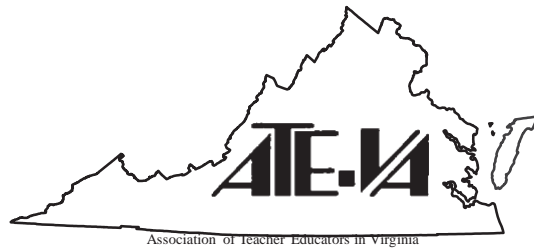


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Lights, Camera, Action? A Reflection of Utilizing Web Cameras during Synchronous Learning in Teacher Education

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Abstract

The onset of the COVID-19 world pandemic caused an unanticipated transition from face-to-face to virtual teaching in higher education. This health crisis impacted teacher education professors and students alike, as education classes shifted from in-person instruction to synchronous digital instruction. However, a significant observation was made during this transition: some education students elected to turn-on their web cameras during synchronous instruction, while others chose to turn theirs off. Therefore, an issue in digital teacher education arises. What are the advantages of students turning on their web cameras? What are the disadvantages of expecting students to turn them on? To address this critical issue, two doctoral education students reflect on their personal experiences during the virtual learning shift. Implications are also shared on the benefits of student choice in teacher education. The reflections are concluded with a call to action for research needed to address this notable research gap in digital teacher education.

Keywords: digital teacher education, synchronous learning, web cameras

The Covid-19 world health pandemic forced a sudden shift to online instruction in teacher education. This unprecedented crisis caused teacher educators to rearrange their face-to-face instruction to digital overnight. With this adjustment, teacher educators had to transition their instruction to be either asynchronous, synchronous, or a hybrid format. Asynchronous digital learning refers to education that does not occur in the same place or same time. Teacher educators were expected to learn online resources to create pre-recorded lessons and digital curriculum materials, whereas education students accessed the pre-recorded lectures through video platforms and responded through email, discussion boards, and collaborative documents. Collaboration and learning did not take place within a specific time frame (Ajabshir, 2019).

The alternative digital instruction in teacher education is synchronous learning. Synchronous learning is known as the more traditional approach in virtual instruction. It is defined as the method of online learning that happens in real time. The teacher educator and the education students interact in a specific virtual place, through a specific digital platform, at a specific time. Methods include live video lectures, chat boxes, small break-out discussions, and interactive polls. An advantage of synchronous learning is class engagement and connection to the learning community (Wang & Wang, 2020). The professor and students can view each other and interact with the usage of web cameras installed on computers. However, during this sudden shift to online synchronous instruction, a significant observation occurred that was likely experienced by the reader: some students had their web cameras turned on during synchronous instruction, whereas others chose to turn theirs off. The purpose of this article is to reflect upon our own experiences as doctoral students; one who chose to utilize the web camera during synchronous learning and one who did not. We also reflect on the benefits of providing student choice. We are education doctoral students who experienced this phenomenon as we completed university courses during the sudden shift to online synchronous learning caused by Covid-19. This reflection was spurred by our observations while we were in classes. For example, we observed an inconsistent web camera usage that depended on the characteristics of the synchronous class. Smaller class sizes typically had more students access their web cameras, while larger classes had fewer. Time was also an important characteristic for webcam usage. At the start of COVID-19 virtual learning in March of 2020, more students had their web cameras on, but then more students started to turn cameras off as the semester progressed.

Therefore, we bring the issue of student web camera usage in digital teacher education to the discussion. We guided our reflections with the following questions: How does utilizing the

web camera during synchronous lessons influence learning experiences? What are the advantages of students turning on their web cameras? What are the disadvantages of expecting students to turn them on? Following a brief literature review, we have provided each of our reflections about student web camera usage in digital teacher education.

