

“But David can’t read:”
The evolution of literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching

by

Blake Morgan Madsen-Davila

B.S., Kansas State University, 2017
M.S., Kansas State University, 2018
M.S., Emporia State University, 2022

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

2024

Abstract

The world of K-12 public education was one area of society that was directly impacted by the introduction of COVID-19 and emergency remote teaching. Teachers and districts alike responded in the way that they determined was best for their students, and the response of teachers at Little Middle School was no different. This narrative inquiry seeks to explore the driving forces behind why specific instructional decisions were made pertaining to literacy, how teachers decided to make shifts, and the lasting impact on their professional practice. This study took place over the course of three semi-structured interviews and one artifact analysis that examined the experiences of four participants pre-COVID, during COVID, and “post-“COVID to better understand the instructional decisions that they made and the driving forces behind them. The theoretical framework used to analyze the findings collected and transcribed through the use of the three-interview series and personal artifact analysis was that of Critical theory, poststructuralism, and deconstruction; this framework allowed for consideration of the findings through a justice-centric focus with an eye toward practical applications both in practice and research. The findings were sorted into nine emergent themes, which were then categorized into the three broad themes of interactions, accessibility, and connection.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	x
List of Tables	xi
Acknowledgements.....	xii
Dedication	xiv
Chapter 1 - March 17, 2020	1
Introduction.....	3
Overview of the Issues.....	4
No Child Left Behind: Best Practice in Theory	4
What Child Left Standing? The Battle for Equitable Educational Experiences	5
COVID-19: The Shift to Emergency Remote Teaching.....	6
Vulnerable Populations	7
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Purpose of the Study	10
Significance of the Study	11
Research Questions	12
Definition of Terms	13
Methodology	14
Theoretical Framework.....	17
Assumptions and Limitations	19
Organization of the Study	20
Chapter 2 - A Review of the Literature	22
COVID-19 in Education	22
Narrative Inquiry: Sharing and Sensemaking Through Stories	25
Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction	28
Equity vs. Equality.....	32
The Haves and The Have-Nots	37
Risk Factors in Education	41
The Vulnerable in Special Education	42
Instructional Decisions in the General Education Classroom	45

Education in the Virtual Learning Environment.....	48
Challenges of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	49
Universal Design for Learning.....	50
Summary	53
Chapter 3 - Methodology	55
Research Questions.....	55
Rationale for Narrative Inquiry Study Approach	55
Research Design	57
Purpose of the Study	61
Population and Sample Size	62
Research Site.....	63
Participant Selection Criteria	63
Participant Recruitment Procedures.....	65
Participants.....	66
Researcher, Writer, and Resource: Positioning of Self Within the Study	66
Procedures and Data Collection Methods.....	67
Semi-Structured Interviews	68
Personal Artifacts.....	69
Data Analysis.....	70
Theoretical Framework: Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction in Practice.....	72
Establishing Trustworthiness and Qualitative Rigor	73
Credibility	74
Transferability.....	74
Dependability and Confirmability	75
Ethical Conduct.....	76
Summary	78
Chapter 4 - Findings: A Shift in Instructional Decision Making.....	79
Pre-COVID	83
Alan: “I hate to say, it was a magical year for me”	83
Melody: “This is going to sound messed up, but I didn't necessarily care about them being, like, good, critical readers”	88

Mandy: “And I hope that they would be comfortable going into those maths just because of the exposure they had in seventh”	92
My Experiences: “Never say never”	95
Themes Identified	98
Learning Occurs in the Interactions.....	98
Lack of training.....	99
Establishing and Reinforcing Foundational Skills.....	100
Pivot, Grace, and Other Triggers: Emergency Remote Teaching During COVID-19	100
Alan: “I felt like I was in a dark room, throwing darts at a dartboard, and just hoping I was hitting something”	101
Melody: “I knew that because I had piqued one kid's interest, at least I was doing my job for one person”	111
Mandy: “If you don't have everything you're used to having to keep you mentally going, you have to substitute in”	117
My Experiences: “Sometimes, I think that those two hours every day were the only thing that kept me sane”	124
Themes Identified	128
Connection (Or Lack Thereof).....	128
Doubt.....	129
Meaningful for Kids.....	130
“Post”- COVID: Educating in the Aftermath	130
Alan: “It helped me immensely not feel like I have to do and try every single thing”	131
Melody: “I firmly believe that pre-COVID was the best teacher me”	137
Mandy: “Even if difficult decisions have to be made, you can still learn and move on, move forward.”	143
My Experiences: “We are still dealing with the implications of COVID on students and adults alike”	146
Themes Identified	150
Lack of Control	150
Isolation and division	152
Ripple effect.....	153

Findings	153
Research Question #1: How did teachers make decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic?	154
Research Question #2: Why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching?	161
Research Question #3: What lasting impacts exist within teachers' professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching?	168
Summary of Our Stories	174
Chapter 5 - Discussion	176
Summary of the Study	176
Summary of Findings and Conclusions	177
Theoretical Implications	179
Pre-COVID-19: Interactions	182
During COVID-19: Accessibility	185
"Post"-COVID-19: Connection	191
Summary of Theoretical Implications	193
Recommendations for Educators	194
Recommendations for Further Research	196
Summary	198
References	200
Appendix A - Internal Review Board Approval	210
Appendix B - Initial Recruitment Email	211
Appendix C - Institutional Review Board Informed Consent	212
Appendix D - Semi-Structured Interview Questions	214
Interview #1:	214
Interview #2	214
Interview #3	215
Personal Artifact Questions	215

List of Figures

Figure 4.1 Student work sample: Similarities and differences between Spanish Flu and COVID-19.....	108
Figure 4.2 Student work sample: Essential question and activity instructions.....	108
Figure 4.3 Student work sample: Student’s response to the essential question drawing from the primary sources provided and personal experiences.....	109
Figure 4.4 Lesson plan standards.....	119
Figure 4.5 Lesson plan activities and assignments for the week	119
Figure 4.6 Shifted weekly lesson plans with standards and objectives	122
Figure 4.7 Shifted weekly lesson plan with activities, links, and directions	122

List of Tables

Table 3.1 Study Design and Timeline.....	57
Table 3.2 Participant Information	66
Table 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Related to the Provided Research Questions	71
Table 3.4 Quality Indicators Within Qualitative Research	76
Table 4.1 RQ 1: Emergent Themes Identified	155
Table 4.2 RQ 2: Emergent Themes Identified	162
Table 4.3 RQ 3: Emergent Themes Identified	169
Table 5.1 Research Questions and Broadening Themes.....	178

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my school family at Seitz Elementary, without whom I do not know if this dissertation ever would have been finished. I have worked at some really great schools with some really great people, but every day, you all remind me about why I got into education. Every single one of you inspires me.

Thank you for your unwavering support.

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Most importantly, thank you helping me to remember that I and the work that I do truly matters.

517... Dragons All The Way!

Chapter 1 - March 17, 2020

Although it has been less than five years, by COVID-19 measure, it feels like a lifetime ago. I sat on the couch in my living room, mind racing, cell phone in hand, waiting for the Governor of Kansas, Laura Kelly, to hold the press conference to address how COVID-19 was going to affect schools in our state. At that point in time, the term, COVID-19, was still a bit of a novelty. The extent of the information that we had was whatever the news channels put out for the day, and even that was inconsistent and not necessarily reliable. What we did know was that we had gotten an extended Spring Break, and, at that point, everyone was still riding that wave of relaxation from the one week turned two. Teachers had left tasks undone before we left for the week thinking, “I’ll do it when I get back,” and we were relying on that.

Little did we know that “getting back” was not in the cards.

On any normal day, I would argue that the phrase “No School” is exciting for anyone whose day revolves around the happenings at school, but this was not normal. As I sat, waiting for the announcement, I found myself starting to shake. Even with a blanket wrapped around my shoulders, I could not control the tremors traveling through my body. When my husband asked me what was wrong, at the time, I honestly could not tell him. In hindsight, I now know that it was not one particular thing, but rather my body trying to cope with the utter uncertainty of the situation.

The excitement of not having to get up early every day (and maybe not even having to put on real pants!).

The anxiety of what I was going to have to do instead.

The fear of not getting to see my 8th graders before they went to high school.

The utter anticipation and lack of control over whatever Governor Kelly could or might possibly say took over my body, and all I could do was shake.

When she finally entered the screen and announced that school buildings would be closed through the end of the semester, my phone started lighting up; family, friends, colleagues, and former coworkers were messaging me, asking what this all meant and what I thought about it; my phone must have worked harder in the hours following than on any other given day.

I wish that I could remember any of the thoughts that ran through my brain following her announcement, but all I can remember is a buzzing in my head, not unlike that of a basketball scoreboard ticking down until it finally hits zero, when suddenly you realize that the only person who knows how to shut it off is nowhere to be found; the longer the buzzing goes on, the louder it seems to become, quickly accompanied by ringing of the ears, increasing irritation, and a sudden sense of panic that wasn't there at first, but seems ever so persistent now.

Fortunately, the buzzing in my head went away. Unfortunately, COVID-19 and all the various complications that came along with it did not. The fact of the matter was that the entire state of Kansas (and the vast majority of the United States) would now be attempting to figure out how to educate in a way that very few had been taught how to execute and even fewer felt confident about (Marshall et al., 2022). More than that, they would be completely revamping education as we knew it in two weeks or less, with little to no extra support, and no additional training (Marshall et al., 2022; Francom et al., 2021). Teachers felt lost and confused, and that is not a feeling that has come close to subsiding even as we continue to put some distance between ourselves and the experience that has come to be known as emergency remote teaching (Manfuso, 2020).

Introduction

The rapid transition to virtual teaching in March 2020 was jarring and traumatic for most, if not all, involved, but it was also a time of great change. On March 17, Governor Kelly announced that brick-and-mortar school across the state of Kansas would not reopen for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year (Education Week, 2020), and suddenly education looked vastly different than anyone could have been prepared to address, regardless of where they obtained their training to become a teacher.

In the span of two short weeks, educators in the district where I worked, Little Public Schools, (and across the nation) were tasked with crafting meaningful learning experiences that would now be serving an entirely different purpose than assignments ever had before. While the expectations set forth by different districts varied in the expectations they set forth for teachers (Love & Marshall, 2022), within Little Middle School, we as teachers were asked to think outside of our content and place an emphasis on the social and emotional wellbeing of students and consider how the usage of academics could be used to help fulfill this need. Teachers were told that the theme for the remainder of the semester was “grace,” and grades took on a whole new meaning; we were also told that we need to get used to pivoting based on what needs came up as they came up. Each subject area was given a specific amount of time to have in mind when designing their tasks, and we were told that the tasks assigned should not take longer than the assigned amount of time daily. Teachers were instructed that they should be aware of the fact that students may not have academic support at home and they should try to host Zoom sessions for students to join when possible. While the role of special education teachers in Little Middle School stayed relatively similar to what it was during in-person instruction based on guidance from the special education cooperative that we worked for, the role of general education teachers

shifted drastically, thus bringing about, whether consciously or unconsciously, a revolution in the delivery of content and literacy experiences.

In this narrative inquiry, to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on teachers and education, I have used the stories of several educators and my own experience to see how the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching (Manfuso, 2020) was navigated and the effect that those decisions have had on their educational practices since. Stories allow people to understand their lived experiences in context with their interactions, to share them, and to make meaning of them (Maynes et al., 2008); it also allows those who are being told the story to make meaning of it. When it comes to the shared lived experience of the world with COVID-19, everyone has a story: about learning about it, about fearing it, about lockdown, about having it, and many other factors. Despite both the many differences and similarities in these experiences, each of them is worth hearing. They provide an understanding of broader contexts at play related to society, a better understanding of ourselves, and a better understanding of the world around us.

Overview of the Issues

The information outlined in this section provides a brief overview of the topics to be addressed in depth pertaining to COVID-19 in education, equity, accessibility within the virtual learning environment, and instructional design.

No Child Left Behind: Best Practice in Theory

The purpose of education is to provide learning opportunities for all students to experience and gain a set of knowledge not previously possessed. Having a focus on equity is certainly the goal in education; however, equity is a concept that involves “the process of making things equal and fair” (Andreasson et al., 2015), which applies across a variety of contexts. In education, that means providing students with what they need to achieve the same goal; this is

done through access to resources, learning outcomes, and quality pedagogy (Chu, 2019).

Oftentimes, equity is considered in relation to closing the achievement gap for students of color or students who are otherwise considered disenfranchised (Macedo, 2006).

Part of the push for equity involves providing spaces in which students who are members of disenfranchised groups can navigate and be successful. One such space is that of the virtual learning environment. As the world evolves, so does the manner in which people learn, which necessitates creation of new and various methods of teaching. With increased access to content and the ability to somewhat personalize and design the space in which they work, learning in the virtual learning environment presents the potential for many positive results (Washington, 2015).

What Child Left Standing? The Battle for Equitable Educational Experiences

In the construction of instructional decisions, teachers are placed in a position of power to influence students and the knowledge that is deemed worth knowing. Because the field of teaching is inundated with white, middle-class women, the “knowledge worth knowing” is determined by that dominant culture that rules both the field and society (Freire, 1970). Although it can be easy to fall prey to this concept, teachers bear the responsibility of providing opportunities for critical thinking, or dialogue (Freire, 1970). This steers the educational experience away from a monologue of knowledge and turns it more into a conversation. Students are able to take center stage in their learning and are able to be active participants.

A prime example of this opportunity for active student participation in is the navigation of the virtual learning environment. Within education, technology is often considered to be a tool for accessibility; often ignored is the fact that, while the technology is provided, the ability to navigate and use it within the space it is designed for is a challenge not considered (Habib et al., 2012). If the design of a virtual learning environment is not geared toward the students it is

meant to serve, they will not see success in using it (Richardson, 2014), which lends to the perception of online learning being lower quality than in-person learning (Hodges et al., 2020). In order for learning within the online space to be successful, the course must be deliberately designed for it to occur; learning in-person is markedly different from online learning in its truest form (Manfuso, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020) in that designing courses for online learning requires time and deliberate choices in the creation of the course.

Universal Design for Learning lends itself to this concept well. Although initially created as an approach to architecture, it quickly became evident that accessibility had a positive impact on all people, not just those with disabilities (Morra & Reynolds, 2010; Rose, 2000). The tenet of universal design centers around the idea of building or creating something accessible, including how knowledge is communicated and evaluated, the first time rather than going back to make adjustments or accommodations, thus allowing accessibility for all people. In education, this took hold when considering curriculum. The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) focused first on providing supports to enhance accessibility for students with disabilities, however they rapidly realized that making the curriculum accessible would benefit more people than just those with special supports in place (Coyne et al., 2017; Fenrich et al., 2018; Center for Applied Special Technology, 2020).

COVID-19: The Shift to Emergency Remote Teaching

There is a difference between virtual teaching and crisis response, which is precisely what the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020; Manfuso, 2020) illustrated in March 2020. Based on instruction given by buildings and districts, teachers prepared educational content and distributed it in the way that they were told (Marshall et al., 2022). Emergency remote teaching differed greatly from online learning in that the design of the

tasks was not necessarily meant to occur within the online space. Rather, the tasks were designed to occur in person and modified to be completed remotely (Hodges et al., 2020; Manfuso, 2020). Because this shift occurred so abruptly, teachers had to attempt to figure out a new manner of teaching, and many felt unprepared and that they lacked the support necessary to do so successfully (Marshall et al., 2022; Francom et al., 2021). There was concern from teachers about how to connect with and hold students accountable, as well as the broader concern about the long-term effects on students (Francom et al., 2021; Love & Marshall, 2021).

Vulnerable Populations

Although students as a whole were the concern of society, those belonging to disenfranchised groups were more at the forefront of concern to those in education. This includes students considered to be the “have-nots” of society, or those lacking money, resources, or information to obtain the things that they needed to successfully navigate their own response to and participation in emergency remote teaching (Huguelet, 2007; Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002). Although schools have made the push for 1:1 technology, this did little good for families who do not have internet or the money to get it to participate in remote education in addition to those students whose teachers do not understand how to access the technology they have with which to effectively teach, which is known as the “digital divide” (Dolan, 2016; Prensky, 2012). Simply having technology at hand is not sufficient for ensuring learning. As discussed in terms of equity, it is essential to have an understanding of the needs of students (and their families in the case of education during COVID-19) to meet them and not further perpetuate the opportunity gap (Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Having an in-depth understanding of the risk factors possessed by various students can assist in supporting them. Risk factors are things that impact how students view school and the

probability that they will successfully graduate (Couillard et al., 2006). The higher the number of risk factors a student possesses, the more likely they are to be truant, have poor academic achievement, or drop out (Huffman et al., 2000). Within special education, it is typical to find high numbers of students with multiple risk factors. Although these students may struggle engaging with the academic content, it is not because they are incapable or do not wish to. Rather, it is due to outside factors impacting these students. Through their learned experiences, they are gaining valuable information, however it is not considered information that is valuable to the education system (Emdin, 2016; Schultz, 2018; Darling Hammond, 2010). These vulnerable populations are at-risk of not being successful, and the actions of educational structures determine whether the child is able to be successful or not in terms of academic success.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers make many decisions on a day-to-day basis. These decisions range in nature from simple to incredibly complex, impacting people both in the moment and in the future, particularly in consideration of planning for instruction. Although schools do what they can to support what they consider to be an equitable approach to education for all, students are all directly impacted by broader social contexts outside the realm of their control (Jordan, 2010; Chu, 2019; Andreasson et. al, 2015). The things that occur outside of the school building, whether intended to directly interact with education or not, influence students as individuals and educators' approach to how they support students.

One such example is that of state testing. With the introduction of the Common Core State Standards, teachers felt that they faced an increase in accountability for what their students were able to demonstrate about what they did or did not know (Chu, 2019). While instruction of

the students as individuals is what is considered best practice, a substantial amount of planning and class time is dedicated to preparing for state assessments (Troia & Graham, 2016). The importance placed on these assessments deemed the type of knowledge and information considered to be worth knowing, which heavily contributes to an environment of homogeneity of information. When education veers away from placing students at the center of the curriculum (Dewey, 1938), the tendency is to rely on the set of information that is designated as being worth learning. Oftentimes, the information identified as worthy favors those who belong in the white, middle-class category, thus alienating those who do not and discriminating against them due to their lack of privilege (Couillard et al., 2006). This contributes to the creation of a common culture (Macedo, 2006), deeming what is and is not worth learning, as well as how to do it. The work of Derrida & Caputo (1997) and Horkheimer (1972) emphasized the fact that concepts and things are more than what they “are” and “are not.” Everything, including experiences, exist in relation to itself and others, meaning that things and experience gain meaning through their relationships and context (Dewey, 1938; Dubose Bruner, 1994).

The introduction of COVID-19 into the world of education illustrates these concepts seamlessly. Due to the rapid transition to emergency remote teaching, the design and structure of courses and content were not necessarily able to be considered at length (Hodges et al., 2020; Manfuso, 2020). Teachers were required to make choices that they thought might work and shift as needed. Despite the various issues and concerns, teachers were expected to make it work, often to the detriment of their own self-efficacy (Fisher et al., 2021). Research pertaining to COVID-19 at the moment largely highlighted what teachers were doing, lacking the questions of “how” and “why?” By placing an emphasis on these two questions, this study may provide the

opportunity to better understand the decisions made, the motivators as to why, and how these experiences provided lasting effects to teaching practices.

Purpose of the Study

It is common knowledge that each and every human being is unique, and that applies to students as well. Students come from a variety of backgrounds and lived experiences that shape who they are, how they interact with the things that they experience now, and who they will become in the future. Just as each student is different, so too is the manner in which they learn. Although Universal Design for architecture was introduced as a means for designing and creating accessible structures in the 1990s (Morra & Reynolds, 2010; Rose, 2000; ADA, 1990) and Universal Design for Learning was brought about in 1992 (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2020), it can be very easy within education to take the route of least resistance when it comes to planning for instruction. While UDL provides accessibility to content for all students, it can require more work upfront on behalf of the teacher, which ultimately can cause some teachers to shy away from the framework, leaning heavily on special education staff to take on the responsibility of differentiating and making content accessible for those students who are legally entitled that accommodation.

As a special education teacher during spring 2020, I was in the position to observe my colleagues before and during their educational response to COVID-19 and the processes that they went through to provide content. Prior to moving to the online space, this observation took place as I was in their classrooms, through coteaching, and supporting my students through their classwork; during the shift to emergency remote teaching, I was able to engage in observation of my colleagues from a slightly different perspective as we engaged in weekly virtual team meetings to collaborate and plan. Team meetings, although not with others of the same content,

shifted into a time to consider instructional decisions as a whole as opposed to placing an emphasis on what only individual students (typically those with a high number of risk factors) needed because they were not able to meet the standard expectations of the whole.

Because of the shift in approaches, I believe that this event and the particular means of navigating it within Little Middle School are worth the time to investigate. Although Little Middle School is not a large school nor is it wholly representative of the experiences of all buildings, our experiences as educators demonstrated a shift to a more equitable approach to education for all students, not just those who were on my special education caseload. This study will entail the interviewing of several educators with whom I worked during the rapid transition to emergency remote teaching as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic during the spring of 2020 as well as my own observations. Due to the rapid response time, expectations set forth, and the nature of the event, teachers did not have much time to assemble an online learning environment, thus why this time is being referred to as emergency remote teaching (Manfuso, 2020; Marshall et al., 2022; Hodges et al., 2020). This study will place an emphasis on teacher planning, responses, and shifts to providing educational opportunities within the March to May 2020 timeframe as well as the lasting impacts of professional practice as a result of this time. The observations and conclusions drawn will be utilized to consider implications for practice during in-person learning and the application of providing meaningful and accessible learning experiences for all students.

Significance of the Study

COVID-19 impacted the lives of people and organizations all around the world in a multitude of ways, and education was no exception. In the United States, all K-12 public schools across the country closed for in-person learning (Marshall et al., 2022), causing a massive impact

on the lives of everyone involved; students, teachers, staff, and parents were forced to adapt to an idea of education that they had never been exposed to before. Although it is too soon to understand the long-term effects that emergency remote teaching has had on education and students, this study seeks to explore and understand how several teachers made instructional decisions in response to the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching and how the choices made during that time have continued to impact their practice today.

Existing studies emphasized what was done by districts and teachers to serve students (Love & Marshall, 2022); they also sought to identify some of the issues observed within this response (Carpenter II & Dunn, 2022), however this current research lacks an investigation into how and why these particular decisions were made within various educational contexts. While much of the existing research positioned student results at the center of studies, the goal of this study is to examine teacher decisions as they responded to the task set before them with emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al., 2020; Manfuso, 2020). Many of my observations as a special education teacher saw my colleagues emphasizing accessibility of content as they navigated the shift, so through the course of this study, my aim was to better understand if these decisions were intentional, how they were made, and what lasting effects these educators have noted within their own practice as a result of the decisions made.

Research Questions

This narrative inquiry and subsequent data analysis is guided by the following research questions:

- a) How did teachers make decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic?

- b) Why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching?
- c) What lasting impacts exist within teachers' professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching?

Definition of Terms

Due to some vocabulary necessary for understanding the concepts discussed within this study, the following terms have been defined using the context in which they will be used pertaining to this research.

Accessibility: The ability to “acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services in an equally effective, equally integrated manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use” as others (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2020).

Continuity: “every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after” (Dewey, 1938, p. 35)

COVID-19: “Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus” (World Health Organization, 2023)

Deconstruction: “to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997)

Emergency remote teaching (ERT): “a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternative method due to crisis circumstances” (Hodges et al., 2020)

Equity: “the dynamic process of making things equal and fair” (Andreasson et al., 2015)

Experience: an event or situation that is “always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment” (Dewey, 1938)

Interaction: the objective and internal conditions of an experience (Dewey, 1938)

Intersectionality: the overlapping of various parts of one’s identity and the resulting interplay between them (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Spivak, 2016)

Literacy: “the ability to use printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one’s goals, and to develop one’s knowledge and potential” (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.)

Narrative Inquiry: the gathering and analysis of stories with an emphasis on the experiences of the narrator, as well as the context in which they occur and the meaning made as a result (Dubose Bruner, 1994).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): “a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn” (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2020)

Virtual learning environment (VLE): “software meant to support teaching and learning” (Habib et. al, 2012); learning management system used to deliver content to students

Methodology

Before written language, there existed oral tradition. This entailed the telling of stories from the mouth of one to the ears of others. Narrative inquiry is the telling of stories, but beyond that it is the meaning making of them. The usage of narrative inquiry as a methodology seeks to tell stories, consider the act of doing so, the act of listening, and the context in which it is told and exists to better understand the occurrences within the story (Dubose Bruner, 1994). With this narrative inquiry, I gathered and analyzed the experiences and realizations of three of my former

colleagues who taught students on my special education caseload during the emergency remote teaching response to COVID-19. These experiences were collected over the course of three interviews with each participant and the sharing of selected artifacts shared by the participants. The artifacts are objects that the participants feel best demonstrated student response to their instructional decisions during this period.

Although I worked with many people over the course of my time at Little Middle School, I chose to focus on three of my colleagues who had one thing in common: they had all vocalized wanting to try something new instructionally in response to emergency remote teaching. Interviews were recorded and transcribed to ensure accuracy of information and data. In addition, I recorded field notes throughout the course of the interviews to assist in identifying broader themes and concepts during analysis. The first interview focused on personal and professional background and teaching practices pre-COVID. The second interview addressed the participants' response to emergency remote teaching and their process in doing so. The final interview addressed participant selected artifacts, their significance, and lasting impacts on personal teaching practices. Data collected from interviews and artifacts was analyzed for broader themes relating to the contexts surrounding teaching during COVID-19. These findings will provide insight into how Remote Emergency Teaching was navigated relating to instructional decisions, why those decisions were made, and how the decisions made have had a lasting impact on the participants from Little Middle School.

As a special education teacher, I was uniquely situated in my position amongst the staff of Little Middle School. While I did not have all of the students that my colleagues did, I was able to form very close relationships with the students on my caseload and even some of the other students with whom I interacted as I supported my students in the various settings.

Although I supervised the paras who worked under me, I was not necessarily considered to be a supervisor. Despite this fact, I was in the position to see how my colleagues in various content areas decided to engage their students in content specific literacy experiences. Because of this, I was able to observe the different things that worked and to discover commonalities that were effective across content areas. It is important to consider this when navigating the following text and observations provided from my perspective as a special education teacher and colleague of my participants.

Although these observations are not from the perspective of a designated teacher supervisor, they are provided from the point of view of someone who spent much of their day in various classrooms, observing teachers and the ways that they teach content, as well as their varying ability levels of supporting the needs of struggling readers. Throughout the course of this time, it was difficult (if not impossible) to avoid identifying which teachers were best able to support students in specific capacities and the shared traits between those who were able to do so with fidelity. As we made the shift to emergency remote teaching, my special education team and I were impacted as well. Our job continued to revolve around supporting our students, which in turn meant supporting their teachers. To give a more well-rounded perspective, I have included input based on my observations of my colleagues' instructional decisions, both in our regular collaboration times and in my times supporting students, and the impact that it had on my caseload students. Although my focus in observations centers on my participants, I would be remiss in my duties to not mention some of the other instructional decisions made by other teachers who worked with my students and identifying what set my participants apart.

Theoretical Framework

We live in a world of dualities: light and dark, black and white, yin and yang. Emphasis is placed on what things are versus what they are not, and education is not a realm that remains untouched by this concept. Teachers often find themselves contemplating what they assume students should be or are able to do and identifying those who can versus those who cannot. With the pressure of state assessments and a constant revolving door of new-and-improved initiatives, teachers feel like they have specific things that must be taught and there are only two categories that students fall in: those who can do and those who cannot. Those who cannot are broken down into even further categories pertaining to why they cannot, but the message remains the same: students are either one thing or they are the other, leaving out the possibility that they might be both. In this narrative inquiry, I will utilize the lenses of post-structuralism, critical theory, and deconstruction to sort, analyze, and make meaning of the data collected through the stories shared.

The work of Horkheimer (1972) emphasized a lack of finality in ideas, knowledge, and concepts. Rather than something being considered for what it “is” or “is not,” the focus of poststructuralism lies largely in the idea that everything in and of itself is a spectrum, existing not only as itself, but also in relation to everything around it, especially relating to human activity surrounding it and the manner in which it is interacted with (Horkheimer, 1972; Spivak, 2016). This is where critical theory and deconstruction come into play. Deconstruction approaches the world and everything that exists within it as something that cannot be confined to a specified set of expectations; rather, things and ideas exist as they are due to how they are situated within and interacted with by the world in which they exist (Derrida & Caputo, 1997). The emphasis of deconstruction is to focus on justice and bringing about justice in a space where

it is lacking due to the interaction with the structures currently in place. The structures serve as a barrier of sorts, finding ways to reinforce those structures, particularly if they are inequitable, and the space in which they exist. Deconstruction provides a means for examining all facets of this concept and an approach for beginning to transcend it (Derrida & Caputo, 1997).

Although some might argue that education has a specific set of “do’s” and “don’ts,” the extent by which educators are bound to certain ideas aligns with the laws in place. With the exception of a few things, education is not a black and white practice; there is a lot of gray area, and within that area is where teachers work the hardest. While there are certainly a variety of things that change and adjust every year for teachers, the gray area in education exists outside the context of the school building, taking place in the wildly varied lives of the students.

The introduction of COVID-19 into the world of education exacerbated and illuminated many of existing issues of equity, particularly when it came to instructional decisions. Due to the wildly varied nature of the schools, districts, and people facing emergency remote teaching, educators made as-informed-as-possible decisions to provide education for students, shifting and learning as they went (Marshall et al., 2022; Hodges et al., 2020; Mafuso, 2020). Within these experiences and stories told by educators who navigated the shift, this study will seek information pertaining to what decisions were made, how they were made, and the factors that influenced them, both internally and externally. As experiences do not occur in isolation, (Dewey, 1938; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), the examination of circumstances surrounding the narratives shared by participants will hopefully allow the findings of this study to lend itself to broader application and context. These concepts will be further described in Chapter 2.

Assumptions and Limitations

Although the goal of this study is to try to identify changes that came about during emergency remote teaching, it is essential to note that these experiences cannot be generalized as the common experience of all educators. Not all schools nor teachers elected to address emergency remote teaching in the same way, so making the assumption that these experiences are reflective of all teachers' and schools' experiences would negate and ignore the various ways that educators and districts worked to support their specific students and populations in their own capacity.

As a special education teacher, I was limited in my experience of teachers even within my own building. I was only exposed to teachers in classes where my caseload students required support per their IEP. This eliminated elective teachers and teachers who did not serve my students from the potential pool of participants. Because of this, my participant selection was potentially not as vast as it could be and runs the risk of not providing as well-rounded of a perspective.

Additionally, it is important to recognize that stories and narratives are not infallible. Stories are crafted based on continuity, interaction, and a variety of other factors (Dewey, 1938). This means that the participants' current understanding and telling of their experiences will vary from how they would have been perceived as the event was occurring due to their personal lives and experiences as well professional. Due to the timing of when these interviews will take place, participants will have had time to reflect on their experiences and function in the time following which will have an impact on how they frame and retell their experiences.

Organization of the Study

Chapter One provides an introduction to the topic of COVID-19 in education and the reactions of educators as they shifted to emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Hodges et al. 2020; Manfuso, 2020). The chapter includes an overview of the issues, statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, research questions, the definition of terms, assumptions and limitations, the researcher's stance, and the organization of the study. Additionally, the chapter introduces narrative inquiry and the theoretical framework through the lenses of poststructuralism, critical theory, and deconstruction.

Chapter Two reviews the literature surrounding equitable instructional decisions as pertaining to education in the virtual learning environment, as well as the vulnerable populations who may be at risk due to the decisions made. This chapter also outlines the origins of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and the impacts that it has on making instructional decisions, providing a frame of reference for that which the study is examining. In addition to examining the topics outlined above, the chapter provides an examination of narrative inquiry and the uses of stories as data as well as poststructuralism, critical theory, and deconstruction as a means of analysis.

Chapter Three details the methodology, emphasizing narrative inquiry and storytelling as a data collection method. The role of the researcher within the study as both participant and researcher are defined. Lastly, the means of selecting a research sample, collecting and analyzing data, and criticisms of the methodology are addressed.

Chapter Four outlines the findings based on the semi-structured interviews conducted and personal artifacts provided by participants. The experiences of each participant and their

descriptions and understandings of them are presented. Based on the findings within the data, themes of interactions, accessibility, and connections are outlined and described.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the findings from the interviews conducted based on critical theory and deconstruction. The findings are split into common themes that were determined from the course of theoretical analysis and detailed in-depth. Additionally, this chapter provides implications for practice and further research pertaining to teachers' instructional decisions in the classroom and how these can further work to support all students and their needs.

Chapter 2 - A Review of the Literature

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to examine the decisions made by teachers in response to emergency remote teaching, why those decisions were made, and the lasting impacts that the decisions had on their professional practice. In this chapter, I first provide some context for what COVID-19 in education looked like and the response of emergency remote teaching. Next, I provide a blueprint for the structuring of the study that iterates the importance of using narrative inquiry as a data collection tool and methodology. I follow this by examining the theoretical framework of Critical theory, poststructuralism, and deconstruction. Then, I conceptualize the ideas of equity in education through the consideration of haves versus have-nots, risk factors, and the impact of these factors in special education. Finally, I operationalize these ideas by examining them within the context of how they are applied with the general education setting. The review of this literature helps to provide a background for the study as well as developing an understanding of necessity of it.

COVID-19 in Education

COVID-19 impacted all aspects of life around the world, education included. March 2020 saw the rapid closing of in-person schooling all around the country except for two schools (Marshall et al., 2022). Schools issued orders that students would shift to remote learning and teachers struggled with the idea of figuring out what that meant. For some districts, this meant learning through the usage of online instruction and tools, while others utilized the regular distribution of hard copy paper packets for students to complete and submit over a designated period (Marshall et al., 2022); remote instruction became as unique as the specific buildings and districts in which it occurred. Because of the very recent timeframe in which COVID-19 came to occur, there is not a large body of research outlining its effects on education. The research

currently published emphasized an examination of education as a whole in response to the rapid school closings and the manner in which teachers were supported as they crafted a response to emergency remote teaching (ERT) (Marshall et al., 2022). There is a gap in the research, due to the recentness of the events, regarding how teachers made instructional decisions at the time of the ERT announcement, the reasons why, and whether those experiences had a longer lasting impact on teachers' instructional decisions following school reopening.

To fully understand the context in which ERT occurred, it is necessary to have a full grasp of the challenges faced both by teachers and students who were engaged in this process, which means delving into the differentiation between the definitions of ERT and online learning, which are both terms utilized when referring to the educational model enacted the last half of spring 2020. This confusion and flagrant disregard of the interchange of terms complicates the concept of true online learning. Many already consider online learning to be of lower quality than in-person classes (Hodges et al., 2020); however, this avoids taking into account the fact that the two concepts are markedly different. Online learning is something that is done deliberately is designing a course; the course is created through the lens of occurring within the online space and requires a great amount of time, planning, and intention (Brown, 2020, as cited in Manfuso, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). In comparison, "remote learning is largely comparable to any other form of telework. Workloads that might normally be tended to in person and in real time are instead conducted online" (Manfuso, 2020). Simply put, the lack of time and planning that occurred during the rapid shift to ERT is what classifies the experience as such. These two factors directly impacted both teachers and students as they attempted to navigate emergency remote teaching.

Because the shift to emergency remote teaching was so abrupt, teachers were required to attempt to become experts in a style of learning that many had never been exposed to before that moment. The concept of remote instruction was new, and many felt underprepared and under supported (Marshall et al., 2022; Francom et al., 2021). While the change in instruction was implied to be temporary, the goal was to provide accessibility to content and materials (Hodges et al., 2020). To support this goal, many teachers were trained on various tools and learning management systems, but they were still left wanting for instruction on the act of how to provide effective remote instruction; they struggled in their attempts to provide academic tasks with the appropriate amount of rigor and to get students to complete them (Marshall et al., 2022; Francom et al., 2021; Love & Marshall, 2021). In addition, teachers lacked the means and ability to hold students accountable for the work they were expected to do, especially because of the expectations conveyed from administrators and state departments (Marshall et al., 2022; Francom et al., 2021). They struggled to make and maintain meaningful interactions with students due to issues pertaining to school and learning and those outside of it as well (Francom et al., 2021; Love & Marshall, 2021). This had a direct effect on teacher self-efficacy: the more familiarity and comfort with teaching remotely a teacher had, the higher their self-efficacy scores were likely to be (Marshall et al., 2022).

These various areas of concern vocalized by teachers were often seen reflected in students' experiences and academic performance. During in-person learning, students already shoulder a vast amount of responsibility; however, they have the benefit of being able to go into the school building and have adults to support them in their learning. Without these supports in place, many students struggled to engage and participate in the learning opportunities provided (Francom et al., 2021). While ERT was meant to function as learning that provided flexibility for

students, it also raised issues of confusion and lack of understanding how to navigate the learning that is to be taking place (Francom et al., 2021). There was concern for “summer slide” and all of the potential concerns for learning loss that come with a lack of (what is deemed) effective instruction (Marshall et al., 2021), particularly when considering whether or not there was accountability for the group of students being taught (Love & Marshall, 2021). In contemplating the concept of accountability, the factors outside of the control of the school must also be taken into account. While students may be “given access” to content and information, with some schools and districts even going as far as providing hot spots to families, they may not truly *have* access, whether deterred by physical means or something unable to be seen and outside of the realm of their control, thus negating their access (Carpenter II & Dunn, 2021).

Although schools did what was within their power to support students and teachers, the reality of the situation was that COVID-19 was (and is) a crisis well outside of the control of anyone. The rapid shift to emergency remote teaching allowed for a spotlight to be shone on existing inequities, while simultaneously rendering educators and students powerless to do much about it (Fisher et al., 2021; Marshall et al., 2021). As much as COVID-19 impacted organizations as a whole, it had a direct impact of the lived experiences of both students and teachers, their personal experiences intersecting with the educational beyond what had been done before, crafting a narrative and understanding of the impacts ricocheted between the two.

Narrative Inquiry: Sharing and Sensemaking Through Stories

Narrative inquiry is a methodology for which there are simultaneously many boundaries and none at all. Simplistically defined, narrative inquiry is considered to be the gathering and analysis of stories, however it is far more complex. There is an explicit focus on the experiences of the subject as well as how they came to be and the impact that they had after the fact, in

addition to the utilization of stories by the teller to make sense of the event that occurred (Dubose Bruner, 1994). Dewey (1938) referred to this concept as continuity, which iterates that experiences and one's perception of them are shaped and modified by the prior lived experiences up to that point and will have a similar effect on the events that follow. Consider the concept of continuity as a timeline. The experiences of people do not occur in isolation, nor does time stop simply due to the occurrence in that moment; therefore, it is imperative to investigate the circumstances surrounding the studied experiences as well as the experience itself (Dubose Bruner, 1994). By making a study of past experiences, one can determine the merit of the current situation based on how it mobilized from the previous experience into present time (Dewey, 1938; Dubose Bruner, 1994), as well as potential future impacts that can occur as a result.

In addition to continuity, Dewey (1938) also emphasized the necessity of interaction in crafting an experience. While continuity addresses the external factors of an experience (i.e. how an experience fits into what has happened before and what will occur after), interaction is responsible for the internal factors of the person telling the story as well as how they interact with the various factors surrounding them in that moment, which assist in dictating what kind of experience something is or what meaning is able to be made. Just as experiences do not occur in isolation, neither do the lived experiences of people. An experience is what it is and plays out in the manner that it does due to an interaction between the person/people within it, the particular situation, and the environment surrounding it, physically and beyond (Dewey, 1938). Experiences, as Dewey (1938) defined them, are shaped by who we are in that moment, our experiences up to that point, our experiences after the fact, the environment surrounding the situation, and, most importantly, the interaction and intersectionality between all of the factors

listed. Experience lacks meaning if it does not occur within context, which is precisely what interaction and continuity allow for.

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) elaborated upon the intersectionality of experience by illustrating the approach to narrative inquiry as a multi-dimensional space requiring researchers to look among the boundaries of both continuity and interaction. The boundaries of continuity consist of temporality, people, action, and certainty, while those relating to interaction are context, people, action, and certainty. To put it simply, continuity focuses on the time and place of an event, while interaction places an emphasis on the things surrounding the event in which context is created. In addition, researchers must view themselves as part of the research and understand how their own particular experiences have a direct impact on the way that the stories told to them are analyzed and portrayed. Narrative inquiry functions as a means of representing and understanding the experiences of others and ourselves. Experiences are narrative by nature, which makes storytelling an effective means of portraying information to understand a phenomenon in relation to the factors surrounding it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry is useful when developing meaning for understanding of events within a larger context and in relation to other things, however there are criticisms of using narratives and stories as a means for analysis and study. This particular method allows for an in-depth analysis of stories however it is not a method that is able to be used with large, nameless groups of people (Riessman, 1993). The data collected is far too deep and time consuming to use with a large sample. In addition, it is important to recognize that the results are not necessarily something that can be considered generalizable to the public (Riessman, 1993). The intent of using narrative inquiry is to understand the information and context surround specific peoples' stories to craft meaning specific to their experience (Polletta, 2012), so while it is possible that

the findings could be replicable with other narratives and participants, it is naïve to assume that they automatically are.

As COVID-19 impacted organizations and individuals alike (albeit quite differently), it is worth the time to discuss and explore the experiences of those who navigated planning and instruction during the shift to emergency remote teaching and the impact that the experience has since had on their practice moving forward. The usage of narrative inquiry as the methodology for this study will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory, Poststructuralism, and Deconstruction

Because the situation in which teachers and students found themselves during the spring of 2020 was unlike anything that they had ever experienced, the approach to effective and equitable education was unlike anything that they had ever done. To fully appreciate and develop a deeper sense of understanding pertaining to the shift that occurred over the course of roughly two months' time, it is imperative to understand the context in which the event (COVID-19 emergency remote teaching) occurred and how the response of those experiencing it actively defied the expectations of the space in which it was taking place.

In organizing this chapter, I chose to examine critical theory, poststructuralism, and deconstruction prior to engaging with the literacy and education-specific content. This was done deliberately. While it is easy to fall into the trap of deciding what education is and is not, it is important to note and remember that education is an entire field of gray area, with very few things that are actually black and white in terms of what things are or are not, or simple enough to be. Dubose Brunner (1994) emphasized using the concept of both/and as opposed to either/or, which leaves space for consideration of ideas in a broader context. Despite there being strategies

and techniques identified as best practice, when it comes to implementation, everything involved is subjective. No two students, teachers, manners of teaching, schools, or locations are the same. They exist among a spectrum, both independently and in relation to everything else. The addition of COVID-19 into the world of education was the addition of an unknown that teachers had to figure out how to navigate. To fully understand and appreciate the gray area known as education, one must understand the concept of a gray area and the manner in which it exists.

Critical theory, as its name suggests, emphasizes a focus on a critique of policies and concepts currently in place. More specifically, this emphasis works toward the liberation of the people oppressed by the concept being critiqued. Bohman (2021) argued that the definition of critical theory arises from the work of Horkheimer and to be categorized as such, must simultaneously “meet three criteria: it must explain what is wrong with current social reality, identify the actors to change it, and provide both clear norms for criticism and achievable goals for social transformation” (pp. 2-3). Horkheimer (1972) believed that traditional means of navigating theory entails a “sum-total of propositions about a subject, the propositions being so linked with each other that a few are basic, and the rest derive from these,” (p. 188) explaining that this school of thought relies on the idea that the truth as it is known depends largely on the “known” knowledge that a society has. The derivations are able to be reached by following a logical deduction, thus arriving at a logical conclusion which is directly connected to an aforementioned proposition. In relation to this, Horkheimer proposed that facts and knowledge are not universal truths and that the way they are presented and perceived depends upon the social space in which they come to fruition, calling upon “the historical character of the object of the character perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ,” as neither are things that exist universally, but rather are shaped through human activity (1972, p. 200).

People are both active and passive participants in their role of experiencing things, as they play a broader role in society, both creating meaning and processing that which society expects in relation to things with which they experience and interact. Traditional theory considers the impact of society to be Other and thus not having an impact upon what are considered to be universal truths; it places value on polarities, or what something or someone is versus what they are not, and categorization. This is where structuralism, which is a means of defining things by their relationship to each other and other structures (Spivak, 2016), thrives, while poststructuralism calls into question the very idea of categorization as a means of disseminating data. Specifically, critical theory posits the idea that there is a direct relationship between intellectual positions and social location, thus leaving concepts open for interpretation based on one's relation to the self and others, as well as differentiated levels of understanding as a result (Horkheimer, 1972). Thusly, there is not a need to separate knowledge from the self as the self plays an active role in creating meaning as both an individual and a member of greater society (p. 223).

With the development of structuralism, there came a sense of security surrounding concepts and ideas: things are as they are until a repetitious observation that they are shifting or changing, thus confining them with the new limits of what they are (Horkheimer, 1972). Poststructuralism troubles this idea in that it raises the thought that the limits of things are not “other” than a concept at its core, but rather as something that defies identification or categorization (Williams, 2005). Much like Horkheimer's (1972) critique of traditional versus critical theory, structuralism functions within a world of things that “are” and things that “are not,” or what they are “in relation to,” whereas poststructuralism establishes the idea that the limits of a concept are the very thing that make and shift a concept into what it is. Rather than

settling with the idea that things simply are what/as they are, poststructuralism seeks to disrupt that security (Williams, 2005). In order for this to occur, it is necessary to constantly be examining situations and structures in which there is an enforcement of inequity. Although they are the systems currently in place, that does not mean that they are the best that they can be, nor does it mean that they cannot be changed. Williams (2005) argued that poststructuralism is not the absence of limits and categorization, but rather a questioning of them as a practice; it is not *something*, but an action that one does. At its root, poststructuralism iterates the idea that a system of knowledge is not final and finite, but rather something that stands to be questioned, made meaning of, and changed for the betterment of situations for all humankind (Lüdeman, 2014, p. 5). It is something that needs constant examination and troubling of ideas to determine how meaning is made of it within that moment (Dubose Brunner, 1994).

In the case of Jacques Derrida, the consideration of knowledge as an ever-changing concept is done through the usage of deconstruction. Deconstruction has its roots in the work of Heidegger and Freud, particularly the concepts of destruction and dissociation (Lüdeman, 2014). Heidegger's destruction functions around the concept of Being, instead using the term "Dasein," which translates to "being there." Dasein is more than simply existing as the being itself, but rather denotes "'always already' thrown into a world that was there before it came into being... 'ahead of itself' in that it understands the world and seizes or rejects the possibilities it offers, and 'among' all that is within the world, that is, among the things and humans that give it a point of orientation'" (Lüdeman, 2014, p. 10); it is also situated among the idea of death and the possibility of no longer Being. Freud's dissociation functions as a means of moving beyond consciousness (Lüdeman, 2014).

Derrida utilized these two concepts to craft meaning for the task of deconstruction, which is defined as a means “to show that things—texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices of whatever size and sort you need—do not have definable meanings and determinable missions, that they are always more than any mission would impose, that they exceed the boundaries they currently occupy” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997). Although the very act of defining deconstruction is antithetical to what it is perceived as, it is something to be used as a tool for analysis. Rather than simply integrating new knowledge into existing schemas, deconstruction serves as a way to consider what is and what is yet to come, as well as what that has to do with the new knowledge itself (Derrida & Caputo, 1997). More critically, deconstruction serves as a way to welcome to the other both personally and on the level of the state, calling forth a consideration of the term “hospitality” in reference to what it is and its purpose in the realm of heterogeneity both of ideas and policy (p. 111). The truest purpose of deconstruction is justice, and while justice is not a synonym for law, it is something that “solicits us from afar, from the future, from and as a future always structurally to come, calls ‘come’ to use, preventing the walls of the present from enclosing us in the possible” (p. 135). Justice can only occur when there is a barrier in place, requiring the action of people to transcend and navigate it. Not only is the purpose of deconstruction justice, but rather “deconstruction is a discourse on, indeed a discourse of justice, justice’s own word, if it had a voice or word” (Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 130).

Equity vs. Equality

The conversation of “equity” versus “equality” is not new, however it is a constantly evolving concept. When considering how to best provide support and academic success for multiple races, ethnicities, language, socioeconomic classes, and various other groups, the idea of equity comes to the forefront. Equity can be defined as “the dynamic process of making things

equal and fair” (Andreasson et al., 2015), which carries over to education through access to resources, learning outcomes, and quality pedagogy (Chu, 2019), while equality is considered be an effort to bring about a sense of sameness regardless of difference, which is problematic as it attempts to ignore the various differences for the sake of sameness (Gosepath, 2021). In spite of the fact that a very real definition of equity exists, Jordan (2010) argued that attempting to define such a term within the context of today’s world is problematic. Macedo (2006) made the case that, while those in power would have society believe that education is meant to be a tool for empowerment, it is actually quite evident that, in its current state, education is merely a method to continue the oppression that plagues Western society. This is done in two very specific ways: 1) Creating a type of literary and language that reinforces the ideals of the culture in power. 2) Create a “common culture,” then use it to force people to conform to the culture in power. Both of these actions help in creating, maintaining, and reproducing what Macedo (2006) called “the pedagogy of big lies,” which can be defined as the means of teaching and engaging in education so as to maintain the status of those who are oppressed or disenfranchised (Macedo, 2006). In order for the pedagogy of big lies to take root within the educational system, educators have to allow themselves to not only believe the lies of the dominant culture, but also be willing to turn a blind eye to the hypocrisy related to it, fully embodying the term, “Do as I say, not as I do.”

Although it is not explicitly stated within the context of a definition, equity is often something related specifically to race when considered through a broader lens, particularly in education. It is problematic in that people tend to only consider equitable practices something that is utilized to close the achievement gap between white students and students of color (Jordan et al., 2010). Immense amounts of work have been done to progress past this flawed perspective and examine how broader social issues play a role in a student’s life when it comes to academic

achievement (Jordan et al., 2010; Chu, 2019; Andreasson et. al, 2015), not to mention the blatant discrimination and inequity built into the structure of education. Despite the work of generations to address these wrongs and dispose of them, the educational structure was not created with “liberty and justice for all” in mind and continues to have many-a-thing left to be desired, even if aforementioned “things” are not as obvious as being separate, but equal, not unlike during the time of segregation.

Consideration of the role that equity does or does not play in the classroom necessitates examination of teachers’ beliefs relating to equity and how they implement them in their classrooms and beyond. Teachers play an integral role in establishing and maintaining a culture for equity throughout the entirety of their building. West-Burns, Murray, and Watt (2013) recognized that in order for this movement to take hold, it is essential to educate beginning teachers on the role that power and privilege play in schools and how they can take an active position to address the inequities created by the unequal distribution of these two things. As such, there is an essential shift necessary for teachers to be considered as having an education equity mindset, which entails “a combination of perceptions, attitudes, beliefs thoughts, and dispositions that are applied to guide professional (or personal) actions or choices,” (Nadelson et. al, 2019, p. 26) including being culturally responsive, rather than solely culturally competent or neutral (Nadelson et. al, 2019; Gorski, 2016). A focus on equity supports shifting the stance of education away from searching for what can be done in response to the presence of various cultures in the classroom, to implementing practices that are beneficial for and inclusive of all cultures, rather than done as an exception for a particular person and the culture that they are situated in.

Education in the United States undergoes constant, regular reform and revision, both formally and informally, whether or not that reform is beneficial for those most vulnerable within it. Most often, reform comes packaged as a new act passed by the government in an attempt to help lessen the achievement gap, as demonstrated most recently by the introduction of No Child Left Behind (Chu, 2019), however it did quite the opposite. Rather than providing equitable learning opportunities for all students, it created a fear-based atmosphere of “pass the test or else” for both teachers and students (Jordan, 2010). These high stakes testing situations, although created with assumed good intentions, play a large role in modern segregation by further alienating marginalized groups (Chu, 2019).

While the term “segregation” calls to mind the civil rights movement of the 1960s, segregation as it is experienced today is not relegated solely to race relations, although that is not to say that race has no place in modern segregation. In today’s world, there has been a shift toward segregating those students who live in poverty, which toes a thin line when considering the difference between race and socioeconomic status, due to the strong empirical relationship between race and poverty (Jordan, 2010; hooks, 1994). Students who attend these segregated schools do not have access to the same quality of resources as their unaffected same age peers; this shows as the cycle of generational poverty continues to ravage communities and educational disparities continue to grow (Chu, 2019), directly impacted and further oppressed by the next wave of well-intended legislation that falls short of any meaningful change.

Restriction of equitable access to literacy experiences illuminates the further oppression of students (Macedo, 2006). Macedo reiterated that the words that people choose to use carry power, particularly those considered to be “shock words” (Macedo, 2006, p. 138). One of the biggest shock words that comes across as deceptively positive is the term “reform”. It is

considered to be a positive shock word, but the issue arises because, in all actuality, it is anything but. Reform gives the impression of change, meanwhile it is a superficial name change, while still implementing the same oppressive practices that have always been in place. The most popular form of this reform is under the guise of school choice. The term itself implies that students and their families have an option about where and how they receive their education when, in reality, there is not a true choice. School choice is the modern-day segregation, only allowing choice for those in power (Macedo, 2006) and relegating those who are not to schools and areas that are seen as “less than” due to their lack of access to resources. Rather than using reform as a blanket word to change a name and continue educators’ role in the oppression of students, schools need to practice transformation by addressing the inequities and oppression that they use to reproduce the current societal expectations by “teacher proofing” teaching methods and removing all hint of personhood behind the academics (Macedo, 2006, p. 154).

Although equity is typically placed within the context of race relations in society, it plays a role within a larger capacity as well. Equity is particularly important for any and all groups considered to be at-risk, meaning that for students identified as fitting this particular category, supports have to put in place deliberately to support the needs of the group and student that are not being met (West-Burns, Murray, & Watt, 2013), calling back to the idea of discrimination of both race and class, as well as the importance of acknowledging and supporting the intersectionality between the two. This requires centering the approach to frameworks implemented in the building within a justice viewpoint. To expand on this concept, Gorski (2016) introduced the idea that educators should be focused more on true equity in the strategies implemented rather than attempting to solely become culturally competent, pointing out only the differences and alienating them when in comparison with the broader culture in which the

marginalized culture is situated. This does more harm to marginalized groups in education, as it stereotypes whole groups and only provides them attention within the context of things such as cultural heritage nights, which are used as isolated experiences of disenfranchised cultures to give the appearance of celebrating diversity when, in reality, they are a means of simplifying the experiences of all within a similar culture. True equity means that educators must understand that the concept of “culture” is a part of everyday life and students’ interactions, as it is only one aspect of their identity which informs the manner in which they navigate the world around them (Gorski, 2016). Overemphasizing culture removes the focus from the needs of the student and places more of a microscopic view on the practices of the student rather than what the teacher and system can do to best support the students and their needs, thus furthering the privilege of already privileged groups.

The Haves and The Have-Nots

Within the context of literature, “have-nots” are typically defined as students in poverty, thus impacting their lives within the realm of what is normal or expected (Huguelet, 2007). While have-nots lack access to monetary resources personally, typically a larger cause is at play, directly impacting this lack of access. Within society, socioeconomic classes are split into upper, middle, and lower, connoting the amount of money that a person or family has. This lack of financial resources can be attributed to a different poverty, which is that of information (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002). Education has historically been considered a commodity for the wealthy, which can be tied back to the access to financial resources, however as time has progressed, so has the ability to access information. There are ways to get into college without having money up front, but there is nothing richer in information, whether it is correct or not, than the internet.

A big push in K-12 education has been to provide 1:1 technology for all students, meaning that all students have a computer or tablet assigned to them for their own personal use. While this is an attempt at providing an equitable education opportunity, it is actually aiding in keeping certain demographics of students further behind (Dolan, 2016). Along with the push for 1:1 comes teachers being expected to rely heavily on the technology as the means to provide the activities. While this is handy for cutting back on the usage of paper at school, it causes issues for students whose families do not have internet at home or cannot afford the quality of internet needed to adequately complete the tasks as intended; this has come to be known as the “digital divide” (Dolan, 2016).

Researchers suggested that “access” is no longer the only manner in which haves and have-nots can be defined, but that educators must broaden their idea of what access means. While students may be provided technology or other attempts at equity, they must have the means and ability to make them work; without these things, students are being segregated further due to poverty and the fact that their family cannot provide the resources needed (Dolan, 2016). While schools may be making an attempt to provide access to students, it is essential to recognize how this access, or lack thereof, can further hinder them and ensure that an equitable education is actually as such. To do this effectively, schools must consider not only the tools that they are providing, but also the students that they are providing them to and the educators who are providing the content. Prensky (2012) coined the term “digital native” to describe the students of today’s world, as they “represent the first generations to grow up with this new technology... as integral parts of their lives (p. 69). In so much as students function as digital natives, those who were introduced to these kinds of technologies later in life are identified as “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2012, p. 69), meaning that technology is not necessarily their

native language, and it is not what they tend to automatically default to. The students in today's world still need to learn the standards and what is important, but teachers may have to do some significant restructuring when considering how they teach it (Prensky, 2012)

There are multiple facets in which schools fail students in terms of access and accessibility, many of which are large, overarching policies that are implemented to further perpetuate the pedagogy of big lies (Macedo, 2006), or a means of teaching what is socially acceptable as determined by the dominant culture, so as to continue the oppression of presently disenfranchised groups. While there was a push for policies to support the education of all students in the 1960s and 1970s during and following desegregation, the disbandment of these programs has ultimately led to ever-widening achievement gap, not at the fault of the children in the classrooms; due to the negligence of those charged with reforming education, students who drop out or are educated in a space that does not adequately prepare them for their post-graduation experiences, particularly students of color and those living in low income areas, experienced an increased risk of homelessness, incarceration, and poverty (Darling-Hammond, 2010). These are the result of practices that are put in place, whether deliberately or not, to further perpetuate the opportunity gap (Darling-Hammond, 2010), which leads directly to the commonly known and mentioned achievement gap.

These practices are most commonly observed within schools where the student population has a large number of families who are low income. Social class and perceptions of the abilities of students coming from those situations has a large impact on the manner in which teachers engage in instruction. Often, these students are instructed using step-by-step instructions rather than being allowed to explore concepts and engage with them in a manner that makes sense to them and their experiences (Schultz, 2018; Anyon, 1980). By doing this, the education

system continues to channel a specific type of students into areas which they deem appropriate, which keep them in a state of oppression both information-wise and financially. Students are not expected to be active participants in their education, thus subjecting them only what the teachers determine to be what they need to learn.

Other manners in which schools and teachers solidify the oppression of students is through seemingly harmless policies, such as “English only” policies, which forbid the usage of a student’s native language in the classroom, operating under the belief that by enforcing this, students will be able to learn and master the content more efficiently (Macedo, 2006). As discussed in earlier chapters, the idea that the United States is a melting pot, which serves only as an attempt to further perpetuate the common culture (Macedo, 2006, p. 43), feeds into promoting the idea of using English only in the classroom (Macedo, 2006, p. 125), as it strips the value of other cultures and promotes the need to transcend these previously existing categorizations to overcome them and be something “more than” (i.e. American), which is problematic as identity is much too complex to be condensed as fitting into a much broader umbrella (Tatum, 2017).

Research showed that forcing students to speak a language that is not native to them does not help them to learn better. Oftentimes, bilingual education programs are looked down upon because they are viewed without reference to a larger context (Macedo, 2006, p. 126). While there are attempts to attribute education, or lack thereof, for non-English speaking students to the fact that they cannot speak English, Macedo argues that language is too small of an aspect to look at. Rather, educators must take a step back and look at the tools of oppression that are helping to keep these oppressive practices in place (Macedo, 2006, p. 126), thus reducing people of color to something considered to be less than. Race, ethnicity, and culture play a large role in identity formation, particularly when students are not white. hooks (1994) emphasized the role

that language plays in continued oppression, acknowledging that, to fight against the oppressor, the disenfranchised must fully understand and utilize the language that is being used as a means to oppress them. Students of color often are forced to consider their race/ethnicity/culture as a dominant part of their personality because who they are is considered dissonant from the dominant culture in which they are living (Tatum, 2017). As they are not considered to be the norm, the dominant culture (in which many educators and teachers exist and participate) plays a role in enforcing the idea that, to avoid being othered, those being disenfranchised must conform to the expectations of the oppressor. Rather than feeding into the idea of a common culture and stripping students of their identities, educators should be allowing students to explore their intersectionality and what that means for them and how they consider their own identities in relation to their experiences within language, culture, and race (Macedo, 2006; hooks, 1994; Tatum, 2017).

Risk Factors in Education

Students do not come into school with the mindset that they do not want to be successful, however there are several factors that directly impact their attitudes of school and the probability that they will successfully graduate. These are called risk factors, which can be seen as barriers to learning as they can have a direct impact on student academic achievement (Couillard et al., 2006). Freire (1970) made the point that disenfranchised students are not people living on the edge of society, but rather they are situated directly within it. The issue is that people often see a need to change the students to make them fit into the structure rather than adjusting the structure so that it is built for them as well. In education, there are a variety of risk factors, however they can be divided into several categories, which include students, families, and school, or more broadly stated, alterable and status risk factors (University of Minnesota, 2017). Some specific

factors that increase a student's likelihood of dropping out are belonging to a minority group, single parent household, poorly educated mothers, limited English proficiency, unstable school districts, large class sizes, school environment, family issues, cultural factors, and more. These factors can contribute to poor academic achievement and school attendance (Huffman et al, 2000; Couillard et al., 2006).

The Vulnerable in Special Education

Historically, the population of students on special education caseloads have not been accurately reflective of building populations. More often than not, students with a higher number of risk factors attached to them are identified as needing services. These students are viewed as being at a higher risk for dropping out or not completing school successfully (Morrison & Cosden, 1997). One of the risk factors identified most often for students in special education is poverty, which overlaps significantly with race (Skiba et al., 2005; hooks, 1994); however, it is not a straightforward correlation. Not every student of color lives in poverty, and not every student living in poverty requires special education services, however these are two populations that are consistently overrepresented on caseloads (Bush-Daniels, 2008). Students and people are not isolated within society and their experiences are not isolated based on the various aspects that they are made up of; rather, students' experiences and how they experience them are explicitly shaped by the intersectionality of their identities (Freire, 1970, p. 54). Talbott et al. (2011) established that society cannot analyze continuity and change in children's development in isolation, but rather society must consider it in context with where they are living and learning; to assume that all children of one particular category all fit neatly within the confines of another subscribes further to the creating of a common culture within education. The term "common culture" alludes to the idea that Western (specifically American) culture looks one specific way.

This particular idea gives lead to the belief that Western (white) culture should be the dominant, prevailing standard to which all assimilate (Macedo, 2006, p. 37 & 43).

Oftentimes, students who belong to disenfranchised groups are not afforded the same learning opportunities as students who fit into the category of being the oppressor. These students face issues such as limited early learning opportunities, segregation and unequal schooling, unequal access to qualified teachers, lack of access to high-quality curriculum, dysfunctional learning environments, and more (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Because of these reasons, students who are already being actively disenfranchised are even further so. The issues that are present in students' everyday lives help contribute to their identities; the problem is that schools make it a point to demonize these experiences, especially if they are not the right kind and even more so when they are not something that the student can control.

Schultz (2018) emphasized this observation in his classroom, noting that the vast array of experiences that students have learned from simply living are rendered “null and non-school curricula” (p. 28), making it perceived as worthless by the education system. What is and is not considered meaningful is dictated by states in their standards-based reform (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 72), which is then put to the test to see what students do and do not know. The problem with this is that these results then become the sole thing that educators look at to determine whether or not a student is successful.

Dewey (1991) took issue with this and encouraged that the child should not learn the curriculum, but rather the child should be the curriculum. While something may not be considered valuable by the education system, that does not mean that the experiences of that student are not valuable (Emdin, 2016, p. 176). Rather, it means that the student has a set of knowledge that informs how they interact with the education system and how it impacts them.

This problematic belief in the need for a common culture, which transcends and ignores all concepts of difference and largely subscribes to the dominant culture's ideas of what is acceptable, is deeply imbued into the United States' educational system, showing itself in a multitude of ways. It is often because educators are so deeply engrossed in this ideology that has the ability to benefit them (if even in small ways), that they do not even realize in what they are partaking. In trying to imply that education should be a neutral political space, "Silber failed to realize is that the very act of viewing education as neutral and devoid of politics is, in fact, a political act" (Macedo, 2006, p. 15). In the effort to make schools neutral, the government has simply turned them into a tool for their own devices, with the sole purpose of reinforcing and replicating the systems of oppression that have benefitted them for so long (Macedo, 2006, p. 44). Although children in special education are often considered to fit into a particular mold of what is expected of who they are, their needs are unique, regardless of the risk factors that they have impacting them and their learning (Hourigan, 2014). By neglecting to recognize this, educators allow their position of privilege to get in the way of educating students as they should be.

McIntosh (1988) specifically related her privilege to being white in the statement that oppressors, "are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work that will allow "them" to be more like "us"" is applicable to all classes of oppressor. Teachers are guilty of assuming this ideology, much to the detriment of the students in classrooms. So often, teachers are busy attending to the test scores that students are expected to achieve and the hidden curriculum that they are expected to teach (Schultz, 2018, p. 25) that they forget about the most important aspect of education: the students themselves.

Instructional Decisions in the General Education Classroom

One of the first things that teachers learn about when they are in college is the importance of standards. Standards, by definition, are the set things that students are expected to have learned over the course of the school year. Teachers are expected to have designed their lessons to teach their students how to do these specific “things”, and students are expected to demonstrate mastery by passing state assessments. Most often, when educators consider standards, their minds immediately think about Common Core, which is a set of standards developed by ‘experts’ around the country that establishes what students should be able to demonstrate in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2020). Although Kansas did not specifically adopt the Common Core Standards, the state created their own version called the College and Career Readiness Standards (Kansas State Department of Education, 2020). Regardless of the title, students are still tested on them and expected to be able to show mastery. Even though education has gotten away from using standardized tests to determine whether or not a school receives funding, teachers still feel an enormous amount of pressure to have their students show that they have, at the very least, been exposed to the standards, if not mastered it.

Because of the pressures of standardized testing, teachers often use the strategy of “teaching to the test,” regardless of how innovatively they do so. There is a blanket understanding that, even though you will not necessarily be fired for your students not passing the state assessments, you will be under intense scrutiny. Although there are not many studies relating to teacher attitudes toward the Common Core State Standards, there are some that exist that emphasize that, although teachers consider the CCSS as a positive adaptation, they are

frustrated due to the fact that preparing for the tests takes away substantial time from content instruction (Troia & Graham, 2016).

Equality versus equity is a revolving hot topic in education, particularly in schools with diverse student bodies and in the process of designing of instructional content and delivery. The idea is that all students may not need the same things to be successful, so they should be provided with what they need rather than giving them all the exact same thing and expecting the same results. In conversations with colleagues, the conversation always comes back around to the question, “How am I supposed to provide individualized support for 100+ students?” which is a fair and valid question to ask, however it can also lead to dangerous ideas of ways to make it work. Considering this idea can be overwhelming at best and absolutely terrifying at worst, but all of the teachers asking that question are right: how are we supposed to provide individualized support for that many students? We want them to be successful, but what is the cost to us as the teacher and how do we actually make it happen?

Many consider the school setting the educational background in which a sense of awareness and political correctness is taught, however both Macedo (2006, p. 6) and Freire (1970) took issue with this, due largely to the fact that the determination of what one should be aware of and navigate carefully is determined entirely by the dominant culture and reinforced by those situated in it, or the teachers in this case. Within the banking concept of education, the student is considered a bank to store knowledge and the teacher does the depositing or information, allowing the student to act based on the knowledge that they have in their possession (Freire, 1970, p. 45). Because the student does not play an active role, the teacher and system are free to feed them what they deem necessary, whether or not it is, and do not require engagement with the ideas.

There is a strong interplay between creating a “literacy for stupidification,” (Macedo, 2006) which prevents students from partaking in critical literacy and viewing ideas within a broader context, and creating a common culture; so much so, that it is difficult to imagine one existing without the other. If society has any desire to continue replicating what they desire to be the dominant culture, they utilize their literacy and language to perpetuate these ideas and “purifying” of the dominant culture’s actions in conjunction with the sheer hypocrisy of their words versus what they choose to do (Macedo, 2006, p. 14; Freire, 1970). While schools spend time attempting to make their language, the manner in which students experience it, and what they are teaching “acceptable” for society’s standards, they are following closely in the footsteps of the United States government, helping to cover and sanitize the actions of the dominant culture (i.e. ethnic cleansing versus genocide) (Macedo, 2006). Utilizing language and literacy in such a way so as to promote a common culture helps contribute to the pedagogy of big lies, simply in the very action of speaking them, and continues to perpetuate the oppressive idea of a common culture being essential and necessary.

A stark contrast to the literacy for stupidification (Macedo, 2006) is the idea of dialogue. Freire’s (1970) definition countered the idea of the dichotomous word; in order for language to assist in the use of education as a means for freedom, word itself must have a vaster meaning than simply good or bad, yes or no, do or do not. From this arises the concept of dialogue, in which the encounter between people must take place (Freire, 1970). Between people, words take on a broader meaning based on the lived experiences, beliefs, and culture of those who speak them, allowing them to venture away from the dichotomy that categorizes them, thus allowing more to participate in dialogue. True education requires critical thinking and communication,

meaning that more than one type of person/culture/system must be represented within the structure to be worthy of the name (Freire, 1970, p. 66)

Education in the Virtual Learning Environment

The existence of online education is not a new concept; however, the manner in which it looks and is used today is vastly different than when it first began. Education itself exists in a constant state of change and there is a need to evolve with the times to provide quality learning experiences (Brigance, 2011). In more recent times, there has been a shift to higher levels of dependence on virtual learning environments for both physical and virtual courses, resulting in heavy reliance on virtual learning environments, also known as VLEs. A VLE is defined as software meant to support teaching and learning (Habib et. al, 2012); a common term associated with this is learning management system. While learning in a VLE was once considered an opportunity afforded to post-secondary students or an alternative to traditional education, public education continues to lean more heavily on the presence of technology both in the physical classroom and to provide an environment for a different type of classroom.

Usage of digital learning material has a number of positive potential results, including increased access to content and an allowance for creating an effective ecosystem in which to best work (Washington, 2015). With this enhanced freedom comes a heavier responsibility on both educators and students. Educators must understand how to create a VLE that is not only navigable but easily understood (Brigance, 2011). Students must be able to engage with the material and the space in which it is presented, regardless of how they feel about it or any external circumstances, including disabilities, which is when problems begin to arise (Romanov & Nevgi, 2008).

Challenges of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

Navigating VLEs is complicated work and doing so with print-based disabilities makes it more so. While technology is often considered to be a helpful tool, attempting to learn with it as the main mode of garnering information can be challenging. Although there has been a push to ensure accessibility for students with learning disabilities, these students continue to go largely overlooked due to the fact that their disability is not necessarily obvious by looking at them. Many of Habib et. al's (2012) interviewees felt that virtual learning environments are not designed to be used intuitively and this presents issues for them as they try to navigate the content presented, which is very word/literature heavy, and as they try to draft responses/assignments that meet the requirements for spelling and formatting. In general, the VLEs that are used currently are confusing for the students with dyslexia due to an overload of unnecessary and inconveniently formatted information, making something already potentially difficult even more so (Habib et. al, 2012; Gallardo et. al, 2015). Beacham & Alty (2006) determined that students with dyslexia and other print-based learning disabilities require a combination of learning materials. Findings suggest that these combinations are most effective when able to match with students' preferred learning styles (Beacheam & Alty, 2006), which can be difficult when education tend heavily toward a one-size-fits-all approach, particularly pertaining to learning in the virtual environment.