Literature Review

The debut of personal computers, along with the internet, has revolutionized higher education and dynamically affected nearly every aspect of teaching and learning. As advanced technological features available on personal computers and general internet access become more widespread, the teaching and learning community is arguably becoming more connected than ever. Professors, researchers, and students no longer need to rely on the static presence of the university library, classroom, or office to conduct their studies, but rather use the internet as a tool that places knowledge, literary resources, and opportunities for collaboration at their fingertips. The introduction of web-cameras into personal computers and corresponding video conferencing platforms (e.g., Zoom, WebEx, Skype) grant further access, allowing users to meet instantaneously regardless of location, setting, or time zone. As a result, distance education research inevitably indicates that instructional formats other than in-person classes are increasing (Lewis et al., 1999; Parsad & Jones, 2005) and synchronous web-camera based courses have the potential to become a powerful part of a university's teaching repertoire. By extension, the use of web-cameras has the potential to enrich student experiences, especially when used for student reflection (Jefferies & Hyde, 2009). Yet, during the COVID-19 pandemic, web-cameras and video-conferencing platforms unexpectedly became an integral part of overall university survival.

Planning for virtual higher education courses can be a daunting task. Due to COVID-19, faculty suddenly assumed the unexpected task of designing online courses. Higher Education faculty face many challenges in this endeavor, especially while ensuring that courses are not only engaging, but also interactive (Hampton & Pearce, 2016). Yet, professional development regarding online instruction may not be provided, leaving university faculty with little guidance on how to transition and provide quality instruction within web-based platforms. Furthermore, many instructors may face a pivotal choice between providing asynchronous or synchronous instruction. In this decision-making process, there are many implications to consider.

Asynchronous classes facilitate anytime and anywhere teaching and learning (Martin, 2012), allowing for greater flexibility for users to collaborate and complete course assignments on their own schedule. Despite the flexibility, it is possible that opportunities for authentic teachable moments and on-the-spot networking are potentially lost. This prospective loss of connection could thereby contribute to a weak and disjointed teaching and learning community, especially when considering the positive benefits of social learning through technology (Swartzwelder et al., 2019). Contrastingly, synchronous classes allow for flexibility in teaching and learning locations but require a specific time where instructor and participants are together on a virtual platform or “classroom” (Martin, 2012). Although synchronous instruction requires additional technological preparation and a great deal of organization on behalf of the instructor, the practices innately embedded in synchronous instruction (e.g., chat features, web-cameras, breakout rooms, polls) have the potential to allow for more authentic conversation, greater collaboration, and deeper learning among participants.

More specifically, Martin et al. (2012) posit that synchronous courses allow for improved facilitation of discussion and interactions than asynchronous courses, with the instructor’s

personal teaching style leading to greater engagement with the content. Furthermore, Verneil and Verge (2000) note that students are successful in online courses when they are able to be active participants. As such, the added layer of web-camera usage during synchronous classes has the potential to yield great benefits (O'Steen, 2007). By crafting quality synchronous classes that highlight web-camera features, instructors can design classes that simulate in-person course experiences as closely as possible on a virtual platform. The use of additional video-conferencing features, including text chats and breakout rooms, allow for further personalization of instruction and increased opportunities for collaboration among course participants. As such, Mandernach (2005) asserts that high levels of interaction in online courses such as these are pivotal for increasing engagement and ensuring overall student success.

Reflection of Turning Camera On

Context

During the onset of the COVID-19 and consequential shift to digital instruction, I was taking doctoral education classes at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. My classes included education research methodology, education policy, and special education courses. It should be noted that class content, size, and instructional delivery varied among my courses. However, I elected to turn my web camera on for most of my digital synchronous classes. By choosing to turn on the webcam, I experienced short-term and project long-term benefits for my academic career. Here are four reasons why I chose to access my web camera and encourage other education students to do the same:

1. It reduces a feeling of isolation for remote learners.

As human beings, we thrive on social and human interaction. This is especially true for the education community. Social interaction is at the core of teaching and learning. It plays an

essential role as instructors and learners interact with each other within the classroom. During the interactive education process, learners organize their thoughts, reflect on their understanding, and analyze the gaps in their reasoning. This is often done through purposeful in-person learner collaboration (Wang & Wang, 2020).