Richardson (2014) reviewed the academic performance of nearly 200,000 students attending the Open University in the United Kingdom, both with and without disabilities, to see if there was any correlation between completion of and success in courses for students with disabilities. When students registered for classes, there were asked to denote whether or not they had a disability or some other extenuating circumstance. When these particular students were

followed up with later in the semester, researchers determined what the student's disability was and the impact of it in particular courses. Findings indicated that, with controlling for other demographic information, students with learning disabilities (particularly dyslexia) are less likely to obtain a degree through distance learning due to the challenges of distance learning being so text heavy (Richardson, 2014).

Nganji & Brayshaw (2017) argued that current e-learning environments are not beneficial to students with multiple disabilities, and that schools and educators can make an effort to provide digital environments that are meant to provide support to students with learning disabilities. VLE's must be designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and the versatility of technology provides the various means to do so. As it is, classrooms (physical and virtual) are not created with students with disabilities in mind. The goal in this case is not only to provide accessibility to content but to the environment itself (Nganji & Brayshaw, 2017). While it may be incredibly difficult to resolve all the needs for all students with disabilities every time, it is feasible to create an environment that lends itself well to the learning of all students in the truest capacity. By providing an accessible learning environment, educators are then able to focus on and concern themselves with how to make content itself equally accessible (Nganji & Brayshaw, 2017).

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning, more commonly known as UDL, was initially created and simply termed "Universal Design" in the 1990s as an approach to architecture (Morra & Reynolds, 2010; Rose, 2000). When Ron Mace of North Carolina State University coined the term, his objective was to craft environments that were accessible to all people and did not require the use of accommodations or modifications to the building to access the space (Center

for Applied Special Technology, 2011). Universal Design gained traction after the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which prohibits discrimination against people on the grounds of having disabilities and affords people with disabilities the right to the same opportunities in daily life as people without disabilities. Mace believed that by utilizing Universal Design (UD) when designing architecture, there would be less of a need to retroactively return to the building and make adjustments to accommodate the needs of those using it (Morra & Reynolds, 2010; Rose, 2000;).

As Universal Design became more widely used and understood, society began to understand that the structures implemented as a result of UD were beneficial to many in society, not only those with disabilities (Hunt & Andreasen, 2011; Morra & Reynolds, 2010; Rose, 2000). Educators noticed the widespread benefits and began finding ways to integrate this idea of creating curriculum that was accessible to all, despite potentially not being accessed in the exact same ways. The Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) (2020) was founded in 1984 and proceeded with the objective of trying to enhance accessibility and learning for students with disabilities. Throughout the course of the research occurring at CAST, researchers were building the foundations for Universal Design for Learning, which ultimately came to fruition in 1992. Despite initially being used as a means to use technology to provide accessibility to content for students who needed it, in 1996 CAST shifted their research emphasis from individual students to curriculum and the education system, as well as the ways in which curriculum can be universally accessible (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2020). Instead of integrating various levels of technology for students to access technology, the objective of UDL is to consider what the weaknesses are in curriculum and how the learning environment can be formatted to support all students in whatever manner it is that they need to interact with the

curriculum (Coyne et al., 2017). As curriculum makes a shift toward providing accessibility for all students, students take note of it as well. Even though not all of the students in classes have disabilities, it is apparent as they engage with the content that it is overall better for all working within it (Fenrich et al., 2018).

UDL places an emphasis on the “why, what, and how” of learning to engage students, requiring multiple means of engagement, representation, and action to demonstrate understanding of content (Boothe et al., 2020). The benefit of UDL is the fact that it is not geared toward one type of disability or student. While research conducted centers largely around the benefit for students with disabilities, that does not mean that it can exclusively be restricted to that realm (Coyne et al., 2017). Fenrich et al. (2018) made the case that, although UDL should support all learners, the emphasis should be on providing instruction materials to support the learning of students with disabilities. While many consider differentiated instruction and UDL to be the same thing, that is not an accurate representation. While they are similar, UDL places more of an emphasis on instructional personalization (Abell et al., 2011). It addresses the issues that lie within the curriculum and how it is being presented rather than why the student cannot access it as is. The difference between UDL and simply providing accommodations and modifications is the fact that the issue being addressed is the curriculum and how it is being taught rather than trying to “fix” the student or their deficits (Colorado State University, 2011). Ways of doing so involve changing the manner in which content is presented, providing different ways of accessing information, and allowing for various ways of presenting learning. Additionally, educators need to consider that the manner in which they assess student learning can and should adhere to UDL principles as well (Boothe et al., 2020; Hunt & Andreasen, 2020).

By addressing this issue, educators are also questioning the existing framework in power, creating an opportunity to address areas of need to make education more accessible.

Addressing curriculum and the way it is provided through the use of UDL aligns closely with hooks' (1994) beliefs that education should function for the student and their specific needs, providing them with a liberating practice to learn and grow. While it is important for students to gain information, it is arguably more essential for them to understand how to engage with it and relate it to their own experiences, which is done through the usage of engaged pedagogy (hooks, 1994, p. 20). Engaged pedagogy is defined as learning in which both student and teacher take an active role. Constant reflection and relation to is required to determine meaning of the content, as well as where to go next with it. Universal Design for Learning and the ideals of constructing an engaged pedagogy developed alongside each other in the 1990s and both accentuate the need to address problematic and oppressive systems that are in place. hooks (1994, p. 21) wrote that “progressive professors working to transform the curriculum so that it does not reflect biases or reinforce systems of domination are most often the individuals willing to take the risks that engaged pedagogy requires and to make their teaching practices a site of resistance,” explaining how educators play an active role in dismantling oppressive practices and their role should be in assisting to address these practices by addressing the problematic system in which they exist, exactly as UDL addresses problematic structures, both physical and not.

Summary

While the discussion surrounding equity and equality in education is constantly revolving and developing, it is inherently clear through the literature that the stakeholders who are most responsible for it are educators. Students arrive at their respective learning environments,

carrying all aspects of their identity, ready to learn; they do not remove their experiences at the threshold and even if they wanted to, it would not be fair or realistic to ask that of them.

Because of this, educators bear the responsibility of understanding the fact that there are so many aspects that their students consist of and that the overlap between these aspects are what shape students into the people that they are. It is their job to recognize this and navigate the means to create an environment in which all parts of those identities can feel welcome without relying on students to parade their identities within an isolated space in a performative manner. Along those lines, nor should the structure of inclusivity in education be performative in nature; the structure should be functional for all to be able to access at their will at the very least.

Although it attempts to exist as a liberatory practice, the system and structure of K-12 public education often inserts itself and gets in the way of true, equitable education. Macedo (2006, p. 12) posited that this is due to the subscription of teachers to the “pedagogy of big lies,” or simply put: a way of educating society as a means to further enforce the oppression and disenfranchisement of groups that society deems less than, such as those with disabilities, people of color, people living in poverty, and many more. Because this is the practice of today’s educational world, to change this, it is necessary to examine the experiences of those directly responsible for working in/with and perpetuating the system, whether knowingly or not, the shaping of their beliefs because of these experiences, and their role in the system that they exist within. In Chapter 3, I outline the manner in which I collected data pertaining to teachers’ instructional decisions during emergency remote teaching, the participants I recruited, and how I designed my study to ensure high quality data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

The purpose of this study was to provide some perspective about the instructional decisions that were made by four middle school teachers in response to COVID-19 and emergency remote teaching as well as the last effects on their professional practice. In this chapter, I explain the need for this study and why it was best suited for a qualitative narrative inquiry approach. Next, I provide information about the population and participant selection process, my role within the study, data collection methods, data sources used, data analysis, and maintaining ethical standards.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

- a) How did teachers make decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- b) Why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching?
- c) What lasting impacts exist within teachers' professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching?

Rationale for Narrative Inquiry Study Approach

Education within the virtual learning environment comes with a number of difficulties, particularly when considered from the perspective of students with disabilities. Despite that, the measures that were taken by teachers during the immediate response to emergency remote teaching during COVID-19 required them to utilize the virtual space to reach their students, although no two teachers approached this challenge from the same angle. Narrative inquiry provides researchers and participants a means by which to explore one person's experiences of

an event in relation to both past and future happenings, as well as the effect that is observed throughout the experience itself (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

To address the instructional decisions made during the acute response to COVID-19 impacting the functioning of schools, I employed narrative inquiry as my means of data collection and analysis via storytelling. Narrative inquiry was used to gather the stories and experiences of my colleagues with whom I experienced this event; however, it was also used to identify what impact, if any, that COVID-19 had on how they decided to navigate instructional decisions moving forward. This was done through the course of recorded semi-structured interviews that explored the teaching experiences and decisions of the subjects up to the point of COVID-19, how they shifted during the acute response, and what (if any) long lasting changes occurred as a result. Additionally, an examination of participant selected artifacts was utilized in context with the narratives provided to further support and create meaning.

In addition to interviewing three of my colleagues as participants within this study, I also told and analyzed my experiences through the same frame. Narrative inquiry requires the exploration of intersections and the in-between spaces of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), so detailing my own experiences during the initial educational response to COVID-19 allowed me to explore my experiences in relation to my peers, as well as allowing me to compare my observations of the experiences as the outsider on the inside (in the role of special education teacher) to what meaning the general education teachers made of their experiences as those on the inside. As a researcher, it would be naïve not to consider my role as my subjects' colleague and the specific purpose that I served (for my students and teachers) during the acute response to COVID-19. An examination of my experiences helped to provide context when considering the impact of the instructional decisions made in comparing them across time and space.

Table 3.1 Study Design and Timeline

Phases in the Research Process	Dates
Phase 1: Design of study and presentation of proposal • Complete Chapters 1-3 outlining background for topic and research design of the study • Complete and submit Institutional Review Board (IRB) documentation • Presentation of proposal to committee -Corrections and edits made per committee feedback	Completed October 2022
Phase 2: Recruitment of study participants • Send initial communication (phone or email) • Once interest is expressed, send more detailed informative communication • If interest is continued, meet with participants to answer questions and further explain the study in-depth • Obtain signatures for informed consent	November 2022-December 2022
Phase 3: Data Collection • Scheduling of semi-structured interviews • Semi-structured interview #1 (January 1-21, 2023); member check #1 of interview transcript (January 22-31, 2022) • Semi-structured interview #2 and Personal Artifact Document Analysis (February 1-18, 2023); member check #2 of interview transcript (February 19-28, 2022) • Semi-structured interview #3 (March 1-18, 2023); member check #3 of interview transcript (March 19-31, 2022)	January 2023-March 2023
Phase 4: Data Analysis • Begin coding process (round 1: holistic, round 2: thematic analysis) through usage of color coding	March 2023-October 2023
Phase 5: Composition of findings • Composing Chapter 4 and 5 • Final member check of analysis and data interpretation	October 2023-February 2024
Phase 6: Presentation of findings	March 2024

Research Design

The experience of teaching during COVID-19 was an experience unlike any other for both myself and the participants of this study. During this time, much of the focus was placed on students: what did they need? How can we support them? Are they okay? Because of this fact,

there is not a large body of work outlining the experiences of teachers and the work that they had to do to answer those questions, particularly in relation to literacy experiences. During the immediate response to school closings, teachers knew that they were expected to provide learning, but the questions regarding how placed more of an emphasis on external factors that could contribute to student failure, such as whether parents were home to make them work or if they had access to internet. In that initial response time, the questions being asked were certainly important; however, the questions being asked during the process of instructional planning led to more evolutionary thinking pertaining to actual teaching and learning and put the responsibility of providing accessible content back on the teachers. For the participants of this study, telling their stories allowed for them to understand what happened and to reflect up the experience to determine what changes they felt needed to be made. As the researcher having lived the shared experience of teaching virtually during the response to COVID-19, I had my own experiences and ideas of how learning shifted; however, through analysis of my own understanding and the conclusions drawn by the participants, we were able to make meaning of our experiences, both shared and individual, and contemplate how these findings may apply on a larger scale.

According to Clandinin (2007), narrative inquiry is a means of studying “stories or narratives or descriptions of a series of events” (p. 4); however, there is not a set outline that designates precisely how narrative studies should be navigated (Dubose Brunner, 1994). Within the study of this style of data, there is an emphasis on relationships, between the self and society, the self and others, the self and the event, and the intrapersonal relationship (Dubose Brunner, 1994; Maynes et al., 2008). This can be considered within the idea that narrative inquiry is a multi-step process and exists within a three-dimensional space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The concepts of truth and validity pertain more to an understanding that all of the stories are

“true” and “valid” because they are told through the perspective of the participant, and their current experiences and perceptions are shaped through their past (Clandinin, 2007; Riessman, 1993; Maynes et al., 2008). The construction of narrative inquiry “is a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). These stories are constructed and made meaningful through the telling and interaction of both the storyteller and the researcher (Seidman, 1998). Through the act of narrativizing experiences, the tellers of a story become teachers both for themselves and others (Dubose Brunner, 1994).

There are various moving parts that occur within the task of narrative inquiry, both on behalf of the participant and the researcher; however, it is essential to understand that narrative inquiry exists as both a methodology and a data collection technique. By using narrative inquiry as a data collection technique, researchers have the ability to use stories as a means of collecting to data to support their stance. In framing the concept of narrative inquiry as a methodology, Clandinin (2007), Clandinin & Connelly (2000), and Reissman (1993) iterated the idea that “inquiry is an act within a stream of experiences that generates new relations that then become part of future experiences.” Both participants and researchers are involved in the act of the inquiry task, with the researcher acting more as a guide to facilitate the conversations pertaining to a specific concept. The participants are a necessity in the process as they are the only ones capable of framing their experiences and creating meaning in relation to them. In short, narrative inquiry as a data collection technique is something that a researcher does, while using it as a methodology is the act of both researcher and participants engaging in critical reflections and conversations of an event and creating meaning based on the experiences framing them as well as the intersectionality between the two (Reissman, 1993). As the researcher, this meant that I

needed to be comfortable addressing the hard stuff as the researcher and be willing to examine my own views and ideas of what 'should be' in relation to the information I received from my participants.

To navigate the space within the study, it is essential that there is a universal understanding of the terms and context in which the study will be taking place (Dubose Brunner, 1994). As stated in Chapter 2, the true definition of experience is the intersection of continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938). Continuity posits that situations do not happen in isolation. Instead, they are a result of the experiences that came before them and will continue to be addressed long after the fact, and the level by which we choose to interact with them contributes to their meaning (Reissman, 1993; Maynes et al., 2008). The specific experience happens within a moment however the clock does not stop running before or after that moment. Intersection simply asks the person to consider the situation in relation to their life experiences (past, present, and future) when contemplating decisions to make. This requires them to turn inward to look at themselves and how they have made decisions based on the things that they keep inside (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Where the two criteria meet and are utilized, that is where the purest concept of experience is created.

As per Clandinin and Connelly (2000), to achieve this intersection, narrative inquiry must be considered within a specific set of boundaries and tensions: temporality, people, action, certainty, and context. Temporality addresses the concept of time in relation to an experience. Moreover, it focuses on the idea that an instance occurs before, during, and after other instances, which crafts meaning due to its time of occurrence and the time in which the teller recrafts it (Maynes et al., 2008). When considering people in relation to a situation, it is necessary to recognize that people are not stagnant, but rather they are constantly in a state of change which

has a direct impact of their lived experiences and understanding of them (Dubose Brunner, 1994). Action requires that an interpretation be attached to signs and symbols; without this step, the narrative experience lacks meaning as it cannot be defined using common concepts. Within narrative inquiry, certainty can only be assured in so much as understanding that the events and meaning relayed within a story belonging exclusively to the person relaying it. Neither can be considered as an absolute truth, or “as it actually was,” beyond it being the truth of the teller (Seidman, 1998; Maynes et al., 2008). Lastly, context exists as a tension in which people consider everything occurring around the situation being relayed. Without context, a situation lacks larger meaning and relationship to the world. Narratives conveyed are a result as the person as an individual (private) and their interactions with society and the factors that make it up (public) (Dubose Brunner, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

My purpose with this study was to examine the beliefs and practices of my colleagues and myself pertaining to our initial responses to emergency remote teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic, shifts that occurred within the instructional decisions made, and the lasting effects on their teaching practice. Having been in their classrooms prior to COVID-19, there was a marked difference in the way they delivered classroom instruction and addressed accessibility of content during the shift to teaching virtually. As both a researcher and participant, I was curious about why they made these particular decisions, as well as what influenced them. As a special education teacher, I was curious about why their automatic default was to make content accessible to all students in designing it when, teaching in-person, the responsibility of modifying the work fell largely to our special education team (me and my team of paras). Rather, they returned to Universal Design for Learning (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2020)

to ensure understanding and accessibility for all students. The explanation was found situated within the context of some broader societal expectations; however, that is based solely on my observations as something within their system while simultaneously outside of it.

In navigating this study, my lens as a researcher and participant was that of a special education teacher. My job required me to provide services to support the students on my caseload so that they had the necessary tools to be successful. During in-person schooling (prior to COVID-19), many teachers expected me to modify my students' work for them or to tell them how I wanted it modified. While I did appreciate being consulted, my belief was that they should have felt empowered to do that on their own, which begs the question of why they did not. Students with IEPs are already at high risk; however, if that is paired with the various other risk factors occurring in their lives, the risk may be even higher. For students to be successful, content and information has to be accessible, which guided my analysis of teacher decisions in educational design when considered against broader societal expectations when both present and removed.

Population and Sample Size

According to Sargeant (2012), when performing qualitative research, "the subjects sampled must be able to inform important facets and perspectives related to the phenomenon being studied" (p. 1). With respect to the idea of perspectives relating to the particular phenomenon being analyzed, the teachers who were recruited for this study were people who were my colleagues during the 2019-2020 school year. Although it was considered to only utilize one grade level, I determined that it was necessary to recruit teachers at the multiple grade levels who interacted with students on my caseload to ensure that I was assessing the full scope of

experiences that impacted my particular demographic of students, as well as the shift and changes that I noted as a result.

Research Site

To analyze the instructional decisions made during the acute response to COVID-19, I established a purposeful selection of the 7th and 8th grade teachers from Little Middle School (pseudonym) who taught students that were on my special education caseload. During the 2019-2020 school year, Little Middle School had an overall student body consisting of roughly 350 students. 57% of the students were males and 42% were females. The student body was 89% white, 4% Hispanic, and 5% multiracial. 28% of the students were economically disadvantaged, and 13% of the students were identified as having a disability (Kansas State Department of Education). My caseload consisted of 25% students of color, 57% economically disadvantaged, and 37% of my students came from a single parent home; this showed a large overidentification of students with risk factors existed within the students that I served.

During participant recruitment, I outlined the topics and themes that were to be discussed throughout the interview process. Additionally, I inquired about what (if any) artifacts they had to document that period in time of their instruction and student experiences. This allowed them to determine whether or not they were interested in participating and to what extent. Written consent was collected utilizing the IRB at the university level as required (See Appendix C).

Participant Selection Criteria

Participants recruited for this study fit into very specific criteria due to the phenomenon being studied. To be considered for this study, participants were teachers at Little Middle School during the 2019-2020 school year. More specifically, they were 7th and 8th grade core content teachers who were selected to teach the students on my special education caseload. These

participants were recruited because there was some consistency both pre- and during the pandemic. My students were in these courses from the beginning of the school year, so I was exposed to the teachers' expectations and was able to observe the manner in which they shifted as we moved to emergency remote teaching. While I could have selected a larger and/or different demographic within the context of the pandemic, it was important for me as the researcher to be able to position myself within the study and have a frame of reference for my observations as a part of the study. By having worked with the targeted participants prior to the shift to emergency remote teaching, I was able to compare my observations of what I noticed then to what I noticed as we were operating within a crisis space. Additionally, this particular demographic removed some variables. Because we were in the same building, the expectations for how we supported and engaged students were the same. We also already had a working relationship, which enabled us to understand the expectations that we had of each other prior to entering into what was uncharted territory for any of us. This allowed me to place more of an emphasis on the individuals' interpretation of the expectations laid out for us, how that translated into their virtual classroom space, and how their own expectations shifted as a result, both in that space and in the following time.

There were only a few factors impacting how I determined my target demographic. The first was that they must all have taught at Little Middle School during the 2019-2020 school year. They must have taught 7th and/or 8th grade students during that time. An additional factor is that the teachers must have had my special education caseload students in their core class. The prospective sample that I recruited was diverse in terms of years of experience, types of experience, and content taught. Personally, the prospective sample consisted of four females and

one male. All of the recruited participants were white, varied in age, socioeconomic status, and relationship status.

In creating my prospective sample, I determined that personal demographics were less important than professional experiences, which is why I did not discriminate based on personal factors. The final and most imperative qualifying factor to narrow down the group and determine my final sample was the selection of teachers who had been vocal about trying something completely new during emergency remote teaching. They were able to recognize that “business as usual” was not going to be effective and they said as much. Each of these prospective participants represented the four core subjects and all demonstrated a willingness to try something new to make learning possible during the shift to emergency remote teaching.

Participant Recruitment Procedures

I recruited participants by reaching out to them via email and/or phone call. All but one of the four prospective participants was still working in education, so they were reachable via email methods. The teacher who was no longer working in education was contacted via phone call. Because I used purposeful sampling, I did not reach out to a large sample to gauge interest. Rather, I contacted my target participants to gauge whether they were interested in participating. I utilized a scripted structure that provided basic information pertaining to the study, the overarching topic, and the method by which data will be collected, as well as outline of the topic and interview structure was provided to them (See Appendix B). After giving the participants time to review the information, I gave them the option to schedule a time to get together in a Zoom environment so that I could answer any questions that they had or further clarify the goals of the study; all recruited participants declined this option. Upon the participants’ decision to participate, informed consent was obtained prior to the initial Zoom meeting (See Appendix C).

Participants

My research sample ultimately consisted of three participants, one male and two female. Initially, all five of the participants that I had recruited were interested in participating. As we began to schedule the interviews, two of the participants withdrew their interest due to personal reasons. The two who withdrew from the study had taught 8th grade English Language Arts and 7th grade Science, and both were white females. My three final participants were Alan (8th grade Social Studies), Melody (7th grade English Language Arts), and Mandy (7th grade Math) (See Table 3.2).

Table 3.2 Participant Information

Participant (Pseudonym) Name	Background Information
Alan	• Subject Taught: 8th Grade Social Studies • Years in Profession (at time of interview): 17 • Experience/Training with Digital Teaching: Some (2 years) (self-taught) • Number of children at home during and participating in ERT: 2
Melody	• Subject Taught: 7th Grade English Language Arts • Years in Profession (at time of interview): 6 • Experience with Digital Teaching: None • Number of children at home during and participating in ERT: 2
Mandy	• Subject Taught: 7th Grade Math • Years in Profession (at time of interview): 12 • Experience with Digital Teaching: None • Number of children at home during and participating in ERT: 0
Blake (self)	• Subject Taught: 7th and 8th Grade Special Education Case Manager • Years in Profession (at time of interview): 6 • Experience with Digital Teaching: None • Number of children at home during and participating in ERT: 0

Researcher, Writer, and Resource: Positioning of Self Within the Study

Because I identified myself as a participant in the research, I took on several roles within the context of the study: researcher, writer, and resource. First and foremost, I served in the role

of researcher, performing and participating in interactive interviews, collecting and analyzing data, as well as disseminating results. It is important to note that it is nearly impossible to separate my role as the data analyst from my role as the writer and narrator of information (Maynes et al., 2008). These roles overlapped; however, because there is recognition of this fact and interpretation of the impact that it has on both roles, this is not a negative concept. As a participant, I viewed myself both in relation to the other participants and within the context of what my position was as a special education teacher. As a special education teacher, I existed both within the expectations for content teachers as I taught two courses (Foundational Math and Foundational Reading), but I also existed outside of them as my purpose was more that of support for both teachers and students. These roles were important to consider in relation to those of my colleagues, as well as my observations of the shift that occurred from collaborating with my colleagues regularly as we planned how to support students during emergency remote teaching, working one-on-one with my students and my team of paraeducators, and simply as a human being learning how to navigate and function within the context of COVID-19.

Procedures and Data Collection Methods

For the purpose of this study, the main data collection technique was semi-structured interviews; we also utilized the addition of personal artifacts collected by the participants that they felt were pertinent to their experiences; these ranged from student produced to something that the participant created that they felt reflected their experience. Per Seidman (1998), “at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in the understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 3). As narrative inquiry emphasizes experiences and the meaning made of them, interview is the natural tool to use to collect the data for this study.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Each of the participants participated in three one-on-one interviews, each lasting from 30 to 60-minutes, utilizing Seidman's (1998) three-interview series. These interviews occurred in a space in which the individual participant was comfortable; all participants elected to participate via Zoom. Each interview followed a basic set of questions outlined (See Appendix D); however, additional and/or alternative prompts were discussed throughout the process based on participant responses (Seidman, 1998). I recorded these interviews with participant permission as this allowed me to return to the content as needed for data analysis. I also took notes throughout the course of the interviews.

The initial interview emphasized a focused life history of the participants (Seidman, 1998). I utilized this opportunity to address questions pertaining to the participants' professional experience as educators as well as their experiences with education that brought them to the point in which we collectively had to address COVID as professionals. Specifically, we focused on what training participants had relating to digital and technology use in the classroom as well as virtual teaching exposure and experience. This allowed for background building of pre-COVID teaching in relation to the participants and the level of self-efficacy that they felt as they entered the act of emergency remote teaching. It also allowed for me to gather some information about the intersection of their personal and professional identities, which ultimately played a role in the way that they decided to respond to emergency remote teaching and instructional design.

The second interview emphasized the details of experience (Seidman, 1998). We delved into the participants' acute response to COVID-19 and emergency remote teaching. This gave them the opportunity to outline the instructional decisions that they made and why they ultimately made them. During the interview, participants also had the opportunity to present their

personal artifact(s) and explain the significance. These were used to help analyze what the participants placed value on pertaining to instruction during this time.

For the final interview, also noted as reflection on the meaning (Seidman, 1998), participants had the opportunity to reflect upon the lasting impact that their acute response to COVID-19 in the classroom has had on their professional practice, as well as what they would have done differently or what went well. The final interview was an opportunity for reflection on their experience of teaching during emergency remote teaching, giving them the chance to consider teaching during COVID-19 in relation to the entirety of their teaching experience but also as its own entity. Additionally, questions addressed what lasting impact their experiences during emergency remote teaching have had on their professional practice in the time since.

In designing the semi-structured interview questions, the questions were narrowed down to focus on the providing of literacy experiences; however, this cannot be viewed in isolation. There must be a consideration of the broader experience of participants' education to give context for the decisions that were made in relation to instructional design during the immediate shift to emergency remote teaching.

Personal Artifacts

The personal artifacts provided were participant selected and reflective of what they felt their experiences were during emergency remote teaching. Participants provided dialogue about the artifact and its significance to them and their practice. We utilized Brantlinger's (2005) Quality Indicators Within Qualitative Research to analyze the artifacts provided and to make meaning of them.

Data Analysis

To analyze for themes and structure of narratives, I recorded and transcribed the interviews using Descript which allowed me to code the data (Riessman, 1993). After completing transcription and collecting my documentation, all documents were printed and prepared for reading. After printing, I utilized two rounds of emergent and exploratory coding to develop themes that arise from the interviews. For my first round of coding, I used the holistic approach. This is a means of emergent coding, as I did not want to skew the interview results toward my initial hypotheses. Holistic coding consists of lumping chunks of data together and labeling their general idea/theme to develop broad concepts of the information given prior to analyzing further during a second cycle of coding (Saldaña, 2016). For my second cycle of coding, I employed pattern coding to further group and analyze similarities across the data sets to create fewer and more succinct categories (Saldaña, 2016). I navigated these rounds by marking on physical copies of the interview transcripts and using color coded sticky notes and highlighters.

Following my rounds of coding, I combined and delineated the categories created to draft themes discovered across the course of the data. I then analyzed the themes constructed using thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). With that in mind, I did not approach basing my interviews in theory. Thematic analysis after the fact allowed for myself as the researcher to look through the accounts given to me and to make meaning of the information within and similarities and differences between the meaning that I made, and the meaning made by the participants. By critically analyzing each set of data for themes, I was able to identify specific sets of information and how they are impacted by the context in which they are set in society. This allowed for me to approach the content through a deconstructionist lens, which provided the opportunity for the

happenings pertaining to emergency remote teaching during COVID-19 to be considered in relation to broader society and the reciprocal impacts between it and the occurrences/current trends within education. I did this by using “bounded segments of interview text about an incident” from my earlier transcribing (Riessman, 2008, p. 75), which allowed me to show the stories conveyed to me rather than to simply tell and construct them using my own frames of reference. Using these direct iterations of the story allows for truer and more authentic analysis and consideration of the data through the usage of phronesis (Frank, 2012).

Phronesis is defined as “practical wisdom gained through analytic experience” (Frank, 2012). To do this, I as the researcher gathered stories from my participants and represented them in writing. Although my responsibility as the researcher lies within representing the tellers’ stories true to form, it is also my responsibility to assign meaning to them within both my framework of understanding and theirs as well. Employing dialogical narrative analysis (DNA) in conjunction with thematic analysis assisted in providing me with a framework to understand the context in which the stories took place and to frame the storytellers in relationship to their experience with the story (Frank, 2012) (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis Related to the Provided Research Questions

Research Questions	Data Sources	Data Analysis
a. How did teachers make decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic?	• Semi-structured interview	• Interviews transcribed using Descript • Round 1 of Coding: Emergent (Holistic) • Allows for grouping of data addressing similar broad topics/concepts
b. Why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching?	• Semi-structured interview • Personal artifact (photos or scanned replicas)	

c. What lasting impacts exist within teachers' professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching?	• Semi-structured interview	• Round 2 of Coding: Exploratory (Pattern Coding) • Allows for narrowing of broad topics and makes them more succinct and identification of common themes • Round 3 of Coding: Thematic Analysis • In-depth analysis of themes across participants and considerations of what they mean when situated in a larger context.
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Theoretical Framework: Post-Structuralism and Deconstruction in Practice

As defined in Chapter 2, poststructuralism is defined as something that avoids being defined solely as something or its opposite, but as something that is beyond the confines of categorization (Williams, 2005). Within the context of narrative inquiry, meaning is made based on our experiences of the things that happen. Just because two people attend the same event, are with the same people, and participate in identical activities does not mean that their experience of the event is the same. Meaning is created using the frames of reference that already exist in our lives and the time and space in which it occurs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dubose Brunner, 1994), meaning that the telling and understanding of events must be considered from the perspective of the person relaying the events, the person receiving the story, as well as considered from the perspective of the event itself (Horkheimer, 1972). Because of this, it is essential to approach all stories as sets of data that reflect the experiences of the person as an

individual but also considers their experiences in relation to broader society. This allows for the critiquing of the societal norms that have shaped these experiences from the perspective of the storyteller and the researcher receiving it.

Derrida and Caputo's (1997) deconstruction provided a framework for doing just that. Their ideas of the fact that deconstruction exists as a tool to consider what is, what is yet to come, and how that relates to them both allows an ideal lens through which to examine the stories and experiences of teachers in relation to their journey in navigating the immediate response to COVID-19 crisis teaching (otherwise known as emergency remote teaching) and the manner in which their providing literacy experiences evolved within the virtual learning environment and after. It helped to avoid bipolarization of such experiences, rather relegating them to a spectrum of categorization that is fluid and changes based upon the moment with which it is interacted going forward (Dubose Brunner, 1994). This meant that findings were subjective based upon the context in which they were being examined and are unable to be considered inherently good or bad, leaving room for analysis both in the moment and in the times to come.

Establishing Trustworthiness and Qualitative Rigor

Lincoln and Guba (1986) posited that there are four pillars for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and neutrality. Because qualitative research data is subjective based on both the participant and researcher interpreting the data, it is essential to identify the ways in which this qualitative study fulfills these requirements to ensure a trustworthy and rigorous study; this allows for justification of the interpretations of the data collected (Schwandt et al., 2007).

Credibility

Credibility can be defined as providing information that readers feel is able to be trusted and can guide decisions that they make (Tracy, 2010); the way in which I established credibility was through use of member checks. Following each interview, I ensured that each transcription of the data gathered underwent member checks (Koelsch, 2013; Wilt, 2013); this consisted of providing the data collected and analysis crafted back to the source and allowing them to view it to ensure that the information and intent that they provided is represented accurately. It is also referred to as member validity (Koelsh, 2013) and helped to establish credibility pertaining to the portrayal and interpretation of participants. Using member checks is done for a number of reasons, but ultimately, it provides a standard for more reliable and valid qualitative research (Buchbinder, 2010; Candela, 2019). Additionally, member checks provide a space for reflection as participants must consider what they were trying to portray and whether that story was done so accurately (Buchbinder, 2010; Candela, 2019; Koelsh, 2013). The implementation of member checks to affirm the data collected and analysis of it leads to a deeper and richer understanding of the phenomenon and experiences researched.

Transferability

Tracy (2010) defined transferability as “when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation, and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action.” Transferability is created through the use of storytelling and the impact that is had upon the reader of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Narrative inquiry as a data collection method lends itself well to the concept of allowing one to understand the experiences of another. During the collection of stories, my focus was placed on documenting the stories shared with me, as attempting to frame the interviews through an existing frame does

not provide authentic responses. Per Dubose Brunner (1994), narrative inquiry may provide an opportunity for us to “come to know something about ourselves, but we may not necessarily know ourselves entirely” (p. 19).

Dependability and Confirmability

In my position as both researcher and participant, I used caution to acknowledge both of my roles in relation to each other, while avoiding the role of the critic (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although I had my own theories and ideas of the situation observed, my responsibility as researcher required me to tell my participants’ stories authentically and true to their telling. In addition, there was no one right answer to the question of “What can we learn from this experience?” Rather, there was an opportunity created to ask different and more complex questions (Dubose Brunner, 1994). Within my position as the writer and conveyor of the stories told, I had a responsibility to align myself with the voices necessary for the delivery of the information as appropriate; however, I was mindful and cautious of how things were shared and whose voice was speaking for groups who were under or unrepresented within the context of this study (Koven, 2012; Alcoff, 2009).

I cannot claim to have spoken the truth in its entirety by way of analysis this study, but it must be understood that the information conveyed using these means was merely my interpretation of an interpretation by my participants; the data collected was an amalgamation of the truths of my participants and of my own; however, that does not make them the universal truth (Alcoff, 2009). There was a time when I utilized my voice as the researcher and analyzer; however, there were also times in which I ensured that the voice of the participant came through despite it being different from my own by means of direct quotes from my participants (Maynes

et al., 2008; Alcoff, 2009). Additionally, I emphasized that the voices being heard are those only of the participants; they do not speak for the population as a whole.

Ethical Conduct

Upon reading Wilt (2013), I recognized the need to ensure high quality research, so in my analysis of my data, I utilized Brantlinger et al.'s (2005) quality indicator guidelines, specifically pertaining to interview studies, document analysis, and data analysis to ensure ethical conduct of data collection, analysis, and presentation (see Table 3.3). To ensure quality data from my interviews, documents, and data, I followed the guidance outlined. For interviews and document analysis, this meant ensuring confidentiality of information and that participant privacy was protected. Additionally, it required that participant stories were told in a fair and unbiased manner by the researcher, allowing them to properly convey the experiences of participants in an untainted way.

In analysis of data, it was essential for me as the researcher to ensure that the information conveyed was sorted and coded in a way that was meaningful for the study. Manners of data collection are documented, and ample information from the data collected are used to corroborate the findings disseminated. To support these findings, they must be able to be related to current research that pertains to similar themes (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

Table 3.4 Quality Indicators Within Qualitative Research

Type of Study	Quality Indicators
Interview Studies (or Interview Components of Comprehensive Studies)	• Participants are appropriately selected using the following requirements: purposefully identified, effectively recruited, adequate number, and representative of population of interest • Interview questions are clearly worded, do not lead the participant, appropriate and sufficient for exploring domains of interest.

	• Interviews are recorded and transcribed using adequate means. • Sensitive and fair representation of participants when described in the report. • Confidentiality measures are adequate and followed.
Document Analysis	• The documents (texts, artifacts, objects, pictures) utilized are found and determined to be relevant for the study at hand. • Documents are obtained and safely stored so as to ensure authenticity in analysis. • The study contains adequate description and citation of the document. • Private documents remain private via the implementation of thorough confidentiality measures.
Data Analysis	• Results of the study are sorted and coded using systematic and thematic means. • Adequate explanation of what was and was not included in the report. • Methods utilized are documented for clarity of trustworthiness and credibility of the study. • Acknowledgement and reflection upon the position of the researcher and their perspectives in relation to the study are included. • Conclusions are adequately supported by the data found in interview transcripts, notes, and document inspection. • Report is related to and situated within related existing research.

Note. A version of this figure was produced by Brantlinger et al. in 2005. The purpose of the figure is to outline the factors that help craft a high caliber qualitative study. Adapted from “Qualitative Studies in Special education,” by Brantlinger, E., Jimenez, R., Klingner, J., Pugach, M., and Richardson, V., 2005, *Exceptional Children*, 71(2), pp. 195-207. Copyright 2005 by The Council for Exceptional Children.

Summary

For this study, I employed narrative inquiry as a methodology, using semi-structured interviews and personal artifacts, and utilizing thematic analysis as a tool for deconstruction and analysis. Over the course of three semi-structured interviews per participant, I interviewed participants about their experiences of providing literacy experiences during the shift to emergency remote teaching and the initial response to COVID-19, as well as the personal context surrounding these decisions. There was an emphasis on how they shifted their literacy instruction, what caused that shift, the impacts observed at the time, and lasting impacts on their practice. Through the lenses of poststructuralism and deconstruction, the data was analyzed to determine how it was reflective of broader social contexts and the impacts that these widespread contexts had and continue to have on education within the contexts of my participants' experiences.

Chapter 4 - Findings: A Shift in Instructional Decision Making

In the time since Governor Kelly had announced the closing of Kansas brick-and-mortar schools for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester in response to COVID-19, Little Public Schools had been meeting via Zoom to try and figure out a plan to educate students. Our district had met with the school board, administrators, teachers, parents, and other parties as they tried to figure out how to navigate what the state was terming Continuous Learning. In a little less than the week since the announcement, I found myself sitting in another Zoom meeting, probably the sixth or seventh one for that week. I had previously been on Zooms where our district pushed out information, where our building leadership had pushed out information, and where our curriculum department had pushed out information. I had sat in on several Zooms with the various content areas to listen to them discuss where they were all at in the curriculum and what they still had left to tackle. We had heard the words “grace” and “pivot” so many times, that I was already starting to develop a visceral reaction to them; to this day, I cannot avoid grimacing when I hear those words used, especially in an educational context.

This time, I was sitting in the Zoom meeting of the 7th grade team. The videos on the screen, each in varying shades of graininess, consisted of two English teachers, two Math teachers, two Social Studies teachers, two Science teachers, and me, the lone special education teacher for the grade level. We had spent a few minutes making sure everyone’s technology was working and coaching those who needed it. We had already checked in and talked about what everyone had been doing and how their families were doing. I found myself fidgeting in the chair that my husband had set up for my makeshift office space as I stared at the screens. I noticed everyone else doing the same. One of the Social Studies teachers, Alan, was the first to speak up.

“So,” he started, “based on what administration said, I think we’re supposed to kind of just talk about what we are planning on doing for the next few weeks.”

The faces on the screen nodded in unison. “Anyone want to go first?”

After a few moments of awkward silence, Kari, one of our science teachers, raised her hand near her face. “I can.” The small gesture made me want to laugh; it seemed almost absurd. What a normal thing to do considering how very abnormal everything else was at this point.

Kari looked down, and we could hear paper shuffling. “So, I was thinking,” she mused. “There’s a couple of things that I was already planning on doing that I think I can just shift it online. One of those is Mammal Madness. The kids can still vote using Google Forms, and I can just do the brackets myself and post them each week. They were all really excited about that, so I want to make sure they get to do it.” The words that she did not say hung in the air: *especially considering all the things they won’t get to do.*

“For our assignment, I kind of have an idea that I want to try,” she continued. “Our next unit was going to be on viruses and bacteria, so I had this really cool idea to provide some articles and reading materials for the kids to read independently, then I have a fun task that goes with it for them to submit for a grade. Some of them are videos and others are creative sort of tasks that doesn’t require them to just read and write all of their answers. I thought that might make it kind of fun for them to do.” We all nodded in agreement; the activity did sound like a lot of fun.

In my mind, I started mulling over how I could support my students with that task, especially knowing how potentially loaded the reading material was going to be with content specific vocabulary and complex information. Even though it did sound like a lot of fun, I worried about how my students would be able to navigate and handle the task.

Almost as if she read my mind, I felt Kari looking at me. I turned my eyes back to the screen as she spoke again. “I’m really excited about this activity, and I think the kids will be, too. I found the activity online and thought it would be perfect for our needs at this point. It was almost too good to be true and almost made my life really easy...” she paused.

We waited for her to go on.

Kari sighed, then finished, “But David can’t read.”

This conversation set up the framework for a shift in how literacy experiences were provided from various teachers that I worked with at Little Middle School in response to emergency remote teaching. It prompted a broader conversation about meeting the various and vast array of needs displayed across the students that we served. That particular comment was the spark that culminated in the initiation of this study as a whole.

Chapter 4 offers a glimpse into the lives and experiences of four teachers, mine included, at Little Middle School during emergency remote teaching as a result of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Each participants shared their stories over the course of three interviews and artifact analysis. They shared their experiences in education before COVID, the decisions that they made in response to emergency remote teaching, and the long-term results that they are seeing in their current practice as a result of those decisions. The documents that they chose to share were examples of what they felt best encompassed and illustrated their experiences during emergency remote teaching, whatever that might have looked like for them.

The organization of Chapter 4 follows the structure of the interview process. First, I introduce each of the participants and share their background information. We discuss their experiences with online teaching and learning as well as their memories of how the 2019-2020

school year was going prior to Spring Break. In our second interview, we discuss the initial and continuous decisions that were made in response to emergency remote teaching. Additionally, we examined their selected artifacts and the meaning that those hold for them; photos of these artifacts are interspersed throughout to allow readers to reference the artifacts as they are discussed to gain deeper understanding. In our final interview, we discuss the lasting impact that COVID-19 and the decisions made pertaining to emergency remote teaching have continued to impact their current practice. All participants placed their experiences within a broader context of the impact of COVID on education in general in an attempt to make some meaning of their own experiences in relation to those of others and what educators are seeing today. At the beginning of each section, I briefly share my experiences pertaining to the timeframe being referenced; this allows for readers to see and understand my relationship to the participants as researcher, writer, and resource and to better understand the intersectionality of all the roles throughout this study. At the end of each section, I discuss the themes identified across the interviews and allow for stories shared to further illustrate the themes discussed.

Throughout the course of this narrative inquiry, I centered my research around the following questions:

- a) How did teachers make decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- b) Why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching?
- c) What lasting impacts exist within teachers' professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching?

Not only do I feel that I was able to adequately answer these questions in relation to my specific participants, but I was able to identify some core beliefs of my participants and uncover their priorities of how to craft a meaningful educational experience within the broader context of education as a whole. Although their experiences are not universal due to various factors impacting them and others, the data illustrates findings that are reflective of participants' experiences and allows for a view into how four teachers chose to navigate emergency remote teaching and the lasting impact of those experiences, both personally and professionally. Allow me to introduce my colleagues from Little Middle School: Alan, Melody, and Mandy.

Pre-COVID

The following section details the findings collected through the course of the first interview conducted with each participant. Questions centered around teacher education training and the participants' experiences as educators prior to emergency remote teaching. The purpose of this interview was to establish background information for each of the participants to build a framework of understanding as pertains to the instructional decisions they made in response to COVID-19. These findings are reflective of the individual experiences and training that led each participant to the point of introduction to emergency remote teaching.

Alan: "I hate to say, it was a magical year for me"

Even though our interviews took place via Zoom, Alan was always very engaged and passionate when he spoke. He was excited to participate and shared that he wanted to read my dissertation once it was complete. At the time of our interview, Alan was in his 17th year of teaching beginning in 2005. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Education with an emphasis in Social Studies from a university in Kansas and is certified to teach 6-12 grade by the state of Kansas. Alan taught Social Studies for 13 years at Little Middle School. He shared, "At

that stage in my career, I taught eighth grade, just single subject until the last three years. Then I also had a second prep that I started, which was a Civics class,” which meant that Alan taught both seventh and eighth graders throughout the school day. Alan now teaches high school Social Studies where he is “primarily focused on teaching the Freshman-level World History, Geography class, and then Honors World History.”

Prior to March 2020, Alan’s educational journey did include a bit of experience with distance learning:

“So, my first two years of teaching, I was one of two members of a social studies department for a 6-12 junior/senior high school in a little town in Kansas. It's a very small community. We, it was, we were technically in a K-12 building, one building. So, um, I taught, at that point I taught high school seniors in government. I had American history for juniors. I had a world, uh, like a current events class for freshman, sophomores that I actually taught remotely before Covid. I taught through the old inner TV process where I would teach to a screen and had kids at a different location.”

When asked about that experience and the training that he received to teach that class successfully, Alan shared that there was not much:

“Well, the training side was pretty much me doing a lot of hands-on learning of my own. Uh, when, as I mentioned, when I taught at my previous district, we had a distance learning program. Basically, we shared some staff members, uh, for three different schools, Our own districts in the town, which also included another high school, which was 10 miles away. Um, and so my job was teaching the world or the modern issues class. I had all of my students for one of the semesters I taught that I had all of my kids that were remote in another school, so I would go into this room, and it would be a

completely empty room and there would be a camera and I would have, you know, a table area and a microphone set up. I would teach to this camera, and I could see, through a closed-circuit television, I could see the kids in that room in the other school. There was always the challenge of the lag between me having a conversation and waiting for that, learning to use the pause to wait. But the bigger challenge was actually getting resources to them, because we were not a digital one-to-one school. So everything that I did, and mind you, that this was a modern issues class, so it was like current events, right? I had to, I had to have things in the mail generally two to three days before the class. So, I always had to plan at least probably three days in advance for every class. And it was a, we were on block scheduling, so it was an every other day class, but I always had to have stuff in the mail, or if our district person who would travel between the two schools would be in the building, I could give it to them and they could travel and take it over to the other building. So, learning to plan that particular class, which was pretty challenging because you had to be three days ahead all the time, but I didn't really get trained on the technical side of it. We had an IT person that was kind of in the room or nearby if there was a technical issue, but for the most part, that side was relatively easy to maneuver. It was teaching to an empty classroom with kids in another building that were, you know, 15 miles away.”

As a high schooler, we had some of these classes, so I was familiar with how they worked even though I never participated in any. Alan shared that the kids in the classes were great to work with, but that did not negate the issue of trying to engage students in a completely separate room from him:

“This was also my first two years of teaching, so there was nothing that I could do to prepare me for that. So, I found myself really struggling to create ways to engage kids and there, like they had a proctor in their room who would distribute stuff, but they didn't have, you know, they were unaware of what was going on any more so than the kids at that point. And so, it became a challenge and current events was so much based upon trying to probe for questions and small group conversations and discussion, and it would be very difficult to have that when you were unable to be right in the room facilitating that directly or moving around in the room. You know, we couldn't do learning styles. Just simply almost me talking to them, which it became very, it was a challenge. I had to come up with a lot of creative ways and probably failed more than I succeeded in that first couple years. But, um, it kind of taught me a little bit. It kind of gave me something to go back to, to remember some of the failures of that and try not to mimic that when I dealt with remote learning.”

Additionally, Alan had some experience with digital learning as a learner/student. He had taken various online courses to be able to renew his teaching license, but he found it to be a bit lackluster as well:

“What I found honestly from it was that was the, the most, that was the least effective way because I, I guess if you're someone who was very driven, like I was to get the class done, it was great because I didn't have to wait. I could just complete it. But as far as engaging and learning, it was not. I've had a couple of situations where that's kind of been the case. I've done it, and in both cases it's not been effective. And then the only, the, I guess the effective would, the effective outcome was that I completed the class I passed it. I did it on my own terms. It's like I didn't really actually learn. I got it done.”

This brought us back to the topic of teaching during the 2019-2020 school year. At the time, Alan taught, “eighth grade social studies, and had a civics class that was a combination of seventh and eighth grade. There was one block of civics and eighth graders. Eighth grade social studies primarily covered what would be considered early American history. Um, it would be the kind of the colonial era all the way up through reconstruction.” When discussing the set up and purpose of his Social Studies classes prior to March 2020, Alan discussed the scope and sequence of his course was largely chronological, progressing through early American history. He also shared that he had undergone a “paradigm shift” in how he viewed the purpose of his 8th grade Social Studies class. He chose to place more of an emphasis on skills-based learning. Rather than placing an emphasis on sharing knowledge for students to memorize and regurgitate, or “the what,” Alan had elected to structure his class in such a way that he could teach students “the how” of gathering and interacting with information. This shift was done in an attempt to encourage students to ask questions about the things they are being told and to ask questions in general as opposed to accepting information without considering and challenging it. Prior to March 2020, Alan felt that his classes were really heading in the right direction to meet this new purpose:

“I felt like 19-20 was just a, it was real, honestly, I hate to say it was a magical year for me. My classes were just dynamic. They were. They were so, like, they just pushed me all the time, and pushed me in a good way. I was constantly being challenged to be better for them because they just fed off of the topics that we looked at. I really redesigned some of the curriculum that I had taught, and we tackled issues a little bit more in depth that we, I felt could connect them. I used a lot of modules where, or ideas, that taught historical issues and then brought them into the modern era, like where we see the effects

of this today. And the kids, just, like I said, it was just a magical year that was happening, and I felt like we were on a good path because the, the feedback I was getting from the kids was great... I, I could just see it. They could, they were starting to figure out, like, what it meant to truly learn, not just for a grade, but just also just to learn. I just, I was really feeling like we were heading in a good direction.”

Melody: “This is going to sound messed up, but I didn’t necessarily care about them being, like, good, critical readers”

Melody is one of those people who is quick-witted and always laughing. She was that way when we worked together, and her humor shone through on our Zooms as well. She was quick to crack a joke, even when she had someone in trying to fix her bathroom light as I interviewed her. One of the things that I always enjoyed about her as a colleague was that she was always able to take a tough day and turn it into something funny; we often laughed at how she cries at almost everything. Melody is one of those people who I always knew that I could go to and vent about something then leave her classroom laughing about something else, typically some sort of anecdote of something ridiculous that happened earlier that week.

At the time of the interview, Melody was in her 6th year in education. Melody graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Secondary English Education and a minor in English in May 2017. She graduated with her Master of Education in Library Media. She has served in a variety of capacities throughout her career, from a freshman English teacher to a 6th and 7th grade English teacher to an Elementary Library Media Specialist to working in a university library as a Course Reserves Coordinator. Melody shared that she had initially gone to school to be a psychologist, but due to her current university not having the program and her life being in that town, she elected to change majors:

“I had a professor who I met with and we kind of like talked about the profession and honestly, I was upset because my university doesn't have the program for clinical psychology; the other one does. There's like some sort of rule in Kansas where they can't compete. And I was like, well, I don't want to live in a different city, and my life and boyfriend at the time, are here, so I was like, Well what about school counseling and stuff? And he's like, well, let's get real about the profession. He said, “Do you really want to be a psychologist?” He was telling me how he's emotional, and he tried to be a therapist and he would just cry all the time. And I'm like, “Dude, that would be me.” I was like, if anyone's going to cry, it's going to be me. So, I mostly switched majors, not because I wasn't liking it; I really was liking psychology. It was because the school didn't have the program I wanted, and I was afraid that I was too emotional for the profession. So I switched to, I wanted to switch to school counseling, and then I learned that at the school, you have to get a Master's for that. You can't just like get your bachelor's in, um, school counseling. So, then my plan was like, well, I'll just get my bachelor's in teaching and then I'll go straight into my master's for education. And then I just ended up really liking education. So I was like, I'll just keep on this path. And here we're leaving that path behind. It was a bad idea, but you know what I did always want to do? It was be a librarian.”

During the 2019-2020 school year, Melody taught 6th and 7th grade English at Little Middle School. We had both worked in the same district the previous two years, her at the high school level and me at the middle school, but this was the first time we had been colleagues in the same building. Melody and I had actually done a number of undergraduate classes together, both in English and Secondary Education. She shared that her experiences regarding learning

about virtual and remote teaching had been very similar to mine. When asked about what type of training she had received pertaining to virtual or remote learning, her answer was simple:

“None. Honest to God, I feel like we focused on, um, Bloom’s [Taxonomy] a lot. Like, when I think back to our undergrad, that is literally the only thing I can remember is like every single assignment, every single field experience or practice lesson always had to come back to Bloom’s somehow. And they did. I will say that there were some good professors, and they did give us some really great ideas for, like, online tools to use like Socrative and Padlet, and I felt like I left with a good wealth of knowledge of things that I could use to be fun and engaging, but not, like, well, you know, how to actually teach. And more like supplemental stuff than anything, how to make your teaching not boring.”

As we talked about experiences with virtual or remote learning, Melody shared that she had only participated in online classes during her time as an undergraduate and graduate college student; her high school did provide options to take concurrent college classes remotely, but she did not participate in those courses. As a professional, Melody stated that she did place an emphasis on what she termed “genuine tech integration;” The learning management system (LMS) that her district at the time used was called Schoology, and teachers were encouraged to integrate its usage into coursework as much as possible. She stated,

“I feel like I’ve always been the type of person that’s like, you can’t just like use your smart board and say that you’re integrating technology. Like, you need to actually incorporate technology. And so, I would use like Flipgrid and stuff, do like virtual presentations. I would do that when I was taught freshmen. A lot of online discussions, like even though we’re in the same classroom. Turn off those lights, get on your computer, have some hot chocolate. Um, so I did feel like I used a lot of, like Schoology

specifically. I did try to make like an online classroom feel, especially because I put everything on-- Always like from the start of my teaching, I always had every single lesson plan and every single activity on Schoology for kids who are absent, because I did not want to be like, here's your folder and here's your little assignment that we did. I'm like, go look at the PowerPoint, the assignments on there. So, like, I did do that, but nothing like recording my teaching or doing any remote learning situations.”

In discussing what she believed to be the purpose for her 6th and 7th grade English Language Arts classes during the 2019-2020 school year, Melody shared,

“This is going to sound messed up, but I didn't necessarily care about them being, like, good, critical readers. I cared about them being good writers and to be able to, like, read something and understand it, but I didn't really care if they could be like, “Oh, the dramatic irony.” Like, you should be equipped with the skills to, as an adult someday, be able to read a text, whether it's like a legal document or a book for funnies or an email from work, be able to understand the context, like the tone, everything, and to be a writer that can actually communicate your ideas. That was it: to be able to understand others' ideas and to communicate your own.”

Melody shared working at Little Middle School was difficult for her in designing her course scope and sequence because there was not much cohesion from one grade level to another. There was not one specific curriculum being used; rather, they were given an overarching theme of sorts and some stories to use, but they were also expected to be teaching the same standards at the same times as their counterparts. This was a source of great frustration, leaving her feeling as though regardless of the work she put in was truly effective. In her words, “we were kind of floundering honestly in the English department there, like trying to create some

sort of curriculum that would improve student scores. And they did, by the way, improve while I was there, because I got the data from state assessments.” Despite the improvement in student scores, Melody noted that she was often left questioning whether or not students learned anything from her:

“In Little Middle School, I think the students were so behind on reading and writing skills because in the elementary school, it feels like they straight up coddle those kids. And like it was very clear coming into sixth grade, it was very clear talking to those teachers the way that they have their expectations set. They're very low and pair that with the fact that we did not have any sort of guide. It didn't need to be like purchased, but like we didn't have any sort of like real guide for what we were teaching. I obviously struggled with at first like knowing what to do because they were so, so low. And even the kids who are like really high, and then there's also those parent expectations in that district where like, my kid's perfect and they're going to get a hundred percent on everything, and if not, then it's your fault as a teacher. Not the fact that their kid doesn't understand, and they've never actually been challenged before. So, I felt like they did not meet my expectations there. Leaving me, even though they did score decently, I often am like, did I even teach them anything?”

Mandy: “And I hope that they would be comfortable going into those maths just because of the exposure they had in seventh”

Mandy is a quiet, serious person, and our interviews were often brief and to the point. After I would ask a question, she would often ask clarifying questions to ensure that she understood what I was asking. She would pause to think through her answers then provide a well-thought-out response. When we worked together, Mandy was the 7th grade team lead. She

was always the person you could count on to have everything in order and ready to go; this was accurate in our interview sessions as well.

At the time of our interview, Mandy was in her 12th year of education and her 6th year at Little Middle School. She had been in education since 2010 after graduating with her bachelor's degree with an emphasis in Spanish and Business. Mandy shared that after she obtained her teaching license, she became certified to teach 5th-8th grade Math and 6th-12th grade English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). When we worked together at Little Middle School during the 2019-2020 school year, Mandy taught 7th grade Math; that was her fourth year in that capacity.

During her education to become a teacher, Mandy did not receive any training about teaching in a virtual or digital setting, so her experience with virtual learning came in the form of her as a student. She essentially has two bachelor's degrees, and her teaching degree was entirely online. Although learning in an online environment was not ideal in all capacities, Mandy shared,

“I liked it, but I don't know if it was probably-- I enjoyed it more as an adult because I could do it on my own time. There was, back when I did that, I mean, there was some meeting times, but we didn't meet with the teacher very often. Mostly it was just go online, complete the courses, and so it was kind of at my own pace, so I enjoyed it because I could do it from home. For me, as the type of learning that I like, I feel like it was good for me because sometimes I don't learn as well in the moment, like in a classroom, um, doing it I think helped me, but I didn't-- I wasn't able to ask questions and that was hard for me to have to ask questions over email was difficult.”

As we began discussing her Math class and the purpose that she had established prior to March 2023, Mandy stated that, “seventh grade math is all about kind of the first-time exposures to all types of math. I hoped that they would be comfortable going into those maths just because of the exposure they had in seventh.” To establish these foundational skills, Mandy explained how her use of manipulatives in the classroom lent itself well to ensuring that the foundational skills were concrete and easily understood for as many students as possible. The curriculum that the Math department used at Little Middle School placed an emphasis on conceptual mathematics, meaning that the teacher served as more facilitator as students explored the concepts instead of simply being told how to do things. To do this successfully, students have to have access to hands-on materials and require some interactions with those around them. In terms of how the purpose of her class was supported, Mandy shared,

“Before it was online, um, in the classroom I had a lot of manipulatives to teach usually the first exposures to things. The students, most of them are tactile and they want to, you know, see a number line and, you know, move things around on a number line or when they're doing geometry, you know, hold the object to do area and volume, so that was my biggest concern, shifting to virtual was not being able to have them. Um, I know that when we first went online, I would send them messages, okay, see if you can find this object around your house. Things like that. So that they would still have the tactile part of it. At the time, it was effective, because, um, you know, I had all the manipulatives and all paper copies, and they were able to write things out and, um, meet their goals with that curriculum at school.”

My Experiences: “Never say never”

Both my mom and my grandma are teachers. My grandma has taught for 40 years, and my mom has worked as an educator in various capacities (teacher, director of an after-school program, assistant principal, etc.) for a total of 23 years. Growing up, I spent many summers and late nights in their classrooms helping to set up computers, painting walls and cabinets, rearranging tables, hanging up decorations, proofreading yearbook pages until my eyes were crossed, and more. Quite frankly, I have probably forgotten more things about those times than I remember, but the one thing that I do remember most vividly is saying that I would never be a teacher.

As a high school senior, many conversations took place with my grandparents where they suggested getting my teaching license “as a back-up plan” and “just in case,” but I was adamant that I would rather do anything but. Over the course of my first four years of college, I switched my major a number of times before finally reaching the point during the fall semester of my senior year where I decided to take an education class, because “What am I going to do with an English degree?” After a couple more years, I graduated with my bachelor’s degree in Secondary English Education. Initially, I had gotten into education because I was really excited to teach my content; I was convinced that I would teach high school English, and I told anyone who would listen that I would never teach middle school if I had a say in the matter. During my student teaching in Title I middle school, I found that there was a massive gap between students identified as having a disability and those who were not, and there were a lot of our students falling in that gap. That influenced my choice of what degree to pursue after graduating. While working as an 8th grade English Language Arts teacher in that same school where I student taught for two years, I worked on my master’s in special education. I told myself that I was doing

it because I wanted to meet those needs that I saw in my students; I would never be a special education teacher. Over the years, I noticed a shift from me being excited to teach my content to being excited to teach my students. Seeing the growth that my students made was exciting for me and getting to see that growth reflected in data was what fueled me to show up every day. On one hand, it made me feel like what I was doing was effective. On the other hand, it made feel good to know that my kids were making growth and excited about learning when they came into my classroom.

Upon graduating with my master's degree in December 2018, I accepted a position as a middle school special education teacher at Little Middle School, which is where I had 7th and 8th grade students on my caseload during the 2019-2020 school year. I taught a self-contained math, study skills, and reading class, as well as co-taught a variety of different courses, which gave me exposure to a variety of settings and content prior to moving to emergency remote teaching. I think that it is fair to say that the one thing I have learned during my educational journey is to never say never, because that is, inevitably, the very next thing that will occur in my career.

Prior to 2020, the only exposure that I had with online learning was as a student myself. During my bachelor's, I took an EdTech class that was online, but all it taught me was some different tools that I could use in the classroom like Canva, Flipgrid, and some others. I did not feel like it necessarily prepared me to teach in a remote or digital capacity. During my bachelor's, master's, and doctoral classes, which I started in January 2019, I had taken a variety of my courses online. They worked well enough because I could do them on my own time, but at the same time, I do not feel like I really learned or retained the content as well as I do when I take classes in person. When I reflect upon the classes that I found to be truly meaningful, it was the ones where we had conversations and discussions about the content. For me, the best learning

takes place during the exchange and interaction of ideas between the teacher, my classmates, and myself. I know that discussion boards are meant to emulate that exchange of ideas, but for me, they are not as seamless and do not provide that opportunity for the free flow of conversation and questioning that in person classes do. I often find myself struggling to engage in a digital learning environment and to adequately express my thoughts. Because of that, I never had any sort of desire to teach in a virtual school or anything of that nature. At least not if I had a choice.

In my position as a special education teacher, I taught a variety of classes. Along with a self-contained math and reading class, I worked in a variety of other classrooms alongside my colleagues as a co-teacher for general education core classes that my students were in. Because all of my courses were so different, I only had two goals in mind: to see students make progress and to believe in themselves that they were capable of learning. I set up my self-contained classes with this focus at the forefront and found ways as a co-teacher to promote this ideology with all students with whom I came into contact. This required some experimentation, and no two days ever looked the same. We did a lot of work with students writing on the chalkboard because, for some reason, that seemed to help them retain things better than if we did it sitting down; this was true for almost all of my students, so that's what we did. Prior to March 2020, I can confidently say that I felt that my purpose was being met. All of my students were learning, and it was very common to hear them saying things like, "Oh, I know how to do this!" and "This is easy!" when attempting things that their previous Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) said that they were not capable of doing nor had they even been exposed to. That was what drove me every day in every setting where I had contact with students. When my focus was placed on my students as individuals, I saw both substantial individual and group progress in more than one

capacity. Not only were my students growing as academics, but they were growing as people as well.

Themes Identified

Through analysis of the first interview, three common themes emerged. These themes are learning occurs in the interactions, lack of training, and establishing and reinforcing foundational skills. The common themes identified take into consideration the experiences of the participants before the introduction of COVID-19 into education but were also considered in light of the participants knowing what came during and after emergency remote teaching. It is important to understand that if the same interview was completed before emergency remote teaching and COVID, the themes identified may have been different due to a shift in the continuity and experiences up to that point. These themes highlighted the common experiences of the participants pre-COVID while also taking into accountability the knowledge that they gained in retrospect.

Learning Occurs in the Interactions

Learning in the digital space is not always the best, even for adult learners. Each of the participants mentioned having experiences in online classes and that they were not always the most engaging. It was noted that they were good in that they could be completed on their own time, but no one felt that they were particularly meaningful as they engaged in the content. Alan noted that he had some experience teaching in a virtual space early in his teaching career and that engagement was difficult because he was not able to talk with and ask questions of students as they talked together, which removed that opportunity for learning. Emergency remote teaching also saw this as an issue. Prior to the shift to Continuous Learning, Alan's classes were functioning in a space that learning was student driven and their questioning led to deeper

learning; this helped him and his students to stay motivated. In this case, the interactions between people drove the learning that occurred. In Mandy's case, teaching a math class in a virtual space was difficult because it removed a lot of the resources that she had found students needed to learn. For her, students struggling with abstract concepts needed manipulatives to make the concept more concrete. This interaction with and manipulation of the resources led to understanding and learning of the concepts that she was teaching. Melody's response was similar; students needed to be able to meaningfully interact with the resources to be able to understand and respond to them in a comprehensive manner. Without the interaction between people and resources, the learning tends to be more shallow and surface level than it has the capability to be.

Lack of training

Of the participants, none of them felt that they could say they had been adequately trained to teach in a virtual environment, let alone shift a completely in-person curriculum into a virtual space in two weeks' time and feel confident in their decisions. Alan's training that he had from his prior experiences were largely self-taught, so he was not sure if the way that he did it at the time was effective or best practice. Melody and I had received training in an educational technology course, but the content provided was focused largely on how to use technology to supplement curriculum and make it more engaging. Mandy shared that she had received no training at all in reference to how to design and teach an online class. Because of this lack of training, participants felt as if they were unsure of what they were doing and did not have confidence in the effectiveness of their instructional design.

Establishing and Reinforcing Foundational Skills

An unexpected theme that arose over the course of the interview was the belief of the participants that they wanted their students to understand and be able to demonstrate strong foundational skills. Alan had shifted to this at the beginning of the school year as he was considering what he hoped for students to be able to get from his course. Mandy's desire for strong foundational skills came from the motivation that seventh grade math lays the foundation for all future math classes; in order for students to succeed in those classes, they needed to build a strong foundation in her class. Melody's drive to emphasize a skills-based approach derived from the idea that English Language Arts is created as a means to teach students how to exist in and interact within society. All participants felt that it was essential for students to be able to demonstrate what they knew as opposed to simply telling it. This was the underlying motivator for all participants in how they designed their courses before the shift to emergency remote teaching and helped to shape the way that they thought about the lessons that they created during.

Pivot, Grace, and Other Triggers: Emergency Remote Teaching During COVID-19

The data provided in this section outlines the participant responses to the questions asked during the second semi-structured interview. The emphasis of these questions centered around the experiences of the participants during emergency remote teaching and the motivation behind their instructional decisions as they were made and shifted. Within this section, we also examined participant selected personal artifacts that they felt best illustrated the decisions that they made during emergency remote teaching and how students interacted with the results of those decisions. It is important to note that all participants taught in the same building and

district, so they were given the same general guidance about what they could or could not do instructionally; what they decided to do with that guidance was at their discretion.

Alan: “I felt like I was in a dark room, throwing darts at a dartboard, and just hoping I was hitting something”

Although the focus of our initial interview was looking at how Alan’s experiences as an educator before March 2020, we found it difficult not to talk about COVID and the initial shift to emergency remote teaching. As we spoke, it was instinctual to talk about the teaching decisions made before and during COVID in relation to one another. The conversation during our second interview revisited our previous conversation as well as delved further into the information he had given me and explored the why behind his decisions. When asked about how much of a concern COVID initially seemed to be prior to March 2020, Alan’s experiences and beliefs at the time were similar to mine:

“So initially we were hearing, you know, everything about it was happening in the eastern part of the world, um, in Japan and the far East. And I guess I, I think about it in terms of like, it's almost this distance thing that I don't know if I really thought much about what it was doing. Um, I know that as we started hearing it filter and move its way across Europe, there was a lot of conversation, you know, it wasn't a matter of if, it was when, and what was that going to look like. We started to watch those other places have these massive shutdowns and there was, you know, there was just general conversation between family members. Um, I had conversations with my fellow colleagues, you know, what, what was this going to look like if this, when this, got to the United States, what would this do to school? But I really didn't-- I don't think I ever really grasped the idea that it was going to happen. I think it was almost that we thought it was going to happen,

but we weren't really preparing ourselves for it. There was a lot of nervousness, um, in terms of what it could potentially do. You know, there are obviously those with health concerns most importantly. But I don't know if I ever really considered a lot also with what school was going to look like. I kind of thought, at times, that maybe it was going to just be, well, it'll get to us by the summertime, and it'll run its course. I, I think it was just the lack of totally understanding what it was doing, what it did to the populace and how rapidly it spread, and just pure ignorance on our-- on my part. I think just really didn't know.”

Alan’s reaction to Governor Kelly’s announcement that the state of Kansas was closing brick-and-mortar schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year was not dissimilar from my own. His wife was and continues to be a high school teacher, so he had someone to talk with about how he was feeling that could relate and understand on a personal level. He shared that he remembered talking with his wife and thinking that shifting to teaching online was going to be

“impossible. We were being put in a position where so much about—very much the DNA of the way we teach is to be interacting with our kids, to be in the room with them, to have that relationship-building piece and how is that going to work in this format where we are talking to each other on screens? I think I spent a lot of time initially just reflecting on, okay, is this even really going to happen or are we, you know, are we going to just end up shutting the school down completely? Because it won't work. And I just didn't have a lot of answers at that point in time. And so, I spent a lot of time probably creating doomsday-like feelings of school for the first several days leading up to when we had our district’s return to school meeting.”

Not only was he concerned about the academic components and how to teach the students, but Alan was also worried about the well-being of our students. While we knew that they would have their 1:1 devices and hotspots provided for them, Alan wondered about the students who received most of their meals from school; at that time, our district's food and nutrition department found a way to still provide meals to students by going to locations all over the district and bringing the food there to pick up. Alan noted that even though things "weren't going to be perfect, but it just reminded me that in this really grim, scary time, people were willing to say, we will figure this out one way or the other."

Although the adults in the district and community came together to try and find ways to make things work, one thing that Alan reiterated was concern about how to meet students' needs based on their wildly varying home life situations:

"I did start to worry about, I could picture kids not knowing what their situations were going to be like. And it really started to bother me that that was going to be their reality. And then as we started planning for the kids, as we were talking about things like, well, we have to understand that our kids may not get on to Zoom because they're also taking care of their four-year-old and their seven-year-old siblings. I don't know if you've ever watched the, the Walking Dead series. But something like that, even though I knew that the world wasn't coming to an end, it started to feel like that for a period of time. It just-- I could not make myself believe that this was really happening this way."

During the two-week planning period prior to providing content for students, Alan recalled sitting in many Zoom meetings like the ones that I have already explained.:

"Every meeting that we were having as faculty, you know, when we would come together as our middle school, the faculty and departments, we just kept staring at each other at

times, Like, okay, what do we do? Like, how does this, what do you think you're going to do? And we would have, that would be so often, much of the conversation would be, well, I think I'm going to try this, but I have no idea if it's going to work. And the fact that we kept were, we were being told, you know, just do your very best to try to connect with them. Know that your kids are not going to be on there. And you know, I'd used the word earlier, grace, that word grace and pivot became the two-- like, if there was words in the dictionary that were going to define this timeframe, it would be those two. Give your kids grace and know that you have to be prepared to pivot.”