However, with the quick onset of the Covid-19 world pandemic, we were quarantined from our professional and personal communities. Teacher educators and education students were forced to work remotely from home. Therefore, it is no secret: working remotely can be isolating. I experienced this firsthand during quarantine and for this reason found turning on my webcam to be beneficial. Electing to turn-on my webcam reduced the feeling of isolation, as I was able to see my colleagues and professors. It made me feel like I was part of a classroom community. An education community of real people and not just profile pictures, avatars, or blank screens. I felt more comfortable engaging in whole group virtual discussions, collaborating in small break-out sessions, and emailing others when I needed help. I had built relationships, albeit not perfect, around trust when choosing to utilize my webcam. They had seen me, the real me... and often my mischievous cat for an added bonus.

2. You remain accountable as an active listener.

Turning on the webcam encourages the learner to be more engaged in the synchronous class. You can't as easily hide multitasks such as making dinner, cleaning your house, or attending to another conversation. Should there be flexibility during synchronous instruction for household responsibilities? Yes, of course. Learning remotely from home presents its challenges, as many have family responsibilities. However, with the webcam turned on, I found myself to be less tempted by nonessential household multi-task activities. I was more likely to be an active listener to my education professors and peers.

As a current K-12 English Learner teacher, active listening has always been crucial to my curriculum. It is who I am as an educator and learner. Active listening involves whole body communication and refutes the notion that multitasking is possible when engaging to another's voice. As a result of active listening, respect can be shared between participants when engaging in a meaningful discourse. This is essential to establish trust before any rigorous discussions take place (Spataro & Bloch, 2018). Rigorous discussions can be scary as they involve risk. Would I feel comfortable partaking in a controversial education topic for class if I felt like my voice was not being heard? Probably not. Therefore, with the webcam turned on during a synchronous class, I am held accountable to be an active listener while I simultaneously assess the digital classroom to see if others are doing the same.

3. Facial expressions are visible.

In conjunction with being an active listener, webcams allow faces to be visible during synchronous classes. When faces are visible, facial expressions are also. In synchronous classes, the majority of the class have their microphones muted. This does not allow for all participants to "read" the room. By electing to turn the webcam on, others can see my facial expressions and gauge how I am feeling. This is beneficial because others, including the education professor, can evaluate my emotions and predict my understanding of the content. For example, an education professor has just asked a pivotal methodological question to the class, but there is no response. Do the students need more wait time? Are they confused about the question and need more clarity? Or, are they just not comfortable answering the question? Being able to see virtual learners' faces may reduce this confusion. Discussions become far more engaging and productive when facial expressions are visible (Spataro & Bloch, 2018).

4. It allows for the shift from virtual to in-person learning.

Eventually, we anticipate for this total virtual teacher education model to come to an end after the pandemic. How will teacher educators and education students handle this shift? Will I be able to develop meaningful relationships in-person? Will I even be able to recognize my peers? While virtual learning does not provide the same education community as in-person (Wang & Wang, 2020), webcams still allow for participants to become familiar with each other. When the webcams are turned on for breakout sessions, I have learned a lot about other students: their personal experience, research interests, and opinions about education. As a result, I will be far more comfortable collaborating with my peers when we return to in-person classes. I will be more likely to remember their names, personalities, and interests due to our interactions on the webcam. Rather than trying to recall a granulated profile picture, I will have a sense of who they actually are. Therefore, I anticipate that utilizing webcams will not only have short-term benefits, but also include long-term benefits for when this shift occurs.

Reflection of Turning Camera Off

Context

The shift from in-person learning to synchronous, virtual learning occurred so suddenly that I felt that the implications for human rights, respect for accommodations, and ethical considerations fell to the wayside. Whereas conversations surrounding these topics may have been prevalent in face-to-face learning, students were suddenly forced to become self-advocates for accommodations that they may not have been aware of, yet needed, on virtual platforms. While many higher education faculty automatically set a precedent where camera usage was required, some demonstrated empathy, respect, and understanding by allowing and supporting the student's choice.