When considering how he planned his course for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester, Alan shared that he gravitated toward “using something that was going to give them some familiarity, and that would give me some go-to that would make the process at least a little bit easier to manage.” He continued to use Google Classroom which was used building-wide at Little Middle School, so that was one variable that he was able to remove. One thing that Alan shared was that, during this time, he was able to become a part of and participate in an informal professional development community via social media. Although he had a support system at home in his wife and his colleagues at Little Middle School, Alan found himself seeking additional connection in a way that would help him better provide learning experiences for and to connect with our students. Even though it started out as a way to find resources, he shared that it also became a therapeutic space for him as he navigated emergency remote teaching:

“It provided me a sense of, I hate to say it, but it was a lot of therapy at times, too. Of course, I didn't believe that, in my heart of heart, that I was the only person dealing with this. But there were times that I just needed to hear other people, not necessarily struggle, but to be empathetic to the fact that we're all dealing with this. And I knew my colleagues

here in my district were dealing with that, and I knew my wife was dealing with it, but just to hear other people throughout the state of Kansas and across the country all being like, okay, how do we do this, what can we do, and we just almost become like collective brainstorming sessions. Just we would talk and or someone would say, Hey, I've got this really great idea. And then people would be like, Hey, what if you did this? Or what if you did this? And there was no sense of judgment. There was no criticism. It was just true professional development for the purposes of, Hey, let's figure this out together.”

Alan shared that, in designing how his weekly modules would look, he emphasized providing a sense of normalcy while also giving students space to process what was happening at the time and in the world around them. Each week started off with a video on Monday that would set them up for the week and the activities to come. On Wednesday, Alan would have check-ins via Zoom, then on Friday, a guest speaker would join their Zoom to talk about where they were in the world and how COVID was impacting them; these guest speakers included a former exchange student from Europe, a senator, the district’s superintendent, and more. During the week, students would complete tasks on Google Slides. Many of these were photos or things that connected back to the 1919 Spanish Flu pandemic; students were able to draw parallels between society did then and what was currently happening as well as talk about how that connected to them personally. He wanted to provide students with a window to view how things were happening outside of our school and town and to give them a broader experience than what they saw from their homes; COVID did not just impact our district, so he sought to find ways to show them that. As we discussed the shift in how Alan chose to provide literacy instruction, he shared that his shift was motivated by meeting the social and emotional needs of students. In Alan’s mind, curriculum was no longer his centralized focus as he designed his instruction:

“It was going to be hard to have any sort of relevant conversation or have any sort of relevant instruction that was going to be centered around historical events of the 1800s, that fill in the blank, whatever. Not that those were not important. It was just that kids’ brains, kids, they-- if you're going to want to stoke some fire of kids' interest in education, you have to kind of think about what was going on at the time. And at that time, the conversation that they were always, always wanting to center around was what was going on in the world. And the fact that I could then build some parallels to the Spanish flu in the early 1900s and look at the response that a country had in a global pandemic before, and then to try to give global perspectives or different perspectives of people that, of the world at this time or at that time, through our weekly interviews with different people. It was all centered around to allow kids to process and feel and then give them a chance to connect with history still, but in a way that was, um, it just, it was meant to be relevant for their social emotional side. And I think that's just, to me, that was the most important thing.”

Although not all of Alan’s students participated regularly, he did have 20-25 students who would regularly participate in the Zooms and activities. He did state that he thought that those kids were the kids who would show up anyway, so he was not sure whether his instructional decisions played a role in that. Alan discussed how the one thing that he shifted as he progressed through those last through weeks was his contact time with students. He had designed his modules to be frontloaded and maintained his instructional decisions, because, “If I kept shifting things every week to doing something different, then it might throw 'em off. But again, I was just like everybody else. I felt like I was in a dark room, throwing darts at a dart board and just hoping I was hitting something.” Alan said that he often found himself extending

his office hours, just because students would want to stay on and talk for a little bit longer. He shared that that was one of the most difficult things in meeting via Zoom was the days that students did not show up:

“I found that it became more of just an opportunity if kids needed to have a place to talk and see faces. And um, and that was hard because as the weeks progressed, it got less and less. And I, you know, you almost felt like the kids had quit. And so like, you know, I'm trying, but what am I doing? Is it really doing any good? Is it really? So there was, there was days where it was just like, I'd open the computer, and I didn't know what I was going to get, but at the end, you know, the start of the day and 10 minutes in, it was nothing. So yeah, those, those days when they wouldn't show up at all were, those were hard.”

To give an example of what his instructional decisions were in designing his modules for emergency remote teaching, Alan provided a virtual artifact. This particular artifact was a completed assignment by one of his students examining the similarities and differences between the response to the Spanish Flu of 1918 and COVID-19 in 2020:

“This includes some video based, doing some comparison through that, and then I would give them kind of an essential question. In this particular case, one of the questions I gave them centered on how our current experiences of living through the COVID-19 global pandemic have similar characteristics to that of the Spanish flu, and then you're going to notice then below that I provided for them some primary sources. This was more of an opportunity to tackle skills. Because we were always-- that was a common thing for us, was to look at primary sources to be able to analyze and look at conclusions or draw conclusions or inferences from those. So this was something that they did with that. And

then you can see there at the bottom, the last slide was where they did their writing. And you can kind of see an example of a student's work with this.” (See Figures 4.1-4.3)

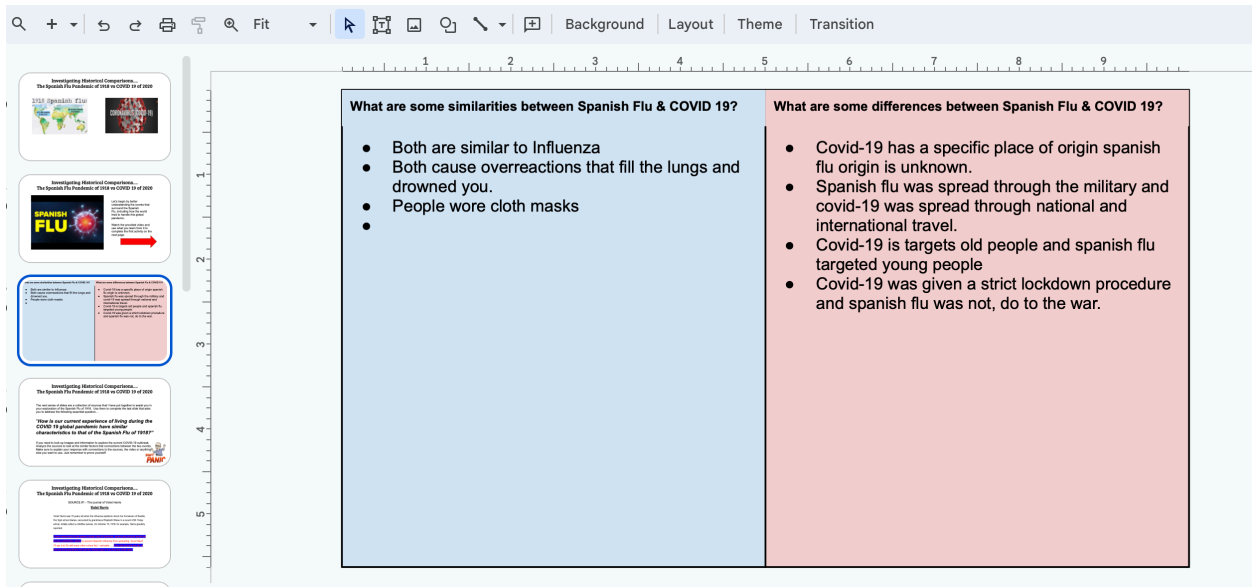


Figure 4.1 Student work sample: Similarities and differences between Spanish Flu and COVID-19

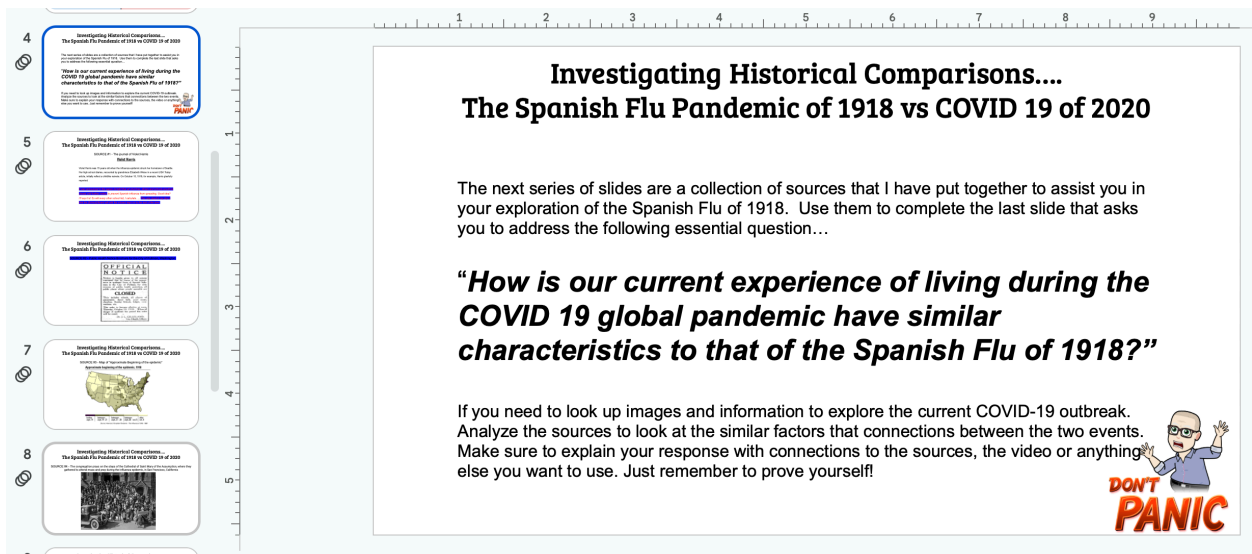


Figure 4.2 Student work sample: Essential question and activity instructions

The student to whom the sample belonged was not a student on my caseload, but Alan explained that this particular sample was very meaningful for him as a teacher, because

“This particular example has shown me, or this particular activity, has shown me ways that I can continue to use digital based frontloading types of activities, um, to help engage with content, um, engage with sources. That's one of the things that's really taught me, um, how to create instructional-- It's really taught, made me consider instructional design that would be done in such a way that, um, I feel like it's continued to help me be a better teacher. Honestly, that's one thing I will see is how to incorporate technology in a more effective way. Probably is this artifact would be a prime example of that. It isn't some flashy thing, but how I tried to lay it out and thinking about kinds of questions that I asked. I've continued to use a lot of pieces like this in my current teaching practice.” (See Figure 4.3)

**Investigating Historical Comparisons....
The Spanish Flu Pandemic of 1918 vs COVID 19 of 2020**

"How is our current experience of living during the COVID 19 global pandemic have similar characteristics to that of the Spanish Flu of 1918?" (RESPOND IN TEXT BOX BELOW)

These two horrible events played out very similar to each other. Starting with the first steps to stop the spread. In 1918 posters telling to cover your mouth when coughing and to not put things in your mouth were dispersed. This is very similar too precautions given in the early stages of Covid-19 by many health professionals. Violet Harris stated that when the school was closed she was concerned that the school days would be added to the summer. In the early stages of Covid-19 many parents and youth were very concerned of this happening to them. Once These diseases started gaining in number dramatic actions were taken. According to violet harris "It was announced in the papers tonight that all churches, shows and schools would be closed until further notice," This was also in the Public Health Notice Brochure for the City of Pullman, Washington and other brochures. During the Covid 19 outbreak many similar steps were taken. As stated by kansas business journal Kansas issued a stay at home order which entailed very similar places that were being shut down. While the world shuts down in these situations not everyone could go home. As stated by the infographic show, all business could not shut down because they were necessary to the war. Come to present day and we are not worried about war resources rather the essentials we need to live that we no longer produce ourselves like many could in 1918. This includes power, water, internet and phone services, banks, agriculture services and more. Therefore these essential workers are still required to go to work. Once the pandemics started hitting the homefront many ways of healthcare were done very different. In 1918 the Oakland, California Municipal Auditorium became a temporary Spanish Flu ward. Present day 2020 we are seeing many similar places set up. Such as medical tents in Central Park New York. As stated these two awful outbreaks followed the old rule of "history repeats itself."

Figure 4.3 Student work sample: Student’s response to the essential question drawing from the primary sources provided and personal experiences

When asked about how he felt that this artifact illustrated his experience with emergency remote teaching, Alan shared,

“Well, it makes me feel, I hate to say it makes me feel proud that I could come up with something that was relevant and that was doable for the kids. As you know, as you can

see with the example, this was something that they could manage that allowed them still to be very self-sufficient learners. That they didn't, they, you know, this reminded me that they didn't need me for every single thing. Um, and so that probably was one thing. I look at this, I rewind it back, because I pulled it back up. Like, gosh, kids, kids who engaged with this could figure it out and do it. So that, that was kind of a proud moment. If I could take anything away as far as emotionally, I felt like okay. In all of that, I figured out something that they could do. Honestly, also, it kind of brings back a little bit of trigger of like, I don't want to go back and do it this way 99% of the time ever again. Because there's so much to this that got lost that, you know, you can see on the screen, things that look like they might have been some success, but, and that also, I'm reminded of the failures. Of genuine opportunities then to have conversations with kids who might have filled this out but didn't come in for the other part of it, which would've been in the classroom. To have that conversation, to be able to share their thinking beyond just this. To ask, be able to ask questions of kids like the one who filled this out, who, if he wasn't in the class or wasn't, didn't come into the conversation on the virtual side. Being able to ask him and share with him like, wow, what's your thought? You know, when you shared this part of the response at the end, I really like this. Tell me a little bit more about that. Or, you know, those are the, those wonderful relationship builders with students and celebrations of kids that virtually got completely wiped out. It's been a while since I've pulled some of this stuff up, so I'm like, oh my gosh. Yeah. Holy cow. But no, I will take away again the fact that there has been things that I have learned a lot about myself as a teacher that I can continue to use from stuff, like this. There, you know, I have to

recognize that there was some good that did end up coming out of all of it. Um, but I, like I said, I would never want to return to this ever again.”

Melody: “I knew that because I had piqued one kid's interest, at least I was doing my job for one person”

Just like Alan and I, Melody shared that, initially, COVID was not something that was of concern to her:

“The 100% authentic answer is like no genuine concept of the threat that COVID presented. Because there were articles already in the news like January of that year that it had been in the United States, and we were not bothered whatsoever. And then, um, I'm trying to recall if we--when the mask mandates started. But I, I will admit that like at the very beginning I was like, whatever, like I'm going to be fine. And then after a few weeks, and then people started to get seriously ill, I started to take it seriously as well. So prior to school getting shut down, it didn't seem as large of a threat as when school got shut down. And then, our lives went to hell, and we had to plan two months of lessons in one week.”

I recall that Melody was one of the people that I was texting while we waited for Governor Kelly’s press conference. Neither of us were sure what to expect, and we joked about it, but when the announcement was given, our reactions were very similar:

“I just talked about this today at work. I cried. I vividly remember this exact moment that I saw the announcement that they were closing schools. I was in my bedroom, and I was on my phone. I saw it, and I just went to the other side of my bed and sat on the floor, cried because it was sad for what it meant to our students in that their learning was going to drastically change. And then also the fact that they were going to live through

something that not a lot of people can say that they've lived through and that it was going to be a mark on their lives. And I just think that it was hard to not end the year because you know how the end of the year with your students is always like a big deal. You're wrapping up like you have that, 'oh, get out, but also I'm going to miss you' moment. So, it was sad to me, but I was glad because we were safe."

Melody shared that the two weeks of planning before beginning Continuous Learning with students was difficult. When I asked what made it so difficult, she stated,

"The moment our district decided that it wasn't going to be mandatory, I felt like I had to change the way I was teaching because how can I make assignments that are extremely rigorous when we're going through a traumatic experience and you aren't required to attend school anymore, right? So, the kids that are, are either being forced to by their parents and they're mad about it, or they want to because they want some normalcy in their lives. I feel like it was really tricky to figure out how best to structure the assignments. And I did rely on our department head a lot for that, because she was the one who brought up the idea of podcasts. She was actually going to do a podcast unit anyway before that happened, so we kind of piggybacked off what she was doing. And then, um, I didn't strictly stick to like written response type things. I tried not to do a whole lot of reading because I couldn't be there to help scale it. I had some parents or students say that they'd finished their schoolwork like that, like it was too quick, but we weren't supposed to give them more than a certain amount because they were at home, and we couldn't help them."

Melody's class was always a classroom where accessibility was a priority, but the shift to podcasts and some of the activities that students were doing looked different from how her class typically functioned. She shared that her reasoning for this was,

“It was mostly accessibility. Like, we're now online, and our curriculum is not easily accessible to our students and our accommodations like paras and you know, different types of assignments, those are not going to be translated through what we had at the time. So it was primarily accessibility. Like I know every student can access this podcast because I found it in these three locations, and surely you can access one of them if I give you all of these different links. So I was trying to make sure that they could have whatever assignment they needed and what resources they needed.

There were some students who really enjoyed the podcast assignments and reached out to Melody to let her know. Her thought was that the podcast activities allowed for a combination of several different things which contributed to students enjoying them:

“I had some say that they liked it because a lot of the podcasts were kind of more STEAM-based. And so being an English teacher, you don't get to incorporate STEAM as much as you'd like to. So, it was nice to have some science stuff in there and also they got to be creative, which you know, is like my thing anyway, right? But they got to be creative digitally.”

Her weekly modules followed a consistent structure that laid out the week and activities ahead. She chose to keep things as consistent as possible both for the students and for her own “mental peace.” Assignments were created and placed in Google Classroom. During emergency remote teaching, Melody created Google Slides “because I feel like you can do so much and make it look different and interactive and link things there.” When the kids would open them, it

would make a separate copy for them so that they could work in it then turn it in. Because of this, she could see what each student was working on as they were doing it; this allowed her to give real time feedback as needed and to connect to students in that capacity. One of the hard parts that Melody noted was,

“The sad thing is though, that every time I would send out an assignment, I mean, you would see like 20 plus in a class that were untouched, and then you have the problem where like you're giving students credit for everything. So, like, what worth is it? They're not going to read your feedback and then you're grading them. You're giving a hundred percent for everything they turn in, because you're not allowed to dock their grade based on what it was when COVID started, because that's not fair to the kids who aren't doing your lessons. So, they can either stay where they're at or increase only.”

At the beginning of the week, she would post a video “going over the weekly guide and explaining the assignments and telling them they could work ahead and, you know, giving them my rad dad joke of the weeks.” When I asked if there were any shifts that took place over the course of emergency remote teaching in her instructional decisions, Melody shared,

“Something that did change is that I was recording chapters of a book (*The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman), because the publishers had made those exceptions for COVID that we could actually record full novels. I was going to stop doing that because I didn't think anyone was watching, and I had a student reach out because in my weekly video, I said like, if you guys are not watching these, I'm not going to keep recording them. And she was like, please read the next chapter. Because she wanted to know what happened next. So, I do feel like that was one of the things where I reflected and was like, is this a

waste of their time? But it was something that they could just listen to, and they were still getting that fluency model that they kind of still needed even in seventh grade.”

Because Melody no longer taught at Little Middle School at the time of the interview, she did not have access to any of the assignments or resources that she had created. Despite not having a copy of the resource, she was able to recall an assignment that she felt was the most meaningful for her as educator when she reflected upon that time:

“One of the ones that stood out was the podcast that a student emailed me about saying he really enjoyed the assignments I was giving. It was about the science behind why time seems to go faster the older that you. And so, like the theory itself is interesting. I asked some comprehension questions that they had to answer, and then I think I asked an open-ended response question. And the students really liked that because I gave them multiple links to find the podcast. And then I literally had just created a Google slide for them to answer some questions. I think that assignment stood out to me, because, and this is going to sound like a humble brag, but it's not meant to be. I've always had students say that they like my assignments. Not every assignment I give, obviously there's going to be some duds and some things that just don't vibe with students learning styles and personalities. But I've always, as a teacher, had like kids express that either time flies in my class, they like my class, they like me, or they like my assignments. So it was that. I would hear those things and, it's partly two things. One, I was trying something new, it wasn't my normal style, and it was still meeting their needs and like engaging them and they were showing interest in it. And so, it was nice to know that I could have validation and like step out of my comfort zone and they would still like it. But the biggest thing is because of who the student was that had sent me the email. He was totally quiet in class

all the time. Never expressed like an interest really in anything we're doing. It wasn't that he was disinterested in it, but like he was a student that I struggled to get work turned in sometimes, and I know his mom was going through like a medical thing and so he had a lot going on at home, but his grades would ebb and flow because he would be really on it and turn everything in, and he was really quiet and then he just stopped turning in work or he'd like stopped doing it in class. So, he was a kid that, because it was him, it made a difference.”

Melody stated that this particular artifact and her reflection on it reiterated to her “the idea that every kid is different and your resources that you use or your strategies that you use for them is going to hit different for every kid. You're not going to be able to have one thing that is an amazing, exceptional activity for every single kid because every single kid is different.” As she navigated education after COVID, Melody found herself trying to integrate the opportunities for podcasts and alternative assignments into her practice. While it was not always perfect, “it did give me, I guess, the opportunity to try something new and not be afraid of what the perception would be because I already had tried that new thing out of necessity, and it had worked.” In reflecting upon her experiences with emergency remote teaching and how this artifact was representative of that time, Melody shared,

“I mean, I feel like it was a fine assignment. It wasn't anything exceptional. I know that. It was just something that I thought was cool, and that I hoped they would think was cool, especially because they are so young and I'm like things do seem so fresh and time does go at a different pace for them. So, I know that it wasn't like my greatest invention of all time or my most creative assignment. I mean, at least in that moment, I felt like someone was learning, because my biggest thing the whole time is that I just felt like I was failing

the kids, and that they weren't learning anything, and that I wasn't really there for them. So, I knew that because I had piqued one kid's interest, at least I was doing my job for one person.”

Mandy: “If you don't have everything you're used to having to keep you mentally going, you have to substitute in”

In Mandy’s mind, COVID was not something to initially worry about. When students started asking her about it in February, the response that she gave them was similar to the other responses shared in this study:

“I was like, it's not going to be that big of a deal. It'll be like, we all have the flu, and you know, it'll be fine. I mean, I really had no concept of how a big a deal it was going to be. I was like, oh, don't worry about it. You know? We'll get the flu shot. You know, we have vaccines now, so it would be okay. That's all. I kind of, I didn't think about it much at all actually.”

When Governor Kelly announced that brick-and-mortar schools would be closing for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, Mandy remembered exactly where she was and what she was doing:

“It's one of those, you know, um, ‘where were you when it happened’ type of things. I know that me and my husband and son, because he was a freshman, we were at the gym and I was on like a bike, or I can't remember. Yeah, it was a bike. And my son came up, he was like, um my friend just texted me and said, they're going to still close schools the rest of the year. I was like, no, they're not. They wouldn't do that. We still have like a whole nine weeks left. And then that was like five minutes later that we got the email from our school district. So, it's kind of like, whoa, what's going on? Like I was like, oh, I

guess...I guess it's a bigger deal than I thought it was, you know. And then, um, I just started thinking, I, I had no idea what they were going to expect us to do as in teaching. So certainly, just a lot of unknowns.”

When asked about the initial planning that she did to prepare for Continuous Learning, Mandy stated that, as a 7th grade Math team, they had decided to use Kahn Academy (see Figure 4.4 and 4.5 for lesson plans with links). They had already been using it to supplement the existing curriculum, so they knew that it had the content that was tied to the current units. Additionally, it provided pre-recording lessons taught by a person, so it removed some of the stress from the teachers. When asked about how she thought her lessons and weekly modules would look, Mandy shared,

“I knew that we had, um, one unit left to teach that last nine weeks. So, I knew what standards needed to be covered. Um, but I, we, I had no idea how to use like Zoom at that point. Um, and then our school district just said they were pushing out Zoom on everyone's computers, and we had to figure out how to use it and then we had to figure out how to communicate with parents every week what, what was expected of their students. So, um, I had initially thought that they were going to, you know, if you have math first hour, you log in, you'd have math first hour. Not requiring them to actually be there was kind of, I think the biggest mistake they made, because that just... the kids that don't like to be in school had an option, can't give them an option at that age, or any age really. But planning on that and just trying to figure out how I was going to make, how I was going to reach as many students as I could was difficult.”

Teacher Name: Melanie Koehn and Jenny Stewart	Subject: WDYE Math 7				Week of: Mar. 30 - Apr. 3, 2020
	Monday 3/30	Tuesday 3/31	Wednesday 4/1	Thursday 4/2	Friday 4/3
Title	Continuous Learning Introduction	Statics and Probability Basic Probability	Statics and Probability Basic Probability	Statics and Probability Basic Probability	Statics and Probability Basic Probability
Common Core Standards	(7.RP.2) Recognize and represent proportional relationships between quantities. (7.RP.2a) Determine whether two quantities are in a proportional relationship, e.g. by testing for equivalent ratios in a table or graphing on a coordinate plane and observing whether the graph is a straight line through the origin. (7.RP.3) Use proportional relationships to solve multistep ratio and percent problems. Examples: simple interest, tax, markups and markdowns, gratuities and commissions, fees, percent increase and decrease, percent error. (7.SP.6) Collect data from a chance process (probability experiment). Approximate the probability by observing its long-run relative frequency. Recognize that as the number of trials increase, the experimental probability approaches the theoretical probability. Conversely, predict the approximate relative frequency given the probability. For example, when rolling a number cube 600 times, predict that a 3 or 6 would be rolled roughly 200 times, but probably not exactly 200 times. (7.SP.7a) Develop a uniform probability model by assigning equal probability to all outcomes, and use the model to determine probabilities of events. For example, if a student is selected at random from a class, find the probability that Jane will be selected and the probability that a girl will be selected. (7.SP.7b) Develop a probability model (which may not be uniform) by observing frequencies in data generated from a chance process. For example, find the approximate probability that a spinning penny will land heads up or that a tossed paper cup will land open-end down. Do the outcomes for the spinning penny appear to be equally likely based on the observed frequencies?				

Figure 4.4 Lesson plan standards

		likely based on the observed frequencies?	likely based on the observed frequencies?		Represent sample spaces for compound events using methods such as organized lists, tables and tree diagrams. For an event described in everyday language (e.g. "rolling double sixes"), identify the outcomes in the sample space which compose the event.
Learning Objectives		Randomness, Probability and Simulation	Randomness, Probability and Simulation	Randomness, Probability and Simulation	Randomness, Probability and Simulation
Daily Activity	Attend the Zoom Meeting from 11-12 to get back into the groove of school. Learn more about continuous learning expectations for math class	Begin Section on Basic Probability 1. Introduction to Theoretical Probability Just watch the 8 minute video	Continue Basic Probability 1. Simple Probability: Yellow Marble 2. Simple Probability: Non-Blue Marble	Continue Basic Probability 1. Experimental Probability	Continue Basic Probability 1. Intuitive Sense of Probabilities
Assessment/Evaluation		Do some experiments with coins, dice, or other on your own to try out what you learned	Complete the Practice for Simple Probability: Try to earn 5 of 7	Complete the Practice for Experimental Probability: Try to earn 5 of 7	Complete the Practice for Comparing Probabilities. Try to earn 5 of 7

Figure 4.5 Lesson plan activities and assignments for the week

After a couple of weeks, Mandy had shared with me that they would not be using Kahn Academy anymore. Instead, students would have a Google Slides to access and activities to do

using those. As we discussed the changes that the 7th grade Math team made, I asked Mandy was caused that shift. She shared,

“You know, Khan Academy had the actual lessons, but it was made for almost like a person who wants to learn it, if, if I’m saying that right. Um, but for middle schoolers, they just were like, okay, I just have to get this done because this is a requirement. I don’t really care if I learn it. Um, so yeah, we started creating our own Google slides and trying to find ways to make it more interesting, hoping that it might stick in their minds better. I know that’s why we did that. I also tried to encourage as much as I could to get students to log in. So, and I had a few that did, um, so that they could be live with me, so I could go, at least if they were gonna go through it, I, they could go through it with me slide by slide.”

Mandy felt that students were often confused by the activities unless they logged in to work with her. There were a few students who were just good at Math, so they figured it out, but in general, students struggled without having the interaction with the teacher to really learn the content. Something that stuck with her from this time was, “it kind of just goes to show with, even with an online curriculum like we have now, there still needs to be that teacher there facilitating, making sure they’re getting the concept”. The idea behind designing the Google Slides was to provide students with the ability and resources to apply what they were learning in more of an everyday setting, but Mandy felt that she was not sure if students really learned what they needed to due to a lack of participation.

For her digital artifact, Mandy chose to provide her lesson plans from that time. She felt that this artifact was significant because it contained everything pertaining to her plans that she

made over the course of spring 2020 during emergency remote teaching (See Figures 4.6 and 4.7):

“That has like all like Khan Academy links that I had used... When we shifted to making our... So, like I have like my finding the slope of staircase, um, Google Slides and the Kahoot games I tried to play when they did log in and. It's all still linked. I keep everything, but I think that it's important to, if we had to go back, you know to see, because I know that we're still... I don't know how to say this-- reaping the, uh, repercussions or feeling the repercussions. I don't know. We're still feeling it. Um, the students are still showing signs that they, that those, that nine weeks was, um, have really affected them educationally. So, it's nice to go back to say, this is what, this is how we were trying to get it across. And if it had been required. I feel like if it had been mandatory, I feel like they still would've learned. Um, but I feel like since there was so little participation and it's like the elementary. I know my daughter was in fifth grade at that time, and she was there, on every day, you know, because those parents are still-- but once they got to middle school, high school, the parents like, well, you know, it's not a requirement and I need you to do other things around the house. And um, but I think that if I could show them this is what, it wouldn't have been that much different if, if they had been required for them to be on every day, like, if they're at school every day.”

Teacher Name: Melanie Koehn and	Subject: Moving Straight Ahead Math 7				Week of: Apr. 27 - May 1, 2020
Jenny Stewart					
	Monday 4/27	Tuesday 4/28	Wednesday 4/29	Thursday 4/30	Friday 5/1
Title	Moving Straight Ahead 4.1	Moving Straight Ahead 4.2	Moving Straight Ahead 4.3	Moving Straight Ahead 4.4	
Common Core Standards	(7.RP.2a) Determine whether two quantities are in a proportional relationship, e.g. by testing for equivalent ratios in a table or graphing on a coordinate plane and observing whether the graph is a straight line through the origin. (7.RP.2b) Analyze a table or graph and recognize that, in a proportional relationship, every pair of numbers has the same unit rate (referred to as the "m"). (7.EE.3) Solve multi-step real-life and mathematical problems with rational numbers. Apply properties of operations to calculate with numbers in any form; convert between forms as appropriate; and assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies. For example: If a woman making \$25 an hour gets a 10% raise, she will make an additional $\frac{1}{10}$ of her salary an hour, or \$2.50, for a new salary of \$27.50. (7.EE.4) Use variables to represent quantities in a real-world or mathematical problem, and construct two-step equations and inequalities to solve problems by reasoning about the quantities. (7.EE.4a) Solve word problems leading to equations of the form $px + q = r$, and $p(x + q) = r$ where p , q , and r are specific rational numbers. Solve equations of these forms fluently (<u>efficiently, accurately, and flexibly</u>). Compare an algebraic solution to an arithmetic solution, identifying the <u>sequence</u> of the operations used in each approach. For example, the perimeter of a rectangle is 54 cm. Its length is 6 cm. What is its width?	(7.RP.2a) Determine whether two quantities are in a proportional relationship, e.g. by testing for equivalent ratios in a table or graphing on a coordinate plane and observing whether the graph is a straight line through the origin. (7.RP.2b) Analyze a table or graph and recognize that, in a proportional relationship, every pair of numbers has the same unit rate (referred to as the "m"). (7.EE.3) Solve multi-step real-life and mathematical problems with rational numbers. Apply properties of operations to calculate with numbers in any form; convert between forms as appropriate; and assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies. For example: If a woman making \$25 an hour gets a 10% raise, she will make an additional $\frac{1}{10}$ of her salary an hour, or \$2.50, for a new salary of \$27.50. (7.EE.4) Use variables to represent quantities in a real-world or mathematical problem, and construct two-step equations and inequalities to solve problems by reasoning about the quantities. (7.EE.4a) Solve word problems leading to equations of the form $px + q = r$, and $p(x + q) = r$ where p , q , and r are specific rational numbers. Solve equations of these forms fluently (<u>efficiently, accurately, and flexibly</u>). Compare an algebraic solution to an arithmetic solution, identifying the <u>sequence</u> of the operations used in each approach. For example, the perimeter of a rectangle is 54 cm. Its length is 6 cm. What is its width?	(7.RP.2a) Determine whether two quantities are in a proportional relationship, e.g. by testing for equivalent ratios in a table or graphing on a coordinate plane and observing whether the graph is a straight line through the origin. (7.RP.2b) Analyze a table or graph and recognize that, in a proportional relationship, every pair of numbers has the same unit rate (referred to as the "m"). (7.EE.3) Solve multi-step real-life and mathematical problems with rational numbers. Apply properties of operations to calculate with numbers in any form; convert between forms as appropriate; and assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies. For example: If a woman making \$25 an hour gets a 10% raise, she will make an additional $\frac{1}{10}$ of her salary an hour, or \$2.50, for a new salary of \$27.50. (7.EE.4) Use variables to represent quantities in a real-world or mathematical problem, and construct two-step equations and inequalities to solve problems by reasoning about the quantities. (7.EE.4a) Solve word problems leading to equations of the form $px + q = r$, and $p(x + q) = r$ where p , q , and r are specific rational numbers. Solve equations of these forms fluently (<u>efficiently, accurately, and flexibly</u>). Compare an algebraic solution to an arithmetic solution, identifying the <u>sequence</u> of the operations used in each approach. For example, the perimeter of a rectangle is 54 cm. Its length is 6 cm. What is its width?	(7.RP.2a) Determine whether two quantities are in a proportional relationship, e.g. by testing for equivalent ratios in a table or graphing on a coordinate plane and observing whether the graph is a straight line through the origin. (7.RP.2b) Analyze a table or graph and recognize that, in a proportional relationship, every pair of numbers has the same unit rate (referred to as the "m"). (7.EE.3) Solve multi-step real-life and mathematical problems with rational numbers. Apply properties of operations to calculate with numbers in any form; convert between forms as appropriate; and assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies. For example: If a woman making \$25 an hour gets a 10% raise, she will make an additional $\frac{1}{10}$ of her salary an hour, or \$2.50, for a new salary of \$27.50. (7.EE.4) Use variables to represent quantities in a real-world or mathematical problem, and construct two-step equations and inequalities to solve problems by reasoning about the quantities. (7.EE.4a) Solve word problems leading to equations of the form $px + q = r$, and $p(x + q) = r$ where p , q , and r are specific rational numbers. Solve equations of these forms fluently (<u>efficiently, accurately, and flexibly</u>). Compare an algebraic solution to an arithmetic solution, identifying the <u>sequence</u> of the operations used in each approach. For example, the perimeter of a rectangle is 54 cm. Its length is 6 cm. What is its width?	(7.RP.2a) Determine whether two quantities are in a proportional relationship, e.g. by testing for equivalent ratios in a table or graphing on a coordinate plane and observing whether the graph is a straight line through the origin. (7.RP.2b) Analyze a table or graph and recognize that, in a proportional relationship, every pair of numbers has the same unit rate (referred to as the "m"). (7.EE.3) Solve multi-step real-life and mathematical problems with rational numbers. Apply properties of operations to calculate with numbers in any form; convert between forms as appropriate; and assess the reasonableness of answers using mental computation and estimation strategies. For example: If a woman making \$25 an hour gets a 10% raise, she will make an additional $\frac{1}{10}$ of her salary an hour, or \$2.50, for a new salary of \$27.50. (7.EE.4) Use variables to represent quantities in a real-world or mathematical problem, and construct two-step equations and inequalities to solve problems by reasoning about the quantities. (7.EE.4a) Solve word problems leading to equations of the form $px + q = r$, and $p(x + q) = r$ where p , q , and r are specific rational numbers. Solve equations of these forms fluently (<u>efficiently, accurately, and flexibly</u>). Compare an algebraic solution to an arithmetic solution, identifying the <u>sequence</u> of the operations used in each approach. For example, the perimeter of a rectangle is 54 cm. Its length is 6 cm. What is its width?
Learning Objectives	I understand Rise over Run	I can find slope	I can explore patterns in lines	I can write equations for linear relationships	I can write equations for linear relationships

Figure 4.6 Shifted weekly lesson plans with standards and objectives

Daily Activity	1. Watch the video Stairway Slope on PBS Learning Media 2. Determine the steepness of a set of stairs in your house. (This will all be incorporated into the Google Slides Assignment)	Kahoot Assignment finding slope and y-intercept	Complete the Google Slide on exploring patterns in lines	Khan Academy Watch the video "Slope-intercept equation from graph"	Complete the Google Form on describing equations
Assessment/Evaluation	Stairway Slope Assignment Assign on Google Classroom (make copy for each student)	Slope and y-intercept kahoot challenge Choose Assign on google classroom through Kahoot instead of Teach. End of the week deadline to play	Exploring Patterns in Lines Assign on Google Classroom (make copy for each student)	Complete the Practice Problems for Slope-intercept equation from graph. Try to earn 3 of 4 Video and Practice Problems to Assign	Describing equations google form

Figure 4.7 Shifted weekly lesson plan with activities, links, and directions

Looking back on this artifact helped to remind Mandy of the necessity of in-person learning and interacting with the teacher. She stated,

“I know personally myself, online classes are okay. I mean, I do okay at them, but I mean, even I struggle sometimes. So, um, I think it's important, um, to keep everything,

all that knowledge around, just makes you a better teacher to understand that. Everything we-- everything's a learning experience, I guess. I mean, the remote learning-- it made everyone, I think, realize how much they wanted to be around... Like they learned something about yourself. Um, how I was able to keep myself going and what I did. But, um, how a lot of the, every time I would get students to log in, they didn't want to log off when they did log in, because they don't get to see, you know, most of them were home alone all day. I just can't imagine when this happened, not having a family, like if I was just by myself. So I was just thankful for that. To be by yourself and not be able to see anyone. So I know how, I'm sure that's, um, why it has affected a lot of this, a lot more mental breakdowns and like a lot of more people need counseling now. And just because it's, it's, it has left that much of a mark on people. Me and my husband and kids, we tried to make sure we were, uh, we went outside every day and since the weather was, it was a time of year where the weather was nice. Thank goodness the weather was good. Uh, we would take bike rides or run or take walks and, um, try to stay physically active to kind of help balance out the not being able to be around people. Because I'm a social person.