During COVID-19, I and many of my peers became some of the aforementioned students facing the precedent set on the other side of the screen. Although we each may have had varied reasons for our choices, it quickly became clear that there is often a negative connotation associated with being the “black box” in a synchronous class. Yet, it is important to note that even among high-performing students, the hidden reasons to keep the web-camera off can be profound. As COVID-19 began to disrupt daily life and we began the inevitable shift to online learning, I was taking doctoral education classes at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia. My classes included literacy, education research methodology, and international education. Faculty responded to the crisis using online formats, varied teaching methods, and supplemental resources. During that period, several personal implications became increasingly evident. As such, I faced making a conscious choice to turn off my web camera during certain courses based on a variety of factors. While I continued to experience the benefits of fully participating in rigorous and rich class experiences through other modes (discussion, chat functions, polls, discussion board posts), I also connected with peers who shared similar concerns and turned their web cameras off while still maintaining high academic performance. Here are three reasons that I have elected to turn the web-camera off, either completely or during portions of class sessions, during COVID-19. I present them here to offer previously shrouded explanations, to draw attention to several important points for consideration, and to be an advocate on behalf of those who may benefit from the privacy afforded in this accommodation.

1. Don’t take a student at “face” value.

Every student that enters a classroom, whether the “room” is virtual or not, has value. When given the choice, most higher education students are capable of responsibly deciding what we think will be the best option for our growth, learning, and safety as individuals. When it

comes to high-performing students completing a doctoral program, there are typically intentional and carefully considered reasons for why one might elect or not elect to use their web camera. Regardless of choice, student engagement may still be high. Krause and Coates (2008) describe student engagement as the “effort and commitment that students give to their learning” (p. 1). Although I chose to keep my web-camera off during particular classes, I found that my class engagement and connection to my classmates was strengthened through the use of other platform features which have demonstrated potential for increasing student engagement, including social media (Heiberger & Harper, 2008), online collaborative work (Thurmond & Wambach, 2004), online discussion boards (Kahn et al., 2017), group texts, and breakout rooms. As such, effort and commitment can be observed in a variety of ways; a web-camera is not the sole predictor of overall quality of engagement within the digital space. Furthermore, Roache and Muschette (2020) posit that instructional design during online learning should be student-centered and continuously reviewed. Simply allowing choice is one way that faculty can embed a student-centered approach, reduce stigma, and demonstrate empathy and respect for the value that a student brings to class, whether they choose to show their face or not. Indeed, the value of a student’s contributions should be determined by the quality of their engagement, discussions, and work products, rather than their “face” value.

2. It acknowledges intercultural competence.

Our globalized learning community is a wondrous place, full of students and faculty from different cultures, backgrounds, and belief systems. As such, intercultural competence is a hot topic within education and is defined as “the ability to communicate effectively, and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one’s intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 194). It allows us to demonstrate empathy and understanding for

those who walk through this learning experience with us. Yet, even in a virtual format, intercultural competence needs to be placed at the forefront and demonstrated for all members of the teaching and learning community.

There are many implications for intercultural competence and virtual learning, yet some essential understandings have unfortunately been left behind since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, within the traditional in-person classroom setting, my observation was that educators were open to explore and understand the many cultural practices that their students bring to school with them each day. One such increasingly common exploration surrounds students' eye contact, including its use, meaning, and interpretation. For many cultures, eye contact denotes different meanings and can demonstrate either a sign of respect or disrespect depending upon the culture and setting in which it is used. This cultural understanding seems to have disintegrated in the shift to virtual learning. Forcing students to have a web-camera on may cause distress for students who are discouraged from excessive eye-contact in their home cultures and for those who believe eye-contact with instructors denotes disrespect. Eye-contact itself may be a postcolonial cultural practice that, when forced, has been shown to hinder relationships and cause misunderstanding among many cultural groups, including Native American (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015), Turkish (Korkut et al., 2018), and Korean (Lee & Carrasquillo, 2006) students. It is essential that educators proactively learn about, reflect upon, and incorporate these intercultural understandings within their virtual platforms. Furthermore, it is important to note that eye-contact is just one example of a plethora of ways that consideration of intercultural competence (or lack thereof) can affect the choice of web-camera usage. Teacher educators can proactively demonstrate respect and cultural sensitivity at an even greater level by

simply offering the choice of web-camera usage, and/or by asking students if they have a preference. They may be surprised by the cultural responses.

3. It offers equity and privacy.

The issues of equity and privacy are inevitable when inviting web-cameras into our private homes. There are several underlying and valid concerns stemming from these issues. One common concern is that many people simply are not comfortable showing their physical environment and other valuable material goods in their web-camera background. Yet, consideration is rarely given in conversation about sensitivities for students from inequitable backgrounds: those whose homes may not look like the typical American family home. It cannot be assumed that all students, even at the doctoral level, come from equitable backgrounds nor that all are comfortable showing differences, albeit indirectly, on a virtual platform. Furthermore, it cannot be assumed that all doctoral students are immune to the digital divide. COVID-19 has highlighted these issues of accessibility, access, and conducive learning environments (Du Preez & Le Grange, 2020), all of which can potentially impact learning quality during real-time web-camera usage. Indeed, we all have unique situations, living arrangements, and privacy preferences that deserve respect.

The sudden shift to virtual teaching and learning during COVID-19 has also reconfigured our definitions of “presence”. Although we may initially think that having a camera on during class denotes “presence” in class, virtual presence often carries a different weight than in-person settings and has the potential to become a source of anxiety. For instance, rather than a student walking into a traditional classroom, sitting in rows or at a small group station and facing the instructor, a student is suddenly forced to face everyone in class, every minute of the class session, without knowing who is looking directly at them at any given time. The pressure placed

on individuals (including those with anxiety) surrounding such experiences can be debilitating. The uncertainty of being “on stage” via technology to numerous unknown individuals can be a hurtful trigger and one that has the potential to distract a student from instruction completely. Sun et al. (2012) affirm that when anxiety is attributed to technology, student performance and satisfaction can be negatively impacted. This can be especially true for students who are trauma survivors and may potentially be triggered by their own reflection (such as a front-facing web-camera), resulting in negative emotional responses, thoughts, and dissociative states (Borgmann et al., 2014). Furthermore, these negative impacts on learning can be amplified by the required projection of self-images to others in a seemingly uncontrolled setting. Although faculty are often empathetic and kind when it comes to student accommodations, it is exceedingly difficult for many students who have experienced anxiety or trauma to advocate for themselves in a COVID-19 environment. In the instance that a student is currently experiencing trauma or an abusive situation, finding a safe and private place to express their needs via phone-call or video conference with a professor to explain their situation can be an immensely challenging situation to navigate.

Furthermore, it is essential to acknowledge that many students may worry about their physical environment not only in terms of their material belongings, but also about the people, actions, and events that may make an appearance during web-camera usage. Unfortunately, the lack of control around privacy can be a strong trigger for many students who struggle with insecurities surrounding their home lives. Some students are fortunate to be able to choose healthy, positive, and supportive environments in every sense, while others experience an inequity that they may feel needs to be hidden or disguised. It is not uncommon for students to wonder about the potential opinions of their peers, including questions like “Will they think my

house is messy?”, “What if my house looks different from others?”, or “What if _____ comes into the room again?” before turning on their camera. Although many students may turn on their cameras without a second thought, for others, clicking “video” may be a concession that is made upon a foundation of worry. As such, Roy et al. (2020) offer a simple, yet meaningful reminder: during the pandemic, many students are enduring emotional distress. The same could be said for all within the teaching and learning community. Providing choice in web-camera usage is one small step to address this potential issue and support students.