Um, and when I would log in with the kids, I would try to have music playing and um, just things to keep the mood positive as much as possible. You know, encourage them to go outside. I encouraged the students that did log in, you know, take your iPad outside and we can, you know, that's the benefit is you don't, you're not stuck in a room. You can go outside, and we can still have class and, um, because if you don't have everything, you're used to having to keep you mentally going, you have to substitute in. And mostly ours was being outside. And if we could, you know, see a neighbor from across the yard, just making sure you're saying hi and communicating.”

My Experiences: “Sometimes, I think that those two hours every day were the only thing that kept me sane”

Before the state of Kansas closed brick-and-mortar schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year in March 2020, I truly had no concept of what COVID was or the potential impact it could have on me as an individual or our society as a whole. During our second interview, I told Alan,

“I reflect back on that time, and that was like, it just seemed so far removed from us. It was like, ooh, that’s no good. That’s no good. Yeah. It kind of just made me think about growing up, you know, thinking about like swine flu and stuff or mad cow disease, like the media hyped it up to be this huge problem, and then it didn’t really impact me. And so it seemed very much like not anything to worry about. Just like, oh man. Yeah, that, that seems rough for people on the other side of the world. But I think, like, it’s this idea of, oh, here’s what we could do, but it’s also this idea of like, but that’s never, we’re never going to have to do that.”

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, hearing Governor Kelly’s announcement that schools would be closing for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year was jarring to say the least. I remember shaking and not knowing what to think. I posted on Facebook a lot on March 17th and in the following days; at the time, it felt like one of the only things that could help me feel better. When I reflect back on those posts, they were a combination of many things: an attempt to spread some hope, an effort to sort through my feelings, but what I see most when I look back at my Facebook timeline during that time is a call for connection. I wanted other people to know that I was there for them, and I wanted to know that other people were experiencing the same feelings that I was; many of the comments on those posts are from my colleagues at the time

affirming exactly that. For me, that time was confusing at best, but while we were forced to be physically apart, I found myself feeling more connected to my colleagues and people around the world as we all weathered COVID and the ensuing struggles together.

Following the closure of schools, our district had a meeting with all teachers, and we were informed that the state would be shifting to what they termed Continuous Learning, which meant that districts had the power to determine how that looked for students. Our district emphasized “giving students grace” and being ready to “pivot,” as I mentioned earlier. We were given approximately two weeks by our district to come up with a plan for the remainder of the school year, which resulted in almost daily Zooms with various teams across our building to see what teachers were going to do for each class. I also met with my paraeducator team regularly as I got more information to share what I knew and to develop a plan for us going forward.

Because I taught a self-contained math and reading class as well as multiple Study Skills classes, we determined that the best thing to do would be to set a two-hour block of time where we would all be on Zoom and students could join. Based on the which kids joined and what help they were needing each day, we split into breakout rooms so that students could get help in smaller groups from adults. I wrote and put weekly lesson plans on my Google Classroom for my self-contained classes, but I found that the work for those classes frequently was a lower priority than the core classes that students worked on. I quickly found that I could not get the three students there at the same time to provide explicit reading or math instruction, so if I could get any of them to show up at any given time, I shifted to try to integrate some of those standards into the tasks they were completing for other classes. While I struggled with whether or not this was best practice, the one consolation that I had was that at least some of the kids were showing

up (even if it was sporadic), and I was able to touch base with them about school and life outside of it.

When looking at the academic tasks that my students were engaging with, I noticed that they looked different from the way the content had been provided in the classroom. Although I was not in every classroom, I did get to see and help them with their assignments in Study Skills. One thing that I noticed in many assignments when we attended school in person was that they tended to be created with the general education students, and my team and I were told that we could modify or accommodate it however we needed to for our students; while this was not perfect, we made it work and did what we needed to do for our students while hoping that we were keeping with what the intention of the assignment was standards-wise.

With the shift to Continuous Learning, however, the way that assignments were provided was different. Our local internet company had provided hotspots for all households and students had their 1:1 device at home with them; these had been handed out before any work had been assigned. Theoretically, the playing field was as equitable as it could be, and all students had equal access to the necessary resources to perform the expected tasks. That being said, I noticed my colleagues asking questions of themselves and the tasks that they were providing. Much like the comment Kari made about David not being able to read, my colleagues were considering accessibility of far more than the concrete items that students needed. For Kari, this meant providing the information needed for the assignments in both a video and written format to all students; they were able to choose how to access the information, but they were all given equitable access and the choice of which to use. Teachers were not only thinking about my students but about the needs of all students and whether they would be able to access not only the information provided but the resources to successfully complete the task. They provided ways to

alternatively access the information as well as reading it. Students were given the opportunity to display their knowledge creatively. Teachers changed how they were doing things as they went when they noticed that the students were not understanding, especially those on the lower end. What I found as we navigated that time was that tasks were designed with all students and their needs in mind. My job no longer was to modify the assignments being given but to support my students as they worked through it. I am not sure whether this shift came about as a result of cancelling state assessments for that year or because we were trying to give students something that they were able to do on their own, if necessary, but it was an exciting shift to see. I was able to watch my students' eyes light up as they told me about their ideas to do an assignment and to serve them as a facilitator of learning rather than someone dragging them through it so that they would not fail. When their needs as well as the needs all the other students were factored into the design of tasks, they were able to successfully show what they knew without me having to question whether I had guided or prompted them too much. While I am not sure exactly what prompted this shift, it has stuck with me since then, and I have yet to see it replicated in another setting.

One thing that I tried to do as a case manager during that time was be able to check in with students at least once a week. As a special education teacher, I was required to document my interactions with students to show that I was providing services to the best of my ability; this was not my main motivation for checking in. At first, my goal was to help hold my students accountable for their academic work; even though their grades could not drop for not doing the work, I knew that this was an opportunity to help raise their grades if they needed it. Most of my students would check in at least once a week, but I had a few that I did not hear from after that first week, despite my many emails and phone calls to both them and their parents. Every day, all

three of my paras and I would wait in our Zoom meeting for kids to show up; only once did we not have any students join. That was a really hard day. At first, most of our students would show up with work to do and get it done within thirty minutes, then they would leave the Zoom. As time went on, they began staying longer. I cannot begin to count how many pet show-and-tell sessions we had. One time, one of our students made us watch his favorite video about his favorite disease (Ebola) and tell us all about why it was his favorite disease. Even though I still worked to hold students accountable academically, I quickly realized that the Zoom sessions we had were our one opportunity for connection in an otherwise disconnected day, and we worked hard to make the most out of every interaction we had with every student. Sometimes, I think that those two hours every day were the only thing that kept me sane.

Themes Identified

The themes identified through analysis of the data provided from the second interview were connection (or lack thereof), doubt, and meaningful for kids. Throughout the course of this section, I elaborate upon how each of these themes was identified and how the experiences of each participant helped to inform the development of the theme.

Connection (Or Lack Thereof)

A common concern noted with each of the participants was students not participating with the activities provided but more so not with the Zooms. One of Alan's concerns was what students were dealing with at home and the isolation that they were experiencing. He recalled thinking, "I could picture kids not knowing what their situations were going to be like. And it really started to bother me that that was going to be their reality." His priority in his Zooms became providing a space for students to join to connect with him, their peers, and guest speakers. Mandy talked about how students would be hesitant to join Zooms, but once they did,

they did not want to log off. An observation that she made was that “most of them were home alone all day. I just can't imagine when this happened, not having a family, like if I was just by myself.” My daily Zooms often became a place where students would come to talk about what they had been doing and to share their daily life. That did not change the fact that the percentage of our classes that we were seeing on our Zooms were low, far below 50% of our class rosters. This was really disappointing, because as adults, we knew how hard things were for us, so we knew that our kids had to be needing that connection but refused to take advantage of when it was being offered.

Many of my participants talked about seeking connection in other spaces outside of the online environment. Alan and Mandy talked about how they would spend time with their families. They often referred back to having that support system helped them to cope with the situation a little bit. The participants also noting seeking outside connections both with colleagues and through resources such as social media. This allowed us to collaborate with other educators going through the same things that we were and to try and feel a little less alone.

Doubt

Doubt about themselves and what they were doing in their instructional decisions was a common theme amongst the participants interviewed. Melody made the statement, “My biggest thing the whole time is that I just felt like I was failing the kids, and that they weren't learning anything, and that I wasn't really there for them.” This was a common sentiment among all participants. Although each provided multiple Zoom opportunities and wanted to connect with kids, they felt like what they were doing was not enough because it was not reaching all of their students. Mandy noted that even though she had some students who were able to do the work, she was not sure if they actually learned what she had intended them to learn. Alan shared that he

often found himself questioning what he was doing and whether it was the right thing or enough: “That was hard because as the weeks progressed, it got less and less. And I, you know, you almost felt like the kids had quit. And so like, you know, I’m trying, but what am I doing? Is it really doing any good?” Although there might not be an answer for what was the right thing to do, the participants were still unsure of what they did do made an impact for better or worse.

Meaningful for Kids

Across all participants, the emphasis in designing instruction was to meet students where they were. Each participant noted that their decisions were heavily influenced by trying to consider the needs of all students when designing tasks. They wanted students to be able to engage without having access to all of the resources that they have at school and still be successful. When students or adults would reach out to them with feedback that something was meaningful for a student, they each felt more fulfilled about the instructional decisions that they had made. The participants found meaning in what students found meaningful, especially in a time where there was not a blueprint for how to craft meaningful educational experiences.

“Post”- COVID: Educating in the Aftermath

The final interview in the three-interview series emphasized a more reflective approach for participants. Questions prompted participants to consider their decisions during emergency remote teaching and to view them from the perspective of their current practice. In doing so, several themes emerged to highlight the commonalities and differences in the participants’ experiences. Throughout the course of the final interview, I was able to see the impact of their experiences on participants’ current practice and how those experiences informed the instructional decisions that they make in their current practice.

Alan: “It helped me immensely not feel like I have to do and try every single thing”

In reflecting upon emergency remote teaching, Alan shared that most of his frustrations came from a place of wanting to do what was best for students but not having the explicit guidance to know what that was supposed to look like:

“Probably my biggest frustration was, and this was nobody's fault, it was just that we really had very little guidance as to how to really provide instruction. Other than that, we were supposed to give kids as much grace as possible, and beyond that, it was just kind of a free for all at times. And so, uh, yeah, I didn't honestly know if I was doing anything that was actually what I was supposed to be doing. But, and again, it was because I think from the top down, they just kept saying, just do your very best. So, if that's considered a frustration, that would probably be it. We didn't have a lot of guidance as to how to approach it really, so it became a lot of just everyone do what you could or free for all, and fend for yourself. And so it kind of just felt like you were on an island most of the time, which literally and figuratively, it just felt like you were on an island. It wasn't cohesive. It wasn't anything in the administration side because they didn't, I mean, there was literally, nobody knew how to go about doing this, so when questions were asked, no one had an answer because no one had ever experienced something like this before. And that's all that became the answer for almost everything.”

In talking about successes that occurred during this particularly trying time, Alan shared that his biggest success came not from his instructional decisions or teaching, but in the form of providing both a sense of normalcy and closure to a school year that was anything but normal:

“I was part of our eighth grade team, and every year our eighth graders do have a promotion, which is like their graduation. And of course, that was going to be taken, that

was canceled and all. And so, uh, for whatever reason, I just decided, because I couldn't figure out anything else to do, I decided to kind of put together a promotion, a virtual promotion. I ended up like recording it, I did a speech, I asked-- like we had, I came up with as much as I could with it as possible to give them a promotion ceremony. And I recorded it, and I challenged kids to like dress up in your promotion stuff and sit down with your family and watch it and do that. And I had a lot of people, and it wasn't an, you know, I wasn't looking, you know, for the acknowledgement of it. But I had a lot of parents talk to me and reach out and thank me for that just because it gave them something. I had kids who took pictures of themselves in their promotion dresses or in the promotion attire, and they were sitting on their deck and they were watching it with their family. And so, I guess that was probably the best success story out of it. And, you know, it was nothing more than just giving them something that was a little bit of a resemblance of normalcy even though it wasn't normal, because it was done virtually. And, um, I feel like that was probably my greatest contribution and joy out of that entire eight and a half, nine weeks, was to have that experience, to do that with the kids and have a lot of them thank me. And again, I wasn't looking for that and so I hate to say it that way, but just to have that connection and kids feeling like, you know, that that moment that was important to them was validated and honored, so in reality, they could close that chapter, and there was some closure for that for them. Even if it was not the normal way, it was something.”

Alan shared that if there was one thing that he wished he could change about his experiences with emergency remote teaching, it would be to encourage students to connect more and to capitalize even more on the social emotional component, even going as far as making

check-in opportunities more of a daily thing. In addition to promoting social emotional well-being for students, Alan shared that he would also tell teachers to just do their best:

“I would probably tell myself, do as much as you can to try to encourage kids to connect, even just to check and to say hello. Make it as much about relationship time as possible, whether it was to send, hey, You know, and I tried to do that some, but making it more of a daily consistent thing of like, even if you're checking in for five minutes and trying to work on that piece of it, because I don't think I realized, I don't think anybody realized, just kind of the amount of psychological toll that was going to have on kids, especially those who were living in places that was completely not connected to the community. If they were living in a, on a farm that was 20 miles from town that felt like they were a thousand miles from anyone if they weren't around people. Uh, just trying to do that as much as possible and just acknowledge that whatever you could do was the best you could. I think trying to not put so much pressure, and I would tell that to any teachers, like, if we ever face this again, it will be better. But you know, when you're faced with a challenge that you don't really know what to expect and it was thrown in your lap in a week's time or two weeks' time, just do your best to build the relationship piece as much as you can and go from there. And because that part of the learning ended up being probably what we'll look back and say, that was the most important part is if we could just have kids connected to other people as much as we could. On the educational side, you know, the content and the teaching pedagogy. I, there was no way to predict how it was going to work. And then also when you're talking about something like this, it requires the person on the other hand to be committed to doing that. So, you could have come up with the most amazing design lessons and all it takes is one person saying, man,

I'm not really feeling it today. And you're, you know, if a bunch of kids, especially middle school kids-- If they're like, Hey, I don't have to be in this, I'm not going to. That is, that doesn't, that shouldn't be a judgment or an evaluation on your ability to create something remotely or virtually in an immersive situation. But I think a lot of people probably felt that. Um, certainly I just don't think there's a-- there is no perfect way. It requires people to have self-discipline, to plug in and do it. No matter what it was. If it was the most amazing lessons in the world, or if it was garbage, it didn't matter. It's just, it still comes down to the person. And that, that's where you kind of saw some kids, it didn't matter what it was, it didn't matter. They were going to do it. They got on every day. They were religious about it, and others, they, we didn't see-- they literally left and we didn't see them for the rest of the semester. They just kind of disappeared off the face of the earth. I knew there was nothing that was going to change that. I really, I honestly don't believe that there was anything that would've changed that.”

Alan’s time during emergency remote teaching had an impact on his practice and has caused him to continue placing an emphasis on relationships and interactions within the classroom. Pertaining to the time following March 2020, he shared that, “I didn't realize that how much eight weeks could do to relationship building and the ability to just connect with kids or, and kids connecting with each other.” Because of this, Alan regularly uses cooperative learning strategies and provides opportunities for students to interact with him and each other during their learning.

Another area where Alan’s professional practice as a result of emergency remote teaching has shifted has been in his approach to his content and what he presents to students. Even before COVID, Alan had experienced a shift in how he viewed 8th grade Social Studies, but after

emergency remote teaching, this mindset became even more central to his planning for instruction:

“It really also made me think about what was important when I looked at my content. For the, you know, the thought of, especially that year after, I always kept saying, okay, if this happens again, what would be-- And we don't have the whole, okay, well, we don't know if this is coming, right, so we're going to give you a whole bunch of grace. Now you really still have to do, what would I do with that? You know, what would I take from what I learned, which was the digital idea, lesson plan design using slide decks using, but now what content would I say is absolutely essential? It really made me think, what do kids have to know if they were to be forced online for a semester? But they still have to demonstrate because the board says, what would I tell them? Or what would I say? These are the things that we are going to have to make sure that you can demonstrate before we were done. Even in a virtual setting, because I did, I had, I had kids who were virtual. So the first, the first almost nine weeks back, I had some kids who were remote and some kids who were face-to-face. So that was a whole new challenge, is trying to blend classrooms and how do I get those face-to-face? Or how do I get those remote kids to feel connected to a classroom when they're sitting like this and the rest of their classmates are in there, and how do I ensure that they can demonstrate those essential concepts or themes or questions that are required of them in that setting where they can't be right here face to face with me? So, there was a lot of, you know, me stopping and considering what was important, um, how could they demonstrate it, you know? So, then it became a little bit of what are various ways that people can be assessed. Does it have to always look the

same way? So that opened up a little bit more things like choice boards, you know, different alternative forms of assessments. So that's kind of been what I've taken from it.”

In summarizing any additions or things taken away from his practice as a direct result of emergency remote teaching, Alan shared that he felt he had really pared down his curriculum and standards to re-emphasize a focus on skills; the structure of the state standards lent themselves well to this. One of his core beliefs was that asking kids to memorize historical facts is not best practice, so centralize skills-based tasks made sense in relation to his subject even as he transitioned from a middle school to a high school classroom. With this in mind, Alan felt that he had become “more selective shopper versus I'm just going to grab everything” in relation to the latest and greatest cool things that are constantly being put out. Before buying something, he asks himself whether that thing does something to help with what he is already doing. It has helped him to shift his mindset in that it “helped me immensely not feel like I have to do and try every single thing.” Both he and his department place less of an emphasis on what students know and focus more on what they can demonstrate with a skill. This mindset shift has also contributed to a shift in how his department structured its classes, allowing for more freedom of choice and personal preference for students:

“I mean, we're talking in my department right now, we're talking about completely revamping our social studies curriculum within the framework of the high school graduation requirements to do it in semester half credits. We have, they have to have three right now, but offering like in a semester half credit of an intensive topic instead of saying, we're going to cover all of this time period for an entire year, doing more focused student-centered topics, you know, whether it would be pop culture in history or the, um, like we have a class right now, the history of rock and roll. It's pushing us to continue to

think about. Maybe not the whole idea of virtual, but what we can do with kids in terms of how we ask them to show demonstrated understanding of history, so, or the history standards. I mean, I look at some of my other colleagues in other disciplines and they feel overwhelmed because they still have all of these standards and all these indicators. All the stuff, and we have just pared down so much, and I feel so much more freedom and I'm supported at the top with that.”

Melody: “I firmly believe that pre-COVID was the best teacher me”

As we spoke about reflecting on her instructional decisions during emergency remote teaching, Melody shared that her frustrations surrounding that time related to things outside of her control more than her own decisions:

“I wasn't frustrated with my choices necessarily. I was frustrated with the fact that we couldn't require work, and that we had to make it more simple. Like you can't, I didn't like the fact that we had to make it so, for lack of better words, easy that any student could figure it out, because we can't be there in person to help them. I didn't like that. I didn't like the fact that we had to plan for like six weeks within one week, because that's ridiculous. Like it's important to plan ahead, but you're never going to be- I never planned that far in advance as a teacher, because you always want to, to pivot, for lack of a much better word, but you're going to need to make adjustments based on student progress and needs. So, to plan that far in advance to me seems unnecessary and like a waste of time. And then we just had to stick to it.”

Melody’s successes revolved more around the decisions she made in creating tasks and information that was accessible for our students:

“I like that I made choices to not just create like my weekly plan for students, but to record a video explaining my weekly plans to my students. So, they weren't just trying to guess at what each individual bullet point or objective meant. And I also had a quote and a rad dad joke of the week every week trying to keep it light. So, I felt like I could have just done the bare minimum and I tried to at least make it as personal as possible for something that's like deeply impersonal. And I think that some students who didn't even do the homework or like the assignments would watch those videos and they'd watch my chapter reads of *The Graveyard Book*.”

Although she noted some success with the instructional decisions that she made, Melody noted that there were some things that she would change if she had to experience emergency remote teaching again. As was mentioned earlier by various participants, not many students were participating and that impacted how teachers felt as they tried to navigate that time:

“I do think that, to be totally honest, I chose the lazy route sometimes because of being frustrated at what was going on, experiencing the trauma of what was going on, and just generally not having the structures in place at home that I would normally have at work. So like I had office hours in my schedule, but they were not mandatory and students were required to email me and let me know that they would like to attend, basically like sign up. Because I didn't want to sit on Zoom and wait for students when only about 10% of my students were doing the work in the first place. And so, I would just use that time to do literally whatever I wanted or look up how to pronounce words in this middle school level book. I think looking back, I would have like to maybe we, we couldn't really require anything but like, maybe phrase it in a way that made it seem like students should. Not to make them feel bad or like forced into it, but so that I could get some time

with them. Like I know a lot of teachers did several zooms and they would just get to interact with the students. The only time during that emergency teaching span of time that I actually saw students on Zoom was one time I popped into one of yours, and two of your students were in there. That was it. I hadn't seen and interacted with any of my students that whole time, because no one attended office hours. That sucked, and I missed them.”

In the time following emergency remote teaching, Melody taught 6th and 7th grade English Language Arts for one more year. After that, she shifted into the position of Library Media Specialist at two different elementary schools. When reflecting on the school year immediately following emergency remote teaching, Melody spoke of that time with frustration:

“I feel like that first, let's say semester, but even year back was so terrifying, and we had all of these restrictions in place from the very beginning that completely went against all of the research and pedagogy that we had been taught as training professionals. So, you couldn't do, for instance, a Kagan structure in your classroom because that involves a lot of like face-to-face, really close up moving around. Germs are spread. And so, I was usually a very, I don't know, I feel like I was a pretty interactive teacher before COVID, and then it kind of like sucked all the joy out of teaching for me, because all the fun parts you couldn't do. And like we had to have all of the students facing the same direction. So legitimately your only option to follow the rules was to have like your basic 1930s all facing like conveyor belt row students. And that sucked. Like there wasn't a lot of room for collaboration until you kind of like survived a few months and then started to experiment and chose willingly to break the rules, which a lot teachers were doing so they could like their jobs again. And I feel like it just made teaching feel different to me.

That was my last year in the English classroom, that first full year back. And so even by the time we got to the second semester and things started to change, my teaching style was still kind of like in that panic-like trauma response. So, I never went back to how I was, and I don't think that that was the best version of my teaching self. Like I firmly believe that pre-COVID was the best teacher me.

But, um, once I got into a library setting, I started to do a lot more of the like, interactive things. And I tried to make it more creative and engaging. But then the whole change of being a secondary teacher, now an elementary librarian was a jarring playing field. It was weird and hard, and I do miss being a secondary English teacher, pre-COVID. Honestly, like after all of that, changing careers, going through a pandemic, I miss what pre-COVID teaching was.”

With her shift from the classroom to working in a library, Melody shared that she had a couple new additions to her practice that were added as a direct result of her experiences during emergency remote teaching. One addition was the increased awareness and intentionality with sanitizing and considering the impact of germs on her profession. Both she and her library clerk made sure to sanitize books as they came in and worked to find ways to help decrease the sharing of illness within their setting. Melody stated that she also noted an increase in her usage of technology when teaching: “It allowed us to teach things a little bit differently with more technology than before. Like I did a lot of technology stuff afterwards, more than before, I would say.”

As we discussed things that were added or taken away from her professional practice due to lessons learned during emergency remote teaching, Melody initially joked, “Yeah, it took

away the joy of the profession.” While we laughed at the quip, she was able to further explain what she meant by that:

“Honestly, my perception of that is I feel like pretty unique and skewed because that year we had a new curriculum instruction director, and he wanted us to buy a canned curriculum. And I think that I found, personally, that COVID became an excuse for a lot of administrators to force teachers out of their autonomy. And to force a pre-made, maybe not the best curriculum on the students, because suddenly there was an even stronger urge to perform and be better and show that you’re learning skills. And I saw that even like leaving the English classroom and going to a library setting like my other district really likes pre-made curriculums for elementary. Like genuinely they do. And one of the biggest complaints that teachers have is that it's boring. It's boring and it's like this: like before I went through Covid teaching and changing things, I would've made an activity fun. I would have used probably like an investigative engaging, getting up around the room activity, probably like a murder mystery to teach about finding evidence to support a claim.

It felt very much like after COVID we were being forced to do something like this: Here is a text, here is a worksheet of questions. Answer, evidence. Answer, evidence, and that is so dull. And so, I think like the shift in how we teach even changed a lot and even what we are teaching because the standards were still the same, but like the way that you got there was completely different. And I think that we're doing our students a disservice. I think that we're pushing too hard and we're using computers as like an excuse because these programs are so great to not actually teach anymore. So, I feel like that was something that, um, maybe was added to my teaching is the use of

canned curriculums because admin was so afraid of scores dropping drastically. Even I think a lot of the created curriculums aren't equitable and there are errors in them. And often I wonder if even content experts are the ones creating that, like I genuinely don't believe that they are. And it can become extremely daunting. And if it is frustrating for a grown adult, a child is not going to enjoy that experience either. Like if we are trying desperately to understand this massive amount of information in a lesson plan, then students are not getting that much out of it. But it's going to seem like they are because all of our, I hate the word like "thermometers," but they use that a lot with like the testing. All of our um, progress monitoring and whatever is tied directly to the curriculum. Well, yeah, no shit, they're going to succeed at that. It's using the same vocabulary."

Our conversation turned to the impact of emergency remote teaching on teachers' mental health and how it impacted Melody personally. Transitioning back to teaching after the events of spring 2020 was traumatic and difficult. She shared,

"I developed severe depression. Honest to God, I feel like it divided us even further as a group. I do not feel like I could rely on my coworkers. And you know this because you were there. I genuinely believe that it brought the worst out of a lot of people professionally. And so rather than leaning on each other as a support system, we were divided and growing apart and at each other's throats. And so, there was no way to cope at work. At work was a traumatic experience every day. I didn't have, I would say probably more than a handful of joyous days at work during that first year back. And so, the only possible way to get through it, and I would, and even continuing on past that year, in the past two years of being and teaching--year and a half, if you're me and you quit-- has been-- like outside life has to be what is holding you up. Like you have to have

a support system outside of the, that brick and mortar setting because that connection and support and bonding or whatever you want to say to describe it, is not there anymore. It's just not. I haven't experienced that since.”

Mandy: “Even if difficult decisions have to be made, you can still learn and move on, move forward.”

Much like Melody, Mandy’s frustrations stemmed from the things occurring during emergency remote teaching that were outside of her control. When the district chose not to make attendance and participation mandatory during that time, many teachers found themselves faced with issues that were resultant because of that. Mandy’s experience was reflective of that:

“I think the biggest frustration was not being able to control the students manda-- I don't know the word. Mandatory. It wasn't mandatory for them at the time. So, it was out of my control. Like, you know, in the classroom you have your classroom and everything that you can control what's in your classroom and what happens and um, I had no control of that aspect. I couldn't make the kids show up. Um, so motivating them to show, for themselves and because they needed it, it was really hard in middle school. Like they just don't think they need it, especially in middle school. I think, because they're not quite to high school where they know this stuff is going to impact me, but they don't have parents on them like elementary. So, it's kind of the ones that showed up were the ones that I feel like have already matured enough to know that it is important, or they just respected me enough to-- I want to be there because she asked me to be there. There's still those out there. So, I think that was a big frustration is the, that they said it wasn't mandatory. So, then I kind of lost control of that aspect.”

Mandy found success during this time in seeing students being able to not only complete tasks in the home environment but seeing that they were able to see how the concepts applied outside of a classroom setting. She shared that she felt it was also a way to show students that “even if difficult decisions have to be made, you can still learn and move on, move forward.” Upon reflecting upon what changes she would have made, Mandy said that she would have “tried to find one that is online but needs a teacher more.” She reiterated that Khan Academy was useful in that there were useful videos and information to help teach concepts, but she would rather use something that made it necessary for students to check in with the teacher.

Zoom was new for Mandy during emergency remote teaching and a bit of a learning curve; however, she noted that Zoom has opened up a world of opportunities for her and her students:

“I mean, I do think that Zoom, I mean, I still use it of course right now and have a student who, um, is going to be gone for two weeks because her mom, I think, is a traveling nurse and has to take her with her. So, we're going to set up a Zoom so she can still be part of the class. That's not something that we would've ever thought of doing before. I also know that I guess when I-- when my students need help outside of class now, it's easier for me to help them if they aren't able to stay after school. We can figure out ways for me to help.”

Mandy noted that while she has shifted her instruction to place more responsibility onto the students to encourage some independence, emergency remote teaching reinforced some of the things that she was doing before and has really helped her to see the importance of accommodations, manipulatives, and providing opportunities for hands-on learning. She stated, “That's the only one of the downfalls of remote. Just, you know, if they go remote, they don't

have the manipulatives at home that they need. I just have to figure out what else could be substituted.” Mandy noted that not only do they use manipulatives regularly in her class, she specifically has a table dedicated specifically for that reason. Students are able to use the manipulatives as needed and know how to access them:

“I just know, as a result of it, I do make sure that I have, uh, like a table in my room of manipulatives for the kids to use. Because I know that if it's in the classroom all the time, they can use it on testing. Um, and just remembering that when they were at home, you know, they didn't have everything that they needed to learn the best that they could, and maybe that affected some of them. Um, and how many students I have that are hands-on visual learners. I definitely do a lot more different types of teaching. Not different type, I guess. I mean, not just teaching, okay, this is the equation. Like I was taught, this is your equation. This is how you do it, so when I teach like the equation and I see that kids don't get it, then I have to figure out how else could I teach it? Because these kids aren't getting, they don't know to use just the equation. And how do you kind of apply it?”

Along with the addition of using Zoom to connect with students when needed, Mandy noted that she and some of her current colleagues have really found benefit in recording themselves teaching the lesson when they have a substitute:

“I know me along with some other teachers, like when we have to have a substitute, um, just to be able to record ourselves teaching a lesson within our Desmos curriculum, so that the kids, the substitute doesn't have to know math, because I know that's always been a big pain because, you know, you can get a substitute for electives and, you know, watch a movie. But like, we can't skip math lessons usually to get through the curriculum. So

that's been a benefit, is now we can now record and know that they're going to get some instruction from us.”

Mandy noted that she has observed the impact of emergency remote teaching on students three years later and not necessarily in a positive way. While this was a unique situation for society to go through, it is not the only trial that people have gone through, and it will not be the last; students have to develop some resilience and perseverance to push through:

“There's always benefits to everything that you have to go through, but it's hard for a middle schooler to understand that. To them it was just, um, some of them are still using it as a crutch, as in, well, we were not here when we learned that in sixth grade. So, we don't remember, we don't know. Just the reason they've always said, oh, well that teacher didn't teach us that. It's not our fault. We don't know it. So, a lot of them are still using that, because what the eighth graders we have now were in fifth grade, so, you know, they are just, some of them are still using it as a reason why. Well, I, this is why I'm behind. I try to tell them, you know, you can't keep falling back on that. You're going to have to take responsibility for your learning sooner or later. So, I think a little bit of some of the learned helplessness has gotten worse than it was before. Because they're just like, oh, I don't, I didn't learn it, so I don't, you can't blame me. It's kind of frustrating. Like, everyone has to, there's stuff in every generation that people go through that have to have to overcome.”

My Experiences: “We are still dealing with the implications of COVID on students and adults alike”

When I reflect back on the time of emergency remote teaching, it is with a bit of caution. As I said in Chapter 1, there was the initial excitement of not having to “go” to school anymore,

but that quickly wore off and was replaced by a lot of anxiety, concern, and fear. One of my biggest frustrations was that I was not able to meet the needs of all of my students because they would not get on the Zooms. While I know that that was not something that I could necessarily control, it made me feel like I was failing those students. I am aware that the responsibility for that is not solely on my shoulders, but there are days where even now I am left wondering whether I could have done more.

While being an educator during emergency remote teaching was incredibly frustrating, there were some successes that deserve to be celebrated. As a special education teacher, my role was unique in that I only needed to provide explicit instruction for those in my self-contained reading and math class. One of the cool things about my position is that I was also able to observe my colleagues simultaneously up close and at a distance. I got to be a part of the struggle of deciding how we were going to meet the needs of our students and the initial confusion of how to emulate “normal” school in an online setting. With that, I was able to watch as their motivations for their instructional decisions shifted to find ways to make content more accessible for all; that was really fun and exciting to watch.

As I reflect back on that time, I do not know if there is much that I would change other than to make COVID not exist if that were at all possible. Being an educator through emergency remote teaching was one of the most trying and hopeless feeling times in my career, but without experiencing it, I never would have gotten to observe that shift demonstrated by my colleagues in such a natural environment. I cannot say for certain why it happened, but what I do know is that it did, which means that there is hope for education in a broader context as we seek to find ways to better our field and practices as a whole. That is something that I look forward to investigating more and seeing how it can be emulated.

Professionally, I have moved into a new role as an administrator at the elementary level, so my practice looks a bit different than it did during the time of emergency remote teaching. That being said, I continued to work as a special education teacher in the two years immediately following March 2020. In my capacity as a special education teacher, I tried to be very intentional about providing information in a variety of ways so that all of my students could access it in the way that best worked for them. One thing that I learned during emergency remote teaching was that learning takes place as a result of interactions, so I made sure to find ways to integrate cooperative learning opportunities into my classes regularly. I tried to find ways to make the abstract concepts concrete, because then my students could investigate and play with the information instead of just hearing it and hoping they remember it; I often find myself falling back to these strategies when I sub for the teachers in my building, regardless of the grade level, as well as when I am leading professional development sessions. I find that this helps people to stay engaged and retain the information as well as apply it when they come to a situation that calls for it.