Benefits of Student Choice in Teacher Education (Apathy vs. Autonomy)

It may come as no surprise that education students learn more when they are motivated. Student motivation is increased when students have control over not only the learning material, but also their learning environment. Yet, apathy remains a consistent challenge of student motivation. As such, learning environments should be inclusive of students deciding for themselves if they want to utilize their web cameras. By providing student choice, faculty can combat this ubiquitous challenge.

Furthermore, student choice for accessing web cameras combats apathy because it offers students autonomy. Hanover Research (2014) posits that student choice makes students active participants in their education, which results in increased participation in both in-person and virtual learning environments. When education students feel comfortable learning remotely from their homes, they will have increased participation. Contrastingly, forced web camera usage policies where students do not have autonomy over their virtual learning environment may lead to decreased participation. As such, if students are forced with web camera policies in teacher education, they may experience frustration and become disengaged with the curriculum, a factor that may lead to attrition. Instead, autonomy in learning is generally associated with a higher

sense of well-being, satisfaction in educational environments, and academic performance (Hanover, 2014).

By having autonomy over web camera usage, students can connect with their strengths while attending to their personal needs in their home environment. The choice of accessing web cameras gives students the power and control over their virtual learning environment, which may boost their intrinsic motivation. While this is a significant benefit of student choice in virtual teacher education, examples of other potential benefits include: (a) students engage in richer and deeper cognitive learning, (b) students' emotional and social needs are met, and (c) student learning is differentiated (Anderson, 2016). When considering the benefits, student choice is a powerful “best-practice” often embedded within in-person teacher education programs. Yet, it can also be easily incorporated into virtual synchronous learning through student choice in web camera usage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the COVID-19 world pandemic created a sudden shift for all teacher education learning to occur online. As classes slowly transition back to in-person learning on campuses worldwide, a paradigm shift of virtual learning has occurred in teacher education; an increasing number of teacher education classes will be permanently offered in virtual settings. Therefore, it is imperative for more research to be conducted on the impact of student web camera usage for synchronous learning in higher education. There needs to be a call to action for researchers to analyze the effects of web camera usage during and after the COVID-19 world pandemic. In the meantime, there is no time to waste. Current education students enrolled in virtual distance learning need quality classes that support autonomy and equity. Teacher educators can craft supportive ways to build class engagement through synchronous learning,

with or without webcams turned on. Reflection of web camera usage is not only vital for education students, but equally important for teacher educators. In short, exercise caution; there are benefits for students turning their web camera on and off in online synchronous learning that extend far beyond their “face” value.

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Re-Designing Professional Development to Assist Instructors' Rapid Transition to Remote Teaching During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

As universities moved to remote teaching environments in response to COVID-19 pandemic, many teacher educators were forced to make the switch without any professional development. This paper presents an example of how faculty at one large public university in Virginia were supported through this process. In Phase 1 of our response we rapidly redesigned an existing Online Teaching Initiative (OTI) course and leveraged the expertise of previous course completers. The OTI was originally developed in the instructor-led, collaborative format. In response to the pandemic, it was moved to the on-demand, self-paced and unfacilitated format. For Phase 2, we have further redesigned the course so that one portion (3 modules) would be self-paced but facilitated, and the other portion would be instructor-led, collaborative with weekly deadlines. The topics covered in each portion were selected based on our personal experiences and faculty survey responses. Recommendations for other programs are discussed.

Keywords: professional development, teacher educators, online teaching and learning

Online learning has grown dramatically over the last 20 years (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Gemin & Pape, 2017). Before the Covid-19 pandemic, a third of all students in higher education in the United States took at least one credit-bearing course online and half of those students took all of their courses online ([National Center for Education Statistics, 2018](#); Seaman et al., 2018). The need for online learning has grown dramatically in 2020 as universities closed during the Covid-19 pandemic requiring students and instructors around the world to practice social distancing measures. Wherever possible, colleges and universities have turned their attention to online learning

solutions to maintain some continuity in student learning. Some have argued that these measures should not be called online teaching or learning and prefer the term “emergency remote teaching” (see [Hodges et al., 2020](#)). To exacerbate the problem, research has shown that teaching online requires different competencies, and skilled in-person instructors do not necessarily make quality online instructors (Barbour, 2012). Thus, with minimal notice and preparation, countless instructors were forced to transfer their content online as well as start teaching in this new format without sufficient time for robust professional development.

Barriers for Online Teaching

Even under the best of circumstances, preparing teachers for the online environment is challenging and often the bottleneck to meeting the student demand for quality online learning. Ertmer’s (1999) foundational research identified two barriers to faculty development. The first-order barriers were faculty members’ knowledge and skills and the second-order barriers were their beliefs, attitudes, and self-confidence. Of the two, Ertmer explained that first-order barriers are the easiest to overcome once time and resources are secured. Overcoming first-order barriers is foundational because instructors cannot teach online without sufficient technological skills and knowledge (Hillman et al., 1994). In fact, the available technology also determines the instructional strategies that can be used in a course. Anderson (2009) explained that as “technologies have developed, distance education evolved in parallel to support new forms of interaction, pedagogy and support services” (p. 111). The Internet has undoubtedly caused the most dramatic evolution in distance education. Prior to the Internet, distance education focused on learner independence and employed largely passive pedagogical methods. Although passive pedagogical methods persisted during the initial phases of online learning, faster internet speeds

and wider bandwidth have enabled more collaborative and constructivist learning (Garrison, 2009). However, these new capabilities do not guarantee a change in practice and many instructors simply use the internet to transmit passive learning to a greater number of students. Garrison (2009) argued that instead, online courses should be “less about bridging distances and more about engaging learning in discourse and collaborative learning activities” (p. 94). Thus, faculty not only need to develop sufficient technological skills and knowledge (first-order barriers), but also need to change their beliefs and attitudes towards online learning (second-order barriers). If instructors fail to overcome second-order barriers by reconceptualizing the types of teaching and learning that are possible online, they are likely to simply attempt to replicate the in-person environment or default to the transition of passive learning and ignore the new possibilities that the online environment affords.

Preparing Teacher Educators to Teach Online

If faculty are to overcome both first- and second-order barriers, those providing the professional development need to carefully consider not only what is taught, but also how it is taught (Norton & Hathaway, 2015). Unfortunately, research on preparing educators for online teaching often involves a limited subset of knowledge and skills without a meaningful focus on how those are taught. That is true for both studies that involve teacher educators and K-12 teachers (Moore-Adams et al., 2016; Parrish & Sadera, 2019). It is suggested that seamlessly incorporating technology use as well as active learning and modeling of online instruction can benefit both faculty in universities and K-12 teachers (Cooper et al., 2020; Gosselin et al., 2016; Norton & Hathaway, 2015).

In response to the COVID-19-related transition to emergency remote teaching, universities in general and teacher preparation programs in particular supported their faculty by providing

easy access to technology (e.g., Zoom), offering courses (e.g., on online course development), and conducting various workshops and webinars (e.g., how to engage students in a synchronous environment). As expected, research examining emergency remote teaching is still evolving and studies focusing on faculty preparation are especially sparse. Consistent with any new and rapidly emerging phenomenon, the initial research tends to include case studies. While case study findings should not be generalized, they can be insightful. Of particular relevance is Quezada's, Talbot's, and Quezada-Parker's (2020) case study. It explored one liberal arts college's brick-and-mortar teacher education program's rapid shift to emergency remote teaching. Quezada et al.'s open coding of documents and notes taken during webinars and teacher education meetings identified five remote teaching activities and possible focus areas for professional development: (1) providing instruction in both synchronous and asynchronous formats; (2) providing technology-based support and consultation for teacher candidates; (3) adapting course assignments and practicum experiences; (4) providing feedback online; and (5) maintaining social-emotional engagement in courses and clinical placements.

Indeed, establishing meaningful discussions and communications has traditionally been an important topic in effective online teaching practices (Walters et al., 2017). Collaboration and community are extremely important in the field of teacher education and should be supported regardless of the course formats. Boutelier and colleagues (2020) have reported on the use of online worklabs for providing accountability, immediate feedback, exposure to virtual platforms, and establishment of supporting professional learning communities (PLCs) for academic and social-emotional well-being. These hands-on experiences and discussions allow teachers to gain successful personal experiences, which later can be generalized to their own teaching experiences (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2010). During these critical times, many universities

have explored time-efficient and meaningful ways to provide high-quality professional development for teacher educators that would support both their technology competencies and offer professional support from peers (Jin & Redish, 2020).

Context and Rationale

In 2014, long before the pandemic, our college of education began offering an instructor-led and collaborative course to help teacher educators to teach online. Our six-week Online Teaching Initiative (OTI) online course focused on asynchronous teaching strategies, but participants also attended a webinar to learn synchronous online teaching techniques. The course design and facilitation were guided by the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison et al., 2000) and the Quality Online Learning and Teaching rubric (Christie, 2014). The CoI framework (<https://coi.athabascau.ca/>) is one of the most influential online learning frameworks with over 6,000 citations according to Google Scholar at the time of this writing. The Quality Online Learning and Teaching rubric, now called the Quality Learning and Teaching rubric (for additional information see <http://courseredesign.csuprojects.org/wp/qualityassurance/instructional-quality/qlt/>), was created by analyzing existing models and rubrics including the CoI framework.

Six modules of the OTI course addressed various topics of high-quality online instruction: (1) introduction to online instruction; (2) assessment and feedback; (3) student collaboration; (4) discussions; (5) presence and support; as well as (6) course design and development. The course was largely delivered asynchronously with weekly assignments and deadlines which allowed us to model facilitation strategies. We were especially aware of our facilitation techniques, knowing that they would likely impact faculty's perceptions of online teaching. Each module contained lessons and workshops that participants completed within their

sandbox course shell in the learning management system. Lessons included examples from other faculty as well as students within the college and university. Participants had a chance to engage in meaningful discussions and experience an organized group project. Digital badges were designed to certify participants in the various areas of online teaching when they successfully completed the varied activities. The focus of the original OTI course was on strengthening learner-instructor and learner-learner interactions (Garrison, 2009). For several years, the course has served an important purpose in preparing our college faculty to teach online. Since its inception, the course was offered 11 times with 136 instructors successfully completing it prior to Spring 2020. In an effort to study participants' experiences, we previously conducted a mixed methods study with 21 faculty members (Borup & Evmenova, 2019).

Based on data from pre- and post-course questionnaires as well as follow-up interviews, we found that a strength of the course was that participants experienced quality online learning as a student. For instance, the course included a lesson on how to provide quality feedback, and the instructor also modeled and provided feedback in multiple forms: text, video, audio, individual, and group feedback. When learning how to facilitate collaborative projects and discussions, they actually participated in a collaborative project and regular discussions. Our research found that learning activities were successful at overcoming both of Ertmer's (1999) first-order barriers (knowledge and skills) and second-order barriers (instructor beliefs, attitudes, and self-confidence) towards effective online teaching practices. That resulted in improved faculty knowledge, skills, perceptions, and attitudes required for high-quality online teaching (see Borup & Evmenova, 2019).

Limitations and Need for Further Development

We also recognized two primary limitations of the course. First, the course took a large

amount of time. On post-course surveys, OTI completers reported spending an average of 5.3 hours per week ($SD = 3.08$; range 1-20 hours) on course activities. While there was a high retention rate in the course for those who committed to it, we did observe a good amount of faculty who signed up for the course and then dropped it before completing a single assignment (attrition rate more than 40%). Based on informal communications with some of those faculty members, they dropped the course once they saw the amount of work that it demanded. Second, the course was only offered twice a year. Set start and end dates with weekly deadlines allowed us to model the type of learning activities and facilitation techniques that we wanted faculty to adopt. However, it