One thing that I struggled with prior to emergency remote teaching as a teacher was social-emotional learning. It is not because I did not agree with it or did not think it was important; it was just something that I struggled to help students navigate in more of 1:1 or small group setting. When issues of this nature would arise, I would seek out guidance from someone stronger in this area and serve in more of a supportive capacity while they took the lead. After emergency remote teaching, I think that I became hyperaware of the repercussions that we were experiencing as a result of COVID and tried really hard to improve in this area. This often showed in how I would counsel students as they dealt with difficult situations and worked together to resolve the issue. I currently find myself being very intentional about using social

emotional learning tools as my work now involves more supporting of teachers. I have noticed that people feel more comfortable coming to me than they used to, and I attribute that to the work that I have done to improve as a professional in this capacity.

I find that we are still dealing with the implications of COVID on students and adults alike; I fondly refer to our current 1st through 3rd grade students as our “COVID Babies,” because we see more academic and social emotional deficits in those grades than in any others. We know that those are not going to suddenly disappear. Because of this, our administrative and teaching teams work very diligently together to try and address concerns proactively as opposed to waiting until the issues worsen. To meet these needs, we have found ways to create Tier 2 SEL small groups to meet various needs so as to bridge the gap between the Tier 1 supports that students receive in the classroom and Tier 3 that they receive with the counselor. While it is not perfect, our behavior data has shown a drastic improvement in big behaviors from last year. Not only do we have fewer big behaviors occurring, we are also finding ways to address them in a restorative manner instead of automatically resorting to punitive measures. Adults feel more confident in using the tools that they have at their disposal, and we are getting to enjoy a more positive school climate and culture. These things certainly were needed before emergency remote teaching, but they might not have been something that I viewed as essential. If nothing else, teaching during COVID-19 reinforced the need for us to meet students and adults alike where they are at and to start there. By meeting these needs, I hope that we are creating a ripple effect that ultimately ends up meeting more needs than what we sought out to address in the first place.

In discussing my observations of During COVID, I mentioned the words “grace” and “pivot” being trigger words for me and others. In conversations with colleagues, we have talked

about the concept of grace. Within the context of COVID and emergency remote teaching, it was used in the reactive sense; we did not know what to expect, so we could not expect students to behave at the same standard as we were pre-COVID. Grace became the life preserver that we clung to as we bobbed in the sea of COVID and emergency remote teaching. It was used in case of emergency. In the time since COVID, however, we have noted a shift among adults and students alike. Instead of being used “in case of emergency,” grace is now an expectation and almost an excuse of sorts for people who are not willing to do what is expected of them. There is not currently any research that outlines this idea, but it is certainly an attitude that myself and other educators have noticed permeating the realm of education. Although there were some positives that came as a direct result of emergency remote teaching, for me, this shift is not one of them, and I worry about how this expectation of grace will impact the realm of education, especially if it is not for the better.

Themes Identified

Throughout the course of the final interview and participants’ reflections upon their experience of emergency remote teaching, the themes of lack of control, isolation and division, and ripple effect came through the findings. Within the following section, these themes are defined in relation to the data collected and explained in detail to elaborate upon.

Lack of Control

The biggest frustration noted by all participants was that they felt out of control of the things outside of their classroom setting. Each of them worked to create and provide academic tasks that would meet student needs, but there was one major thing that all parties were up against that had a major impact on the success of the things that they created: students were not mandated or required to complete work during Continuous Learning. The district that Little

Middle School belonged to structured this time in such a way that students were not required to attend Zooms or to do the work. Their grades could not be negatively impacted during this time, and grades could only improve as they completed and turned in work. I was unable to make my students show up even with repeated phone calls and emails; if I was lucky enough to get a response, it was typically an excuse as to why the student could not join. As Mandy noted, “I couldn't make the kids show up. Um, so motivating them to show, for themselves and because they needed it, it was really hard in middle school.” Although adults could tell and reiterate the importance of showing up and participating, not just academically but emotionally as well, students ultimately were able to make the choice of whether or not to do that. Mandy also observed that this perceived lack of control impacts students years later as they often default to learned helplessness when something seems difficult at first; they will not accept accountability for their efforts or needing to learn if they perceive that they can shift that responsibility to something that occurred during emergency remote teaching.

Along with this, there was an implied lack of being allowed to challenge students. Melody stated, “I didn't like the fact that we had to make it so, for lack of better words, easy that any student could figure it out, because we can't be there in person to help them.” While she was in favor of providing accessible material, she noted frustration with the simplicity assignments, because students did not have to interact or think much about how to complete tasks; because of that, she felt that learning did not take place, or if it did, it was not the amount and caliber that it could have been. Alan noted that, although it was nobody's fault, nobody really seemed to have the answers for how to navigate this time and to equitably provide educational experience to all students. He shared that emergency remote teaching often felt like a “free for all” and “fend for yourself.” Because of this, he could not be sure if what he was doing was right or effective.

Isolation and division

Accompanying teachers' concerns about connecting with students was the feelings of isolation that adults felt themselves. Alan illustrated this feeling by saying, "literally and figuratively, it just felt like you were on an island." As sure as teachers were of what the guidance was that the district and building was giving out, they were equally unsure about what it meant. Everyone was left to interpret the directives however they thought it was supposed to look for them and their class. Based on the interviews and data gathered, all of the participants appeared happy with how they interpreted the information and what they did with it, but the gap is in the fact that they wanted more concrete information and feedback to know that what they were doing was right.

Melody observed that although information was left up to interpretation and teachers were told to do their best, it seemed to lead to distrust of teachers from administration. She said, "I think that I found, personally, that COVID became an excuse for a lot of administrators to force teachers out of their autonomy." One of things that Melody had noticed was that she felt that COVID gave districts the justification that they were looking for to purchase prescribed curriculums because they were so worried about scores decreasing and kids losing learning. This distrust came from society as well even though they had just lauded teachers as superheroes for what they did during emergency remote teaching. Regardless of what teachers worked to make happen during COVID, it ultimately was not seen as right, despite a lack of guidance. This distrust was also noted among colleagues. Even though everyone was going through the same thing, it felt like there was no one outside of the home to lean on. Although there was the desire for connection, people were subsequently being driven apart due to the shared trauma of having to navigate the event, thus result in an even larger psychological toll on all involved.

Ripple effect

Both Mandy and I noted that we are still seeing the effects of emergency remote teaching and COVID in schools today. Mandy is still teaching at Little Middle School, and I am working at an elementary school, but we have both observed that students' time during emergency remote teaching negatively impacted them both academically and social-emotionally at both levels.

Mandy shared that students exhibit more learned helplessness and an unwillingness to try things that might be perceived as difficult even if they have the prerequisite skill set. Additionally, their learned helplessness goes beyond wanting to have someone do something for them; they tend to use COVID as an excuse for why they cannot do something and do not want to try.

At the elementary level, I see deficits as well, but they look different. Our 1st through 3rd grade struggle with appropriate social and problem-solving skills. They also are achieving lower as a whole and taking longer to achieve at the level where they are needing to be in reading and math. With this group, there are not excuses being made relating to COVID being the reason why they cannot do something; rather, there is a lack of accountability and an environment of "It's not my fault" and "But he/they did this" when an interpersonal issue arises with peers or adults. With appropriate accommodations, they are making progress, but there is a long way for them to go to get to where they need to be.

Findings

Within the following section, I analyzed the data collected from all four participants through the use of a three-interview series and personal artifact analysis. For each interview, I considered the three themes identified and the commonalities between them. In doing that, I was able to establish three broader themes that encompassed each of the three initial themes identified and helped to provide the answer for the research question assigned to that interview.

Research Question #1: How did teachers make decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic?

The first research question that I sought to answer through the use of semi-structured interviews and artifact analysis was the following: How did teachers make decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic? My intention in using this as the first question was to allow me to analyze my participants' stories and experiences from more of a topical level. This question seeks to understand some of the more basic concepts that impacted the initial decisions that were made; it allows for deeper analysis of external and societal factors and constructs that impacted the decisions that participants made in relation to later questions. To answer this question, I chose to look at the background experiences of the participants, me included, to consider how participants felt that those readily apparent experiences played a role in their decision making. The framework for how teachers made instructional decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic is three-pronged: learning occurs in the interactions, lack of training, and establishing and reinforcing foundational skills. These themes fall within the same broader theme of Interactions and help to identify the fact that decisions were made based on participants' experiences prior to COVID-19 (See Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 RQ 1: Emergent Themes Identified

Evidence	Theme Identified	Explanation
1. Alan: Emphasized being able to listen to an interact with students as they discuss (p. 83) 2. Melody: Interacting with others and situations (p. 88) 3. Mandy: Use of manipulatives for learning (p. 91) 4. Me: Students interactions with their perception of themselves and others' perceptions of their capabilities (p. 94)	Learning occurs in the interactions	Each of the participants identified that the success that they observed occurring with learning for students was due to interactions of some capacity (people, resources, information, etc.)
1. Alan: Self-taught out of necessity as he taught in a distance learning capacity (p. 81) 2. Melody: "I felt like I left with a good wealth of knowledge of things that I could use to be fun and engaging, but not, like, well, you know, how to actually teach" (p. 87) 3. Mandy: No training, but completed teaching degree completely online (p. 90) 4. Me: "I did not feel like it necessarily prepared me to teach in a remote or digital capacity" (p. 93)	Lack of training	All participants noted having little to no training, and the training that was had pertaining to education technology was either self-taught or focused on making in-person learning more engaging, not how to teach in an online capacity

1. Alan: Emphasis on skills-based learning (p. 84) 2. Melody: “That was it: to be able to understand others' ideas and to communicate your own” (p. 88) 3. Mandy: “Seventh grade math is all about kind of the first-time exposures to all types of math” (p. 91) 4. Me: “See students make progress and to believe in themselves that they were capable of learning” (p. 94)	Establishing and reinforcing foundational skills	Each of the participants noted centralizing the purpose of their courses around foundational skills. They discussed wanting students to be able to demonstrate and apply learning as opposed to memorization and recitation.
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The idea that learning occurs in the interactions is multifaceted and can be approached from a variety of angles. In this study alone, it was evident from the participants’ stories that the interactions between humans, objects, and ideas all play a role in educating students, and that the occurrence of COVID-19 interrupted these interactions in the way that we knew and understood them. Each of the participants had in common the fact that they had all participated in online learning in some capacity as students, and yet they all agreed that, while it fulfilled its purpose for them as adult learners in that they completed the courses and received credit for them, participating in education in that setting had not been what they would term as effective in so far as crafting meaningful learning experiences. Each participant noted that while they successfully completed the courses, they did not feel as if what they learned was necessarily impactful and meaningful pertaining to what learning was gained from the courses. Mandy noted that, while taking online classes worked for her as an adult, getting questions answered was difficult because she could not ask them in the moment, and it was hard to ask them over email and get them adequately answered and explained. The participants all noted that the lack of interaction

with other people about the content that was being learned contributed to a less than satisfactory learning opportunity during their participation in online classes.

In addition to a lack of interaction with other people, participants all noted that their instructional decisions were also impacted by considering what educational resources students would no longer have access to as they transitioned to emergency remote teaching. Based on Alan's prior experience teaching via distance learning, he knew that one of the resources that students would lose access to was the teacher and the interaction with them. Despite being present in online lessons, he would lose the opportunity to navigate amongst students and small groups to listen to their discussions and to ask questions. Because of this, he knew that there could be potentially missed opportunities for deeper learning to take place. In designing his lessons, Alan had to consider and decide if there were ways to replicate that opportunity for learning or to accept that it was something unable to be replicated. Mandy's concern centered around the idea that students learn best when provided opportunities to learn in a hands-on manner so as to manipulate and work with concrete concepts to better understand them abstractly. Much like Alan, Mandy also noted that providing students the opportunity to interact with each other was lost in the transition, and trying to have them interact with resources at home was an attempt to show them that the math that they learn in school is not isolated to that setting; rather, she attempted to provide ways for them to generalize what they learned to a broader, more applicable space. Even in doing that, she felt as if there was a gap in the learning taking place. Melody also emphasized the necessity for students to be able to understand others' ideas and to communicate their own, but a lack of expectation and attendance made it difficult for her to know whether students were understanding how to do this. Whether it was interaction with people, a resource, or an idea, all participants noted that interaction was essential for success in

learning of the things that they were trying to teach and was something that they intentionally targeted when considering how to structure their instructional decisions for students during emergency remote teaching.

Another aspect that played a role in how the participants of the study made their instructional decisions was a lack of training about how to teach within not only a virtual setting, but an emergency remote setting. All participants noted that they had participated in learning in the digital space as students, as mentioned earlier, but none had received explicit training on how to educate in that space. This lack of interaction with training material to be able to meet this need made participants feel as if they were not meeting the needs of their students and were ill-equipped to provide instruction in that space.

During her teacher education program, Mandy had not received any training about educating in the virtual space. Melody and I both noted that we had been required to take an educational technology class during our undergraduate education, but the emphasis was on how to make in-person learning more engaging and provide an opportunity to let students practice some twenty-first century skills in a digital environment, not how to be a teacher or structure a class in a virtual setting. Even with her experiences of extensively integrating technology into her classes, Melody shared that teaching within the virtual setting was beyond what she had done.

Alan's experience was a bit different from all of ours. In his first teaching job, Alan had been employed at a small school and taught a distance learning class for various schools in the area; he taught via a television system where classes in other schools could see and interact with him from their own buildings. When asked about his training, Alan shared that all of his training was via hands-on learning on his own as far as how to actually execute the teaching and provide

resources to students as well as the technical side of things. While he was able to figure out what worked for him over the course of time, Alan still felt that the lack of training negatively impacted his skills both at the time and when education shifted to emergency remote teaching. All participants faced the shift to emergency remote teaching with a lack of training and expectations set forth, which allowed them to consider what really mattered in what they taught and how they wanted to approach it. The lack of training forced participants to be reflective on what they knew for certain about learning in a digital space and to apply it to the extent of what they knew how to do.

The final concept that impacted how participants made instructional decisions about how to provide virtual literacy experiences was their individual understanding and purpose that they had set for their course prior to the shift to emergency remote teaching. Each of the participants emphasized that they had made a shift to establishing and reinforcing foundational skills in each of their respective subjects. While this shift had occurred at the beginning of the school year, it served to inform all of the decisions that they made as they navigated emergency remote teaching.

In English Language Arts, Melody's driving force behind all of lessons centered around how to interact with and understand information and how to craft and put information back out into the world as a means of interacting with the information that they received. Alan structured all of his activities around the skills that he wanted students to be able to demonstrate as opposed to what he wanted them to do; he had noted that, in the past, students had focused on memorization of information, but they did not necessarily know what to do with it. Because of that, he focused on teaching them how to apply and demonstrate what they were learning in a way that was meaningful for them moving forward. Mandy shared that seventh-grade math lays

the foundational skills that students need to be successful as they move forward in their educational careers; if students do not gain these skills they can struggle as they continue progressing through math classes. The commonality identified amongst all participants was that they wanted students to be able to apply what they knew and use it in critical thinking and problem-solving tasks; this helps to demonstrate that they understand not only what is being taught but how it interacts with themselves and the world around them to make sense of it. Although each of the participants taught different subjects, the fact that they prioritized gaining skills and an understanding of how to apply them impacted each of their instructional decisions that they made in the shift to emergency remote teaching. By considering how the students interacted with the information provided and how they could promote deeper learning through a skills-based approach, participants centered students and their experiences within their planning, which allowed them to consider deeper underlying factors that impacted their instructional decisions as a whole.

To summarize and succinctly answer the question of how teachers made instructional decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, the decisions that were made were made in an attempt to mitigate the known issues with online learning that the participants had previously experienced as online learners themselves and to attempt to proactively address the potential issues with making the shift. Each of the participants had different background experiences that led to the point of study within their professional practice, but all of them identified a common issue that occurs with learning within the digital space as pertaining to learning, training, and skills taught: the lack of interaction provided. Shifting from an in-person learning environment to emergency remote teaching removed students from access to the learning resources with which

they were familiar, teachers from the training they had received, and thrust both into a world with which they were not familiar and had to learn to navigate as they went. Although these decisions may not be exactly reflective of how the participants educate now, they do serve to illuminate some areas of necessary change within the field of education especially as pertains to education as we “know” it, what “we” can determine education can be, and the potential for restructuring of teacher education and training and ramifications for education as a whole.

Research Question #2: Why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching?

As I approached considering the data provided from my second semi-structured interview, I centered my findings around my second research question, which was, why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching? The answer to my first research question found that how teachers made instructional decisions during the shift to emergency remote teaching was a direct reflection of the teacher participants’ experiences and beliefs as learners within a virtual space; this answer illuminated that participants’ initial and immediate response was to look inward and consider what they “knew” to be true to formulate a response to teaching during COVID. As I shifted to consideration of the second research question and the findings provided within the data, I discovered that the question of “why” turned the looking glass away from what the teachers internally “knew” and outward toward student needs and learning as the driving force behind the decisions. Through examination of the data collected via interview and artifact analysis, I was able to identify “why” in the simplest of terms: accessibility. This was informed by the three common themes of connection (or lack thereof), doubt, and meaningful for kids that were identified within the data in response to the semi-structured interview questions and artifact analysis.

Table 4.2 RQ 2: Emergent Themes Identified

Evidence	Theme Identified	Explanation
1. Alan: Worried about students, especially when he did not see them (p. 104), sought out connections with other educators (p. 102) 2. Melody: The majority of students were not doing assignments or connecting with teachers (p. 111) 3. Mandy: Encouraged students to go outside, provided a positive environment for Zooms (p. 120) 4. Me: Connection to students and other adults in the same situation (p. 121-122)	Connection (or lack thereof)	All participants noted that their efforts centralized connecting with students and that not all students joined Zooms or completed work, so it influenced how the participants viewed themselves and their instructional decisions. Participants also noted seeking out means of connections themselves with family, colleagues, other educators, and outside connections in a safe manner.
1. Alan: “I’m trying, but what am I doing? Is it really doing any good? Is it really?” (p. 104) 2. Melody: Felt like she was failing her students, they were not learning anything, and she was not there for them (p. 114) 3. Mandy: Unsure if students learned concepts due to lack of participation (p. 117) 4. Me: Unsure if content was meaningful or learned, but allowed for opportunities to connect (p. 122-123)	Doubt	Despite all of the participants centering student needs as the driving force behind their instructional decisions, all noted varying degrees of uncertainty. Because there was a lack of training and guidance, they were not sure if what they were doing was right or if they were helping students in any capacity, especially because participation was so low.

1. Alan: Assignments made historical and current connections, as well as opportunities for students to process COVID-19 (pp. 102-108) 2. Melody: “So, he was a kid that, because it was him, it made a difference” (p. 113) 3. Mandy: “Everything's a learning experience” (p.120) 4. Me: Observed colleagues shifting to more of a UDL format in their instructional design (pp. 123-124)	Meaningful for kids	The motivation behind the shift in instructional design that each participant showed was to find a way to connect with students and to provide meaningful, relevant learning experiences. They wanted the things that students did to resonate and connect to their current experiences.
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In considering the impact of connection on accessibility, I looked at the variety of connections that occurred for the participants as a result of COVID-19 and the shift to emergency remote teaching. The first connection that was brought to the forefront of the second interview was connecting with structures that put forth the expectations of how to navigate emergency remote teaching, specifically our school district. Each of the participants factored in the constraints given to them by the district in what they were or were not allowed to do in their planning. Alan mentioned that focusing on the social emotional needs of students was something that he distinctly recalled being prioritized by our district. Melody also noted that teachers were only allowed to give assignments that would be able to be completed within a set amount of time, and this was restricted by the fact that the teachers could not be there to help scale the assignments to meet the individual needs of each student; additionally, students' grades could not decrease, so they noted a lack of motivation and/or urgency for students to engage. Mandy and

the others also commented on the fact that not making attendance and work completion mandatory in some context influenced the performance of students. The connection to this factor was outside the control of the participants, but the guidance set forth was expected to be followed. While it was helpful to have a framework in which to operate, participants noted feeling out of control and frustrated that this had such a substantial impact on student participation during emergency remote teaching.

Connection to students was the second factor that drove why teachers within this narrative inquiry decided to make specific instructional decisions during emergency remote teaching. The participants noted concern about their students and their overall wellbeing during this time, which can largely be attributed to a fear of the unknown. Some of the questions being asked were: “Do they have access to the things that they need? What is going to happen to those who depend on the school for food? A safe place to go? Belonging? Love? Are they okay? Are they going to be?”

Unfortunately, there was not an easy answer to those questions and the answers that they did have were not uniform across households. Alan stated concern about students’ home lives and what they were being expected to do outside of, and in addition to, school. All participants commented that their intent in providing the instruction that they did was to give students something that was both doable independently and provided some semblance of normalcy in an otherwise abnormal time. Melody noted that the only time that she had a face-to-face interaction during emergency remote teaching was when she joined one of the Zooms for my class, even though her instructional decisions were made to center accessibility and connection to resources and content. Mandy’s observation was that it was hard to get kids to join a Zoom, but once they did, they would not want to leave. All participants shared that they struggled to get kids to come

online, so they would try to find ways to draw them in and encourage participation, but it was always the same kids who joined each time. The decisions that were made were driven by trying to entice students to join and interact with the teachers and their peers, but that was not able to combat the things going on for students outside the academic realm and influencing that participation to begin with.

The third factor pertaining to connection that impacted why participants made the instructional decisions that they did during emergency remote teaching was the connection to other sources. The term “sources” is very broad and intentionally so. These specific sources functioned more as a support system for the participants so that they had the capacity and ability to provide the instruction that they did for students. These sources consisted of family, colleagues, and social media as informal professional development opportunity. Both Mandy and Alan shared about how teaching during emergency remote teaching pushed them to spend time outside with their family; they felt that they were productive during that time, and it gave them a chance to connect with what people they did have access to. Alan iterated the importance of the relationships that he built through accessing the education community in an online space. The ideas shared gave him some ideas of what to do as an educator, and he felt that it is now a community that he continues to access. Although this specific type of connection was centered around the educators, meeting their needs provided them with the capacity to meet the needs of their students. He also mentioned seeking connection with colleagues from Little Middle School, but that they seemed to be feeling just as lost as he was. One benefit that came from that connection, however, was the realization that, even though they were isolated, no one was going through the experiences of emergency remote teaching alone. The only certainty was uncertainty, and there was a bit of comfort to be found in recognizing that no one knew what they were

doing; they were just doing the best they could with what they knew at the time. By seeking this connection with peers, the participants of this study saw the importance of connection for themselves and understood the impact of connection in relation to how they structured their instructional decisions for students.

The second topic that helped to support and tease out the theme of accessibility in determining why instructional decisions were made was doubt. A common observation made by all participants was that they were not exactly sure what they were supposed to do as far as instruction, and neither was anyone around them. The guidance that they received was vague, and nobody really had a good answer when asked. Each of the participants reported that they felt uncertainty in so far as whether what they did was working or not. Alan shared that he felt as if his role as a teacher was undefined and that what he was trying to achieve was unclear; when he felt like he might be getting close to doing what he was supposed to do, the target moved. Mandy and Melody shared that they often found themselves questioning what they were doing and if it really mattered. Participants noted that they did the best with what they had, but they consistently doubted their effectiveness. A commonality noted was that the only thing that helped to make participants feel as if what they did worked was direct student feedback either via participation or words of affirmation.

The final topic that supported the theme of accessibility as to why the instructional decisions made were made was whether the experiences crafted and provided were meaningful for kids. Despite their doubt of what they were doing and the impact that it was having, the motivation that participants shared was purely to ensure that students were able to make progress in some capacity when engaging with the work provided. As the participants designed and shifted within their designs, they all shared that the one thing that made them feel as if what they

were doing was working was student feedback. Melody discussed direct student feedback about the read aloud that she was doing and positive student responses to the podcasts that she used; the instructional decisions that she made allowed her to have more options in terms of providing topics of interest in what she was using for instruction. Students wanted to reach out and acknowledge that what she was providing resonated with them in some capacity. Alan's instructional decisions emphasized a means of students understanding the world around them and how it was impacting them in the time of COVID-19. He shared that the work that students were turning in allowed him to see life as they were experiencing it as well as allowing them to see life how people in different capacities experienced a similar event before and how they were navigating it now. Alan emphasized that he knew that whatever instruction he chose to provide needed to resonate with students otherwise they would not be motivated to participate. Mandy's instructional design similarly found a way to be relevant to real life for students. She searched for ways for students to apply the math concepts within their own homes; after teaching the concept, she provided them with a task to find something in their home to apply the concept to. Mandy wanted them to be able to understand that the concepts learned were not something that remained within the school walls and that they could have application in their everyday lives. Each of the participants reflected this ideal in some way. By centering meaningfulness for students in their instructional design, participants were able to provide some learning experiences in a way that impacted students and allowed them to engage in content in such a way that they are able to get more from it.

In examining why participants made the instructional decisions that they did in relation to emergency remote teaching, it is apparent that participants considerations shifted from more of a reflective nature to a consideration of the experiences and needs of the students who would be

and were interacting with the content provided. While the initial response to the shift to emergency remote teaching was a reflection of participants' own prior experiences with learning in a virtual space, the deeper exploration of why those instructional decisions were made as emergency remote teaching progressed centered around the perceived, expressed, and unknown needs of students and how to meet and fulfill those needs through the providing of instruction and resources. The participants were trying to meet a plethora of needs, both identified and not, and their instructional decisions magnified that motivation. In examination of the perceived needs identified by the participants, I was able to further question, define, and tease out a variance in how to interact with the concept of accessibility and the interaction of those providing the learning experiences versus those participating in them. In doing so, I was able to consider these ideas and experiences in relation to what the participants "knew" as they engaged in emergency remote teaching and how their own experiences informed the experiences that they provided and engaged in as providers of educational instruction.

Research Question #3: What lasting impacts exist within teachers' professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching?

The final research question addressed in this narrative inquiry was, what lasting impacts exist within teachers' professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching? This question was the driving force behind the interview questions asked during our third and final interview. Throughout the course of the first and second interviews, the emphasis had been on answering how and why instructional decisions were made in response to emergency remote teaching. There had been a shift noted in how instruction had been provided to place more of an emphasis on meeting student needs, and this

shift was focused more as systematic shift for participants as opposed to picking and choosing who did or did not need it, which was prevalent in the stories provided during the response to emergency remote teaching. Because the emphasis provided within that shift appeared to be more student-centric, I was curious about if or how this had carried over into the “post”-COVID education that participants were involved in. The answer to what lasting impacts exist within teachers’ professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching is not a simple one. It is multifaceted and considers things that were addressed in relation to both research questions, looking both inward for participants and outward to the impacts seen because of their choices. The three common themes identified throughout the course of the final semi-structured interview were a lack of control, isolation and division, and the ripple effect (see Table 4.3); as delineated within the following section, these themes all contributed to the common theme of Connection and helped to identify what long-term effects of emergency remote teaching participants identified within their practice.

Table 4.3 RQ 3: Emergent Themes Identified

Evidence	Theme Identified	Explanation
1. Alan: Lack of guidance and “just do your very best” (p. 128) 2. Melody: Frustration stemmed from decisions made for her and students (p. 134) 3. Mandy: Not making participation and attendance mandatory (p. 140) 4. Me: Could not require attendance and participation, which made it impossible to support students (p.144)	Lack of control	All participants shared that they experienced feeling out of control with many things related to emergency remote teaching. The decisions that they made had to work within the guidance they were given, but students were not required to attend to the work or Zooms. This contributed to teachers feeling like even the things that they could control were out of their control.

1. Alan: “Literally and figuratively, it just felt like you were on an island” (p. 128) 2. Melody: “Honest to God, I feel like it divided us even further as a group” (p. 139) 3. Mandy: Has seen the opposite effect and uses some of the same technology to provide enhance opportunities for connection (p. 142-143) 4. Me: Was able to observe colleagues making changes, but not everyone was doing it (p. 144)	Isolation and division	Participants noted that even though everyone within Little Middle School and the world were experiencing COVID-19 and trying to figure how to teach with it happening, they felt alone and divided. In the aftermath, they noted an increased opportunity for connection with students, but did not note positive connections with other adults.
1. Alan: “More selective shopper versus I'm just going to grab everything” (p. 133) 2. Melody: “I genuinely believe that it brought the worst out of a lot of people professionally” (p. 139) 3. Mandy: Kids continue to use COVID as an excuse for behavior or when they do not want to do something (p. 143) 4. Me: Social emotional deficits are still apparent today, even in young children (pp. 145-146)	Ripple Effect	All participants shared that they continue to see the impacts of COVID-19 and emergency remote teaching on their professional practice and students as they progress through school. Their perceived impact on their practice has been positive but the impact on students has not been.

It is important to note that even though I reference education in a “post”-COVID world, that does not mean that COVID is gone. In fact, I continue to see its impacts both actively and

posthumously in education today. To understand the impacts of emergency remote teaching, it is essential to reflect upon what was happening during and what it did to the educators who were navigating it, as well as how it made them feel; they must look inward to consider its impact on them and how that experience has impacted them within the present future. Each of the participants noted that their memories and feelings pertaining to emergency remote teaching were marred with a feeling of an overwhelming lack of control. Each participant shared that they felt like they were at the mercy of the actions of a structure that outranked themselves as far as what they could or could not require students to do; they shared that they could not require students to get online or do their assignments, because that was not the guidance that was given. Although they themselves were trying to provide meaningful instructional opportunities for their students, they felt that they had lost some autonomy while simultaneously gaining autonomy over things that they did not know what to do with. Alan mentioned the fact that participants did not know how to educate in that space, but there was also not anyone who was able to tell them if what they were doing was right. “Just do your best,” seemed to be the overarching guidance that was being given, but no one knew what that meant exactly. This lack of control and understanding was very frustrating for the participants and led to what some participants viewed as an opportunity for administration in education to remove more autonomy and control from the teacher and classroom.

The second aspect that has shaped the long-lasting effects due to emergency remote teaching is the feeling of isolation and division experienced by participants. Although participants noted having access to their families, they commented on the fact that they actually felt disconnected from their colleagues and structures that are typically in place that provide means of support. Despite seeking means of connection in alternative methods, participants felt

that emergency remote teaching impacted how society and education as a whole viewed the choices that they made. There was a lot of conversation within society centering around learning loss and how test scores would be negatively impacted due to emergency remote teaching. Melody noted that there seemed to be a development of distrust by administration and society toward teachers, which was an opportunity to remove the autonomy that had recently been forced upon them by way of curriculum adaptation and shifting to more of a scripted model, thus placing constraints on what the teacher can or cannot do. Participants noted frustration with this because they all were doing what they could and thought was best at the time with the limited guidance provided, most of which centered student needs and how to provide education that considered the needs of the whole child. In considering these impacts in a post-COVID world, participants felt as if they were being driven apart and away from collaborative opportunities as a result of the shared trauma that they experienced, and the actions taken by higher powers in response to the decisions that they made during emergency remote teaching.

The final factor that addressed what long lasting effects teachers are noticing on their practice as a result of emergency remote teaching is the ripple effect. Participants noted observing this phenomenon in interacting with students and the deficits that they observe. While administration and other structures were concerned with what academic deficits might crop up as a result of emergency remote teaching, participants noted that the most obvious deficits are within the area of soft skills; students are having a hard time being resilient when they come to something they are not sure how to do. They give up quickly and their ability to self-regulate is not as strong on a broader spectrum than it was pre-COVID. Of course, there will always be individuals who have these deficits, but participants noticed that they are more common and impacting the majority of students as opposed to the few.

To attempt to address these issues within their practice, participants shared that they are integrating opportunities within their classes to help strengthen these areas for the student population within their classrooms. Alan noted that he highly prioritizes both skills and cooperative learning opportunities in his practice; this allows him to promote student interactions and social skills as well as to consider what is truly meaningful in what he teaches. Mandy shared that she finds that things that came about during emergency remote teaching continue to be used within her practice, including the use of Zoom to allow students to participate in class when they cannot physically be present and for her to work with students outside of school. Additionally, she has found that she has worked to balance teacher-led instruction with placing more responsibility onto students for their learning. Although Melody no longer teaches in K-12 education, she shared that when she did, she tried to make sure that she was implementing more interactive opportunities for students to help them engage in the content and increased her usage of technology in her practice to help prepare students in the event of another shift to learning in the virtual space. All participants noted that although there are deficits within the broader student population, they are doing their part to address the ripple effect and support students to make growth by using their experiences to mitigate the issues that they are seeing in their current practice.

The simple answer to the final research question of “what lasting impacts exist within teachers’ professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching” is that teachers found a way to connect what they “knew” and learned as a result of their personal experiences to what students were giving them by interacting with them and their instructional resources to create a fuller understanding of what truly matters within education and the classroom for them. All participants shared that they had reflected upon

the things that they did in response to emergency remote teaching, and continue to do so, to consider what they learned and what needs they continue to observe within their practice. In considering the stories shared by each participant, they continued to place social-emotional wellbeing and skills at the forefront of what they considered important. Understanding this, I am able to see that, although broader structures may value academic test scores as an indicator of student success, those who are practicing within the field of education do not see that as the only measure of success. By viewing how participants considered their own experiences as well as how the experiences of others impacted their choices, it allowed me to see that the changes that they made within their practices were dictated by the interaction and connection of various experiences that occurred as a direct result of emergency remote teaching.

Summary of Our Stories

Chapter 4 contained the stories of four educators from Little Middle School: Alan, Melody, Mandy, and me. Not only are we former colleagues, but we taught together during a time that was revolutionary for our professional practice and education as a whole: emergency remote teaching as a result of COVID-19. Through the use of narrative inquiry and personal artifact document analysis, I have crafted a look into the lives of these educators as they navigated emergency remote teaching and the ensuing instructional decisions that they made as a result. The sections were split chronologically, examining the experiences of each participant at that moment in time in relation to emergency remote teaching.

In looking at pre-COVID teaching, the interviews centered around the intended purpose for each participants' course that they taught at the time and how they structured the classes to make that happen. Participants provided some of their background professional and educational information, which helped to inform the point from which they were starting when it came to

emergency remote teaching. As we shifted to emergency remote teaching, questions emphasized both the personal and professional experiences of each participant. We examined what their initial reactions were in considering their instructional design and how those designs changed as a result of the experiences as they lived through emergency remote teaching. They were also given the opportunity to provide an artifact that they felt best demonstrated their experience with emergency remote teaching and explained how that was representative of that time in their educational journey. The final interview contained more a reflective component and the opportunity to look forward. Participants shared how their experiences during emergency remote teaching made them feel, but they also examined how those experience have impacted their current educational practice.

At the end of each section, there was a brief discussion of common themes identified across the interviews and the significance of those in relation to that timeframe. Following the final interview, Chapter 4 contained an in-depth outline of the themes collected within the findings as well as an explanation of the broader themes identified per interview, allowing for each of the three research questions to be answered. Chapter 5 will contain an in-depth analysis via critical theory, poststructuralism, and deconstruction of how these themes are impactful in a broader sense relating to education and can be operationalized to bring about meaningful understanding and change.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a discussion of the results gleaned from this narrative inquiry and share recommendations for practitioners and future research. This chapter is arranged so that it begins with a summary of the study followed by a summary of the findings as they relate to the research questions. The chapter will then discuss the theoretical implications as they pertain to the research questions and time upon which each specific interview focused. Lastly, based on the results of the study, this chapter provides recommendations for both educators and future research opportunities.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain a better understanding of the factors that influenced teachers' instructional decisions. I utilized narrative inquiry as a qualitative research design to examine how teachers at Little Middle School decided to provide literacy experiences during the abrupt shift to emergency remote teaching in response to COVID-19. Data collection methods included a semi-structured three-interview series and personal artifact analysis. The four participants shared their stories over the course of three interviews focusing on background information and teaching before COVID, their initial educational decisions in response to COVID, and the lasting impacts of COVID on their professional practice; additionally, participants provided a personal artifact that was utilized for document analysis. During the course of the second interview, participants discussed how the artifact was representative of their experiences during emergency remote teaching and its significance in relation to their understanding of how they experienced that time as a teacher. Although I was the researcher and writer of this study, I also served as a participant. I responded to the research questions through writing and examined my own experiences as the special education teacher at Little Middle

School, which provided a different lens through which to view the stories of my colleagues as I worked with them and to support them. Analyses of the interview data collected was conducted using holistic and thematic analysis means to identify common themes. Throughout the course of this study, the focus was on answering the following questions:

- a) How did teachers make decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic?
- b) Why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching?
- c) What lasting impacts exist within teachers' professional practice resulting from the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching?

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

In examining the stories collected, I was able to identify that many of the instructional decisions made by my participants emphasized interactions, accessibility, and connection (See Table 5.1). Although their approaches may have varied and shifted both in the beginning and throughout the course of emergency remote teaching, the goal was always to meet students where they were at and to give them what they needed. Much of the existing research surrounding COVID-19 and education, particularly pertaining to K-12 education, centers around students: their experiences, the results, and lasting effects. As far as research pertaining to educators and their experiences during COVID-19, the focus emphasizes what decisions were made in response to emergency remote teaching and, as a result, the long-term impact on students.

Table 5.1 Research Questions and Broadening Themes

Interview and Research Question and Emphasis	Emergent Themes	Broad Themes Identified	Explanation
Interview/RQ #1: Pre-COVID	1. Learning occurs in the interactions 2. Lack of training 3. Establishing and reinforcing foundational skills	Interactions	1. Interactions between people 2. Interactions with resources/tools 3. Interactions with information/training
Interview/RQ #2: During COVID	1. Connection (or lack thereof) 2. Doubt 3. Meaningful for kids	Accessibility	1. Access to people (colleagues, students, family, community) 2. Access to resources 3. Access to information that is relevant and applicable
Interview/RQ #3: “Post”-COVID	1. Lack of control 2. Isolation and division 3. Ripple effect	Connection	1. Connection to people (colleagues, PLCs, students) 2. Connection to resources (curriculum, structures, information) 3. Connection to information (guidance, familiarity)

There is not a body of research considering the reasons behind the decisions that were made by educators in response to emergency remote teaching, thus leaving a gap in what education could be addressing to further bridge the educational disparity that was brought to the forefront as result of COVID-19, which is that of meeting students where they are in all capacities to support authentic and relevant learning. That is not to say that this disparity did not formerly

exist, but rather it was easier to overlook because it did not impact the majority of the student population, thus it was easy to ignore. COVID-19 shone a spotlight on the existing disparity. As schools shifted back to in-person learning, the participants of this study shared about how some of their instructional decisions shift a bit as a result of emergency remote teaching, but much of their instruction reverted back to what it was pre-COVID. Although this study showed that COVID illuminated the fact that a broad population are impacted by the instructional decisions made by the participants, the “new normal” was back to business as usual with a slight adjustment to some aspects of the decisions being made. The results of this students showed that not only are the have-nots impacted but all students, so drastically that it requires a deeper look and consideration into how we as educators can address the issue of how we are currently educating students, what expectations we have for them, and what we are doing to help them meet them at its core and use it to shift to a model of education that emphasizes equity and justice for all.

Theoretical Implications

Following each section of interviews in Chapter 4, I identified common themes that arose based on the narrative data. In the following section, I addressed my findings as related to broader thematic analysis. All of the specific themes that were identified following each section of Chapter 4 were able to be categorized based on the time period considered during each interview as each contributed to larger overarching themes to be addressed. I utilized the themes identified to provide the answers for each of the research questions addressed. These themes and the commentary that they provide on education are analyzed through the lenses of critical theory and post-structuralism by means deconstruction. These lenses will allow for me to provide a

more in-depth analysis of the themes identified so as to help better understand the implications of these findings on education now and in the future.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the field of education and the practices that it is made up of are not as simple as right or wrong. With the addition of COVID-19 into a field that contains a multitude of practices in relation to a multitude of educators teaching a multitude of students, a not-so-simple field became even less so. Within this study, I was able to consider the experiences of a few teachers and the motivation behind the decisions that they made to educate a few students and the lessons that they have learned in the meantime, but it is not even as simple as that. In considering the experiences shared within this narrative inquiry, it is essential to understand the lenses through which they will be analyzed.

Critical theory encourages the consideration and critique of existing policies and concepts so as to strive for justice and liberation for the oppressed. Horkheimer (1972) posited that traditional theory emphasized knowledge as something known simply because it is; he troubled this definition by centering lived experience as the determining factor for determining meaning both of the object being perceived and the perceiving organ. In essence, things are more and beyond that which we repeatedly say they are and use them as; their meaning is highly subjective based on the person or people who are interacting with them at that moment and within that space. This definition highlights the idea that knowledge is not universal and is what it is based on who is receiving and interacting with it. This is essential to consider in that I as the researcher was both an active and passive participant in the study, thus creating meaning for me that may not have been evident for someone viewing the interviews and data for external positioning. Meaning is created based on the relationship of me with myself and my experiences as well as

my relationship with my participants and others within education and society, which informed my analyses and interpretation of the findings collected (Horkheimer, 1972).

Poststructuralism serves as a philosophical movement to critique the concepts of structuralism. While structuralism crafts boundaries to identify what something is in relation to what it also is not (Horkheimer, 1972), poststructuralism seeks to defy dichotomous categorization (Williams, 2005). Specifically, poststructuralism is a practice of encouraging questioning of what things are. In relation to existing concepts and structures, this comes in the form of seeking to understand what things are and are not being identified as, as well as seeking to make changes that emphasize justice and equity for all (Lüdeman, 2014). Dubose Brunner (1994) elaborate that the practice of poststructuralism is constant and ongoing to question existing concepts that allow the participant to make meaning of the concepts at play.

Within the course of the following analysis, I utilized Derrida's model of deconstruction as a means to interpret my findings in relation to critical theory and poststructuralism.

Deconstruction is the understanding that things, structures, ideas, concepts, and more defy the boundaries in which they currently exist (Derrida & Caputo, 1997); deconstruction itself is something that transcends definition and providing an exact definition is contradictory to the concept, but in an attempt to provide a better understanding of the tool with which I chose to work, the definition that I enlisted is as such: deconstruction seeks to pursue and provide a commentary on justice, which means that the world in which we exist must provide opportunities for injustice to be overcome. Deconstruction requires action and provides the means for people to act in such a way that they are able to identify the oppressive structures at play in a situation, question, and find ways to dismantle and overcome them (Derrida & Caputo, 1997).

Within the confines of this narrative inquiry, I did this by considering the data provided and identifying common themes. These themes provided answers for the research questions that I posed, but they also provided topics for discussion. Each of these themes have their existing definitions and meanings, but I chose to examine those definitions and to consider how the data provided also troubled the existing definitions in relation to the experiences of the participants' during COVID-19 as educators and instructional decision makers. As my participants were all teachers who instructed students with disabilities on my caseload, their instructional decisions were influenced by the needs of my students as well as the others in their classes, thus calling into question how equitable and just education is and can be for all within a variety of times, places, and spaces.

Pre-COVID-19: Interactions

In analyzing the stories provided within the context of interview one, it became evident that the answer to my first research question of how teachers made decisions about providing virtual literacy experiences during the rapid shift to emergency remote teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic was tied to the prior experiences of the participants when they were in the position of learners or students within a virtual space; this is also known as continuity (Dewey, 1938). Because that was the only frame of reference and interaction within that space that they had, with the exception of Alan, they used that knowledge base to make decisions, thus situating them within the work of what they believed/"knew" education in a virtual space should be (Dewey, 1938).

While the shift to emergency remote teaching was beyond the realm of what any of the participants were familiar with, their initial response was default back to what they "knew." Horkeimer's (1972) critique of traditional theory challenges the idea of knowledge being

universal because it is impacted by the person experiencing the knowledge and broader surrounding contexts; this is where critical theory is factored into developing a deeper understanding of how the choices were made by participants. Because all participants had experienced virtual learning in the student capacity, they “knew” what did and did not work, and made their instructional decisions based on that. With that being said, I would like to draw consideration back to the word “knew.” In the initial context of its use, I considered the known knowledge of the participants from a past perspective in that they only “knew” what they did based on their own experiences (Dewey, 1938); the addition/development of their current known knowledge is a culmination of their added experiences as educators within the virtual space during emergency remote teaching.

Bearing that in mind, all of the things that the participants “knew” regarding what they shared pertaining to their experiences was restricted based on their positionality in relation to a variety of factors surrounding them leading up to and during emergency remote teaching, so what they “knew” was what, for them, had been informed by their experiences of virtual learning as students and, for Alan, what he had taught himself during his first teaching job. This means that, while the participants were doing what they believed to be best at the time, they were doing what they “knew” to be education in a virtual space, and as they learned more and different things, they shifted into more of a consideration of why they were teaching the things they were and an external locus centering student experiences and needs (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Until that point, the educational experiences being provided for students during emergency remote teaching were shaped to and reflective of the beliefs held by the participants pertaining to learning in the virtual space, thus impacting the way that students may or may not have been able to experience the information being provided.

An important factor that cannot be overlooked within the findings of this study is the emphasis on the lack of training about how to provide education within the virtual space received by the participants either in their formal education programs or in an informal space. The lack of training provided was another factor acting against the participants in this study as they considered that they did not know what they did not know; again, they did what they “knew,” and what they “knew” was not how to educate within an emergency remote teaching setting, which factors in not only educating in a virtual setting, but also within a worldwide traumatic event taking place. By not providing teachers with explicit training about how to educate students in the virtual space, either in the moment or previously, a variety of structures were failing a variety of parties, educators included. Although the town where Little Middle School was located worked together to provide equitable access to resources such as internet and food, there was not consideration given to the people providing those experiences and how they would (or could) be supporting the mission of equitable access.

In considering external factors that impacted the decisions that teachers made, it is essential to consider how the teachers and the experiences that shaped their decisions may have contributed to broadening existing equity gaps. The aforementioned lack of training is a considerable area of needed growth within the teacher education programs accessed and participated in by participants of this study. In addressing my second research question, I will seek to define accessibility in relation to its existing definition as well as the unique situation of emergency remote teaching; however, with participants only accessing and using their “known” knowledge to craft learning experience, it cannot be guaranteed that all students were getting the things that truly met their needs. To address this area of concern with an eye toward not only equity but justice within the realm of education, (Lüdeman, 2014; Derrida & Caputo, 1997) it is

acknowledged that it is something that will have to be addressed from the perspective of teacher preparation and continuing education programs. Because education and society are ever-changing and constantly advancing, programs must not only inform teachers how to educate in today's classroom, but also how to educate in the classrooms of tomorrow. Programs must not only consider technology but the changing landscape of how education can look to successfully prepare educators to thrive in the education of the future.

In essence, the things that students learned during emergency remote teaching were heavily shaped by the educators structuring the information provided and the space in which they decided to do so; because of their background and experiences, educators serve as one of the many filters through which students perceive information, both directly and indirectly (Dewey, 1938; Horkheimer, 1972). The education and best practices being provided during emergency remote teaching defied the dichotomy of either/or (Williams, 2005) in terms of what was or was not best practice and crossed into a category of improvisation invention: “yes, and” (Dubose Brunner, 1994); instead, decisions were made as a result of the continuity experienced by each individual participant (Dewey, 1938). To better meet the needs of students, we must first meet the needs of teachers, which may entail a deeper review of the structure of teacher education and training, as well as the structure of education as a whole.

During COVID-19: Accessibility

Through analysis of the stories told and digital artifacts provided during interview two, I was able to answer to my second research question, which was “Why did teachers decide to provide particular literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching?”

The commonalities in themes that arose across all three participants and the identification of accessibility as the theme made it evident that the “why” decisions were made was because of

the perceived and identified needs expressed by students as the participants navigated emergency remote teaching based on the participants' interactions with the students they served (Dewey, 1938). Despite initial instructional decisions being made due to the prior experiences of the participants, the motivation to design and provide experiences that met the needs of students came from the participants looking outside of themselves and examining the needs of those that they served (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938).

In the context of the first research question, participants made instructional decisions based on what they “knew” (Dewey, 1938; Horkheimer, 1972) of teaching and learning in a remote space. Because knowledge is not universal and is shaped by the experiences of the person wielding it (, what was “known” about providing education in a remote space by the participants was a result of what they had experienced with learning in a virtual space from the perspective of a student and, for Alan, as a teacher who taught distance learning in a very different capacity. When shifting to considering how the results of the interview answered the second research question, the stories of the participants made it evident that their perspective and factors considered had shifted when transitioning from the “how” decisions were made to “why.”

The responses of participants and the artifacts that they provided emphasized the idea that their decisions and the motivation behind them was driven by the expressed and perceived needs of their students and their interactions with them (Dewey, 1938). Their “why” and what participants did about/with it was addressed through a two-fold approach, not unlike that of looking through a window at different distances. A window can serve a variety of purposes sheerly from the vantage point of vision; the distance from the glass impacts how the viewer interacts with it and the purpose it can serve (i.e. being looked at or viewed through). This is how

participants viewed the instructional decisions that they made as they progressed through emergency remote teaching and answered why those decisions were made.

After making an instructional decision, participants took on more of an “outside looking in” perspective, using their insight into students’ lives and needs as a nose-against-the-window of sorts to identify what function and purpose their existing instructional decisions were serving in the lives and needs of their students; this allowed them to consider what they were seeing as a result of their decisions as shaped and interacted with by the experiences of the student responding (Freire, 1970). Simultaneously, the participants were able to step back a bit from the metaphorical up-close view to see what of their own experiences were reflected back to them through the decisions made and responses provided. There was a shift that took place throughout the time in which the participants navigated emergency remote teaching in that they had to consider both what they knew based on continuity and what they were experiencing in real time through interaction (Dewey, 1938), which also impacted the decisions that they made as they went (Dubose Brunner, 1994). Although the instructional decisions provided for students were interacted with and interpreted by them, they were still shaped by the beliefs and experiences of the person providing them (Macedo, 2006; Freire, 1970). Because emergency remote teaching came with a number of concerns, many of which were noted by the participants of this study, it is also essential to consider the existing inequities that may have been exacerbated but also those which were considered that may not have been previously.

Within the context of education “as usual,” there are a number of inequities that exist simply because that is the way it has always been done; the victims of these are those identified as the have-nots. The have-nots can be defined as those belonging to disenfranchised, marginalized, and oppressed groups, which means that education and the way that it is

traditionally navigated is not designed for them or their needs. These groups are considered to be impoverished, but not necessarily in the typical sense of the word (Huguelet, 2007; Carnevale & Desrochers, 2002). They do not have access to resources and information in way that allows them to operationalize it for their personal gain. Those who are identified as haves tend to start out in life at a baseline that allows them to only move up in the world; the have-nots do not. They start below baseline at varying degrees due to risk factors (Couillard et al., 2006) then have to mitigate that gap to move up at a rate that is comparable with their have friends. These disenfranchised populations are forced to live within the structure of education and find ways to conform (Freire, 1970); if not, the system in which they operate will continue to disenfranchise and oppress them, because that is what it is built to do.

There tends to be an overrepresentation of have-nots identified as having disabilities within the field of special education, especially if they have multiple risk factors which often overlap and are at play with each other due to various oppressive structures and interplays (Skiba et al., 2005; hooks, 1994; Bush-Daniels, 2008). Prior to COVID-19 and emergency remote teaching, the have-nots were the ones at the disadvantage as the school system was built to accommodate and serve the needs of the haves (Macedo, 2006); with the introduction of COVID-19 into education, suddenly the disadvantage was no longer only relegated to the have-nots within the system. Each of the students educated by the participants was provided the same experience, but their various experiences impacting them outside the realm of school also played a big factor in what they could or could not access. Because of this shift and sudden explosion in number of students who were now experiencing education in the same capacity as the pre-COVID have-nots (Darling-Hammond, 2010), the participants noted the shift in their motivation for their instructional decisions.

Dewey (1991) emphasized that, instead of expecting all students to fit into a mold that is the curriculum, the child themselves should be the curriculum. The knowledge gained from their lived experiences should be valued, and it should be understood that their experiences impact how they interact with and understand the curriculum (Emdin, 2016). Within the confines of emergency remote teaching, the participants of this narrative inquiry were able to see that. Not only were they able to see it, but they were able to and willing to take into account the impact that students experiences may have on their education and the instructional decisions provided.

At its most basic form, accessibility can be defined as being able to get something and use it, whether that is a physical need or information. Within the context of this study, the participants tweaked and redefined accessibility within the confines of emergency remote teaching. Not only did the participants seek to provide access to resources within the virtual space; they also sought to find ways to meet the various needs of students. Because of the introduction of COVID-19 to education, many students were now dealing with varying deficits depending on their lived experiences (Jordan, 2010; Chu, 2019; Andreasson et. al, 2015), not just the have-nots. Although not every need was able to be met by the participants, they found themselves thinking about what needs existed and how they could help to meet them to best support the students. This was done in a variety of ways such as encouraging them to go outside, join Zooms, completing tasks that reflect upon their current experience, and more. In doing this, the participants redefined accessibility within the context of education: meeting the physical, social, emotional, and mental needs of a student to help them simply survive and attempt to attend to higher level processes as their needs are met. This allowed for an attempt at teaching the whole child in so much as could be done within the confines of COVID-19.

While this does fall within the realm of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, it becomes accessibility because these various aspects are the foundational building blocks of education and learning. In a typical school day, there will be some students not getting their needs met for a variety of reasons; to support these students, individualized plans and structures are put in place to address these needs. Emergency remote teaching was the first time that these needs manifested on a large scale and required response by means of instruction. This is the foundation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Center for Applied Special Technology, 2020). With the shift to learning in the virtual space, COVID-19 allowed for the participants to see these inequities and the gaps that are contributing to them, which resulted in them making adjustments to their instructional decisions to meet the needs that were a direct results of these inequities. With that being said, it begs the question of why were those needs not being met on a broad scale prior to forcing it to happen? Why does education require a worldwide pandemic to make changes that are good for students on a holistic level as opposed to on an individual as needed basis? I do not have answers to these questions, but findings within this study suggest that while these changes and shifts occurred on a small scale as a result of emergency remote teaching, the changes necessary would need to be addressed on a large scale.

To summarize, the motivation behind why educators made the instructional decisions that they did was a direct result of their perception of student needs as determined by interaction with them and the moment in which emergency remote teaching occurred (Dewey, 1938). The changes that they made targeted accessibility for students both through means of providing access to resources and meeting needs to support students' baseline preparation for learning by means of instructional decisions. The shift in the participants' approach to providing instructional decisions centered student needs and experiences above all else, and yet it still

allowed for students to showcase skills. The decisions made brought to the forefront the existing and exacerbated inequities within education and brought up the question of if these things could be done on a broad scale during COVID, why were they not done before and are they being done now?

“Post”-COVID-19: Connection

Analysis of the data from the stories provided throughout the course of the final interview revealed that the answer to the third research question of “What lasting impacts exist within teachers’ professional practice as a result of the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching” is that teachers combined their “known” knowledge based on previous personal experiences with what information they were receiving as a result of how students chose to interact with the instructional experiences provided to identify student needs both during emergency remote teaching and in the time following (Dewey, 1938). Decisions were made and reflective of both the prior experiences that informed teachers existing knowledge base and were shifted as outside experiences and concepts shaped their understanding of needs based on their observation and understanding of how the instructional decisions impacted students and their experiences as well. This consideration of both the self and the external experiences of students shaped and continues to shape the instructional decisions being is an interaction of its own, thus creating an understanding and experience of how to navigate new and uncertain situations within the confines of education (Dewey, 1938; Dubose Bruner, 1994). As educators approached planning instruction in the “post”-COVID era, they were impacted by all of the experiences that led up to that moment and the act of planning itself. These decisions were considered by examining the continuity and interactions in which these instances occurred to better understand the context surrounding it.

Within the context of “post”-COVID instruction, the first concept that participants overtly examined was the continuity in which their previous instruction took place and how that impacted instructional decisions that they made as they progressed (Dewey, 1938). Continuity pertains to external factors that impact a person’s perception of an event due to previous experiences (Dewey, 1938). Participants viewed the instructional decisions that they made “post”-COVID from the perspective of both what they had done pre-COVID and what they had done during emergency remote teaching. None of the participants explicitly expressed that one style of teaching or the other was better for them. Rather, they noted a lot of uncertainty in what they were doing and how they were meeting needs during emergency remote teaching; each participant was still able to note some good things that they did and carried some lessons that they themselves learned about providing instruction into approaching their planning of instruction within the “post”-COVID era. The lessons that they learned while actively experiencing emergency remote teaching caused a shift from the participants’ pre-COVID instructional decisions as they were given a front row seat to how the existing inequities in the structure of education affect not only the have nots but everyone (Dubose Brunner, 1994; Dewey, 1938).

The second thing to be examined through the course of the final interview, although more on a subconscious level, was the impact of interaction on how the participants made meaning of their time during emergency remote teaching. Whereas continuity pertains to external factors and previous experiences to shape one’s understanding of an experience, interaction applies to the internal and immediate factors of an experience that shape how the participant(s) in that moment make meaning of the experience (Dewey, 1938). In planning for their “post”-COVID instruction, participants noted the interactions that had taken place during emergency remote teaching and

the concerns that they had based on those. They took this knowledge and implemented opportunities for more interactions so as to continue to monitor and gauge those specific areas of concern which trying to mitigate them. In understanding and observing the impact that the interactions during emergency remote teaching had on students holistically, participants were able to move into teaching in a “post”-COVID world and make informed instructional decisions with both the past and future in mind.

In considering the final research question of “What lasting impacts exist within teachers’ professional practice as a result of the experience of and decisions made during emergency remote teaching,” it is clear to see that the lasting impacts are a direct result of both continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938). Without having the frame of reference of how education was in pre-COVID time, the instructional decisions made during emergency remote teaching might have looked very different, thus impacting the full understanding of exactly what COVID-19 did to education as a whole. Having that timeframe as a space upon which to look back and consider allowed participants to consider how they wanted to shape their current and future instructional decisions as well. Understanding how the previous and current choices impacted students also played a role. It is easy to simply make a decision, but to have to see how that decision impacts others and the way that they experience it helped participants to make meaning of what they were doing and what changes needed to take place as they transitioned into the “post”-COVID world and beyond.

Summary of Theoretical Implications

Within the theoretical analysis of the interview and personal artifact data collected throughout the course of this narrative inquiry, there were two terms that kept coming back to the forefront of the conversation in addressing the research questions posed: continuity and

interaction (Dewey, 1938). These terms help to navigate and understand why an experience might be interpreted in the ways that it is by the people who lived and live through it (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Dewey, 1938). In considering the impact of these terms on the findings of this study, what became quickly evident was that continuity was the driving factor behind how decisions were made during COVID-19 and the initial shift to emergency remote teaching while interaction was the reason why things shifted as emergency remote teaching continued over time and some things changed for participants' instructional practice as they shifted to their "post"-COVID response. Simply put, when initially responding to something and making quick decision, the knowledge that the decision maker often relies on is their previous experience; as the decision maker transitions into living through that experience, they move to rely more on interaction as a way to inform what is happening, whether it is working, and what needs to change. Participants' each followed this track, and their stories serve as a means to observe how their experiences before, during, and "after" COVID inform their professional practice today.

Recommendations for Educators

It is important to consider how the findings of this study can help to inform the future practice of not only myself and the participants, but educators on a broader spectrum. Based on the common themes of interactions, accessibility, connection, there are some concepts worth considering when approaching making instruction decisions even in the "post"-COVID world.

In considering the theme of interactions, there was a theme addressed about learning occurring within the interactions. Participants were addressing this idea in relation to the way that they instructed prior to emergency remote teaching. They emphasized the importance of talking to students and having them talk to each other. Alan made a point that one of the hardest things about creating an engaging learning environment when he taught distance learning was

that he could not walk around the room to listen to students having academic conversations and engage with them in that moment. Although students may not individually have the background knowledge about a specific topic does not mean that a peer will not. Additionally, allowing students to pull in prior knowledge to help them connect the new information they are learning to will make it meaningful for them and allow them to engage with it in a way that will help them to recall and understand it better. Incorporating structured opportunities for students to interact in a multitude of ways about the content being provided will allow both them and the teacher to learn from each other.

As discussed within the findings, the definition of accessibility does not simply mean giving a student access to a resource or information; it means meeting them where they are at in all capacities. By prioritizing Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and identifying where the baseline for learning is that we expect students to be at, teachers can begin to view students through a lens that understands that variation is the only constant and students will never all be at the baseline for learning at the same time every day. This can be done through developing a thorough understanding of Universal Design for Learning, which promotes approaching instructional design with this idea in mind. Additionally, it can help us to view students more compassionately so as to address the needs that they have instead of feeling attacked by how those needs are manifesting within the classroom through behaviors.

Connection was the final theme identified within this study. While the previous two themes emphasized how to support students, this theme places a priority on teachers and their needs. Teachers need to be able to connect with each other in meaningful professional learning communities (PLCs). The introduction of COVID-19 into the educational structure left educators feeling isolated, out of control, and doubting their abilities. Schools must find opportunities for

teachers to building relationships and connect with one another, both personally and professionally. While having mentors for new teachers and designated PLC times throughout the week is a step in the right direction, districts and administrators must also consider their building climate and culture, and if there is a problem, acknowledge and take steps to fix it. Teachers willingly seek out professional interactions in various spaces, many online, but some of the most valuable resource can be found within their buildings. Collaboration should not be something that teachers feel like they have to do; it should be something that they want to do because they like and respect the people that they work alongside every day. When teachers feel connected and like they belong, it shows up in how they interact with and treat students and how students treat each other.

Recommendations for Further Research

Most of the existing research pertaining to COVID-19 in education focuses on students and the data that came as a result of emergency remote teaching. While this is valuable information and certainly helps us as educators understand the numbers that we are looking at and plan where to go from here, it is not the only thing worth considering in relation to COVID-19 in education. In this narrative inquiry, I focused on the factors impacting teachers as they made instructional decisions about how to provide literacy experiences during emergency remote teaching. Like with all qualitative studies, the smaller participant pool plays a limiting factor in so far as being able to generalize the results.

Based on my observations within the confines of this study and as a practicing educator, I have noted that many of the instructional decisions being made from district and curricular standpoints do not consider many of the things mentioned within this study. Future research delving into a variety of perspectives could help to better understand this trend and potentially

mitigate the gap between the teachers' experiences and the perceived numbers that are being viewed from a curricular standpoint. While a study of this nature could be done using narrative inquiry to understand motivations from both a district (macro) level perspective and teacher (micro) level perspective, it could also be done using quantitative and survey methodologies to capture a larger demographic (Riessman, 1993). I think that it would be worth comparing responses from the two parties to identify any similarities and differences, as well as to consider the impacts had on the different factors considered.

Further narrative inquiry could be of benefit in examining the emergency remote teaching experiences of teachers who taught at schools with a different demographic than Little Middle School as well as different subject areas and grade levels. The sample within this study all were provided with the same guidelines for how to provide instructional experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), so considering the experiences from a different district would allow for another perspective and to see if these findings were congruent across the various factors. While this would allow for consistency in the approach to the study, conducting a narrative inquiry would continue to limit the number of respondents unless conducted by a larger team, which also introduces other variables; however, the continued use of storytelling to convey the experience and the participants' interactions of it helps the researcher to better understand the various factors at play to better understand these experiences and the impact on the participant moving forward (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This would also allow an examination of whether a default to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) was a common decision for teachers on a broad scale, or if that finding was explicitly identified within this study.

Summary

This narrative inquiry used semi-structured interviews and personal artifact analysis to uncover a deeper understanding of the instructional decisions made by four middle school teachers as they worked to provide literacy experiences during the shift to emergency remote teaching. The literature reviewed examined the existing inequities identified within the pre-COVID structure of education and virtual learning environment. The theoretical framework used proposed that there is no right or wrong in considering experiences, but rather that experiences must be viewed within the context of when and how they occur.

Throughout the course of the interviews and artifact analysis, three broad themes emerged based on common themes identified: interactions, accessibility, and connection. The findings related to all three participants' stories was that instructional decisions are not something made at random; they are crafted and shaped by the continuity and interaction of previous experience and current contexts. Recommendations provided encompass both the needs of teachers as individual entities as well as larger structures to provide a framework in which teachers can provide the best instruction for their students. Further research considerations address looking at the findings of this study on a broader and differentiated scale to identify commonalities and differences between studies as well as to address broader structural concerns in how student needs are/are not being addressed. The most important finding that came from this study is that teachers not only want to teach, but they want what is best for their students, and not just within the classroom. When given the liberty to create something to try and meet student needs, they default to a model of education that centralizes Universal Design for Learning, but when structures are replaced, the model tends to defer back to what was used

before the introduction of liberty. Teachers want to do what is best for their students; it is up to the education system and structures in power to make it possible.

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Appendix A - Internal Review Board Approval



TO: Vicki Sherbert
Curriculum and Instruction
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number: IRB-11351

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 10/11/2022

RE: Proposal Entitled, ""But David can't read." The evolution of literacy experiences during the rapid shift to Emergency Remote Teaching."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category:Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Phill Vardiman on 10/11/2022 12:43 PM ET
On Behalf of IRB Chair

Appendix B - Initial Recruitment Email

Dear Participant,

I am reaching out to you because I would like to invite you to participate in my research study to learn more about the instructional decisions made during emergency remote teaching (the version of teaching utilized in response to rapid school closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and the lasting impact that it had on your professional practice. You have been selected as a potential participant because you taught at Little Middle School during the 2019-2020 school year and served students from my 7th and 8th grade Special education caseload in one of your core classes. Additionally, as we shifted to emergency remote teaching, you vocalized the desire to try something new due to the unique circumstances that we were attempting to teach in thus resulting in vastly varied experiences.

For the purpose of this study, data will be collected over the course of 3 1-hour interview sessions. During this time, we will address your professional experience, your experiences during emergency remote teaching, and the impact on your professional practice as a result. You will also have the opportunity to present a personal artifact(s) illustrating the shift that you made as a result of emergency remote teaching and explaining the meaning of it.

If you are interested in further information, please contact me at bmmadsen@ksu.edu for further details.

Thank you,
Blake Madsen-Davila

Appendix C - Institutional Review Board Informed Consent



University Research
Compliance Office

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Informed Consent Form

comply@k-state.edu | 785-532-3224

PROJECT TITLE:

"But David can't read:" The evolution of literacy experiences during the rapid shift to Emergency Remote Teaching

PROJECT APPROVAL
DATE:

10/11/2022

PROJECT EXPIRATION
DATE:

10/11/2023

LENGTH OF
STUDY:

3-6
months

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Vicki Sherbert

CO-INVESTIGATOR(S): Blake Madsen-Davila

CONTACT DETAILS FOR PROBLEMS/QUESTIONS: Dr. Vicki Sherbert (785)210-6349 sherbev@ksu.edu

IRB CHAIR CONTACT INFORMATION:

Lisa Rubin, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224; Brad Woods, Associate Vice President for Research Compliance, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

The purpose of this research is to examine the instructional decisions made during the shift to Emergency Remote Teaching due to COVID-19 by some of my former colleagues, why those decisions were made, and the last lasting impact it has had on your professional practice. Additionally, I will analyze the data to determine how it is reflective of broader social contexts and the impacts that these widespread contexts had and continue to have on education within the contexts of participant experiences.

PROCEDURES OR METHODS TO BE USED:

I will use a series of semi-structured questions over the course of the course of three 1-hour interview sessions located at mutually agreed upon locations by both the interviewer and interviewee. These interviews will be recorded and transcribed using MaxQDA. You will participate in member checks following each interview to ensure that the information collected during the interview process is accurate. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to participate in member checks following the analysis and composition of the documents to be used to share the results.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES OR TREATMENTS, IF ANY, THAT MIGHT BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO SUBJECT:

There are no alternative procedures or treatments that might be advantageous to the subject as a part of this research design.

RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS ANTICIPATED:

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

BENEFITS ANTICIPATED:

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY:

I will be conducting and recording semi-structured interviews collect my data. Based on participant preference, we will conduct the interviews either face-to-face or via Zoom. If conducted via Zoom, I will collect video recording to document the meeting. If we interview in person, I will utilize audio recording to document the information shared. The interviews will be transcribed using MaxQDA.

These recordings will be stored on a password protected external hard drive. Transcriptions will be stored in both MaxQDA and the password protected external hard drive owned by me. The recordings, both audio and video, will be stored for 5 years following the study. At that point, these recordings will be erased from the external hard drive and destroyed. I will keep copies of the transcriptions for 5 years following the study, at which point they will be destroyed and erased from both MaxQDA and the external hard drive.

The information or biospecimens that will be collected as part of this research will not be shared with any other investigators.

IS COMPENSATION OR MEDICAL TREATMENT AVAILABLE IF INJURY OCCURS?

☐ Yes ☒ No

Terms of participation: I understand this project is research, and that my participation is voluntary. I also understand that if I decide to participate in this study, I may withdraw my consent at any time, and stop participating at any time without explanation, penalty, or loss of benefits, or academic standing to which I may otherwise be entitled.

I verify that my signature below indicates that I have read and understand this consent form, and willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described, and that my signature acknowledges that I have received a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

(Remember that it is a requirement for the P.I. to maintain a signed and dated copy of the same consent form signed and kept by the participant).

PARTICIPANT NAME:

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE:

**WITNESS TO SIGNATURE:
(PROJECT STAFF)**

DATE:

DATE:

Appendix D - Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Interview #1:

1. How long have you been in education?
2. Where did you receive your teacher education training? What was your major/content area?
3. What grade level and content did you teach during the 2019-2020 school year?
4. How long had you served in that capacity?
5. Prior to March 2020, what type of training did you have regarding virtual or digital teaching?
6. Prior to March 2020, what experiences did you have with virtual or remote teaching? Where were those earned?
7. Prior to March 2020, what did you believe was the purpose of the course that you taught?
8. In your role during the 2019-2020 school year prior to March, what was the set up for your course and what purpose did you have for setting it up that way?
9. How did this set up contribute to students meeting your expectations of the purpose for your course?

Interview #2

1. Prior to school closing, what concept did you have of COVID-19 and how big of a concern did it seem to you?
2. When you heard the announcement that Governor Kelly was closing brick-and-mortar schools for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, what was your reaction?
3. Prior to “going online,” there was approximately a two-week period during which our building prepared for emergency remote teaching. What was your thought process about how you were going to structure these experiences during what Kansas termed “Continuous Learning”?
4. I observed that the decisions that you made pertaining to your instructional design varied greatly from what you were doing in the classroom prior to emergency remote teaching. What caused this shift in your instruction?
5. How did students engage with the content provided?
6. During this time, did you continue to shift your instructional decisions, or did you stick with the same concept that you started with at the beginning?
7. What factors impacted that specific decision for you?

Interview #3

1. When considering the instructional decisions you made regarding emergency remote teaching, what were your frustrations?
2. What things did you perceive to be successful?
3. In reflecting upon that time, is there anything that you would have liked to have changed based on what you know now?
4. In the time following emergency remote teaching, how has your professional practice in the classroom changed? How has it remained the same?
5. When you consider your current practice, are there any aspects of it that were implemented as a result of your experience with emergency remote teaching? If so, what are they?
6. Is there anything that you added or took away from your practice due to lessons learned during emergency remote teaching?

Personal Artifact Questions

1. What personal artifact did you bring?
2. What is the significance of this artifact for you?
3. Is this artifact related to a particular revelation in your teaching journey?
4. How does this artifact make you feel in regard to it and your experience with emergency remote teaching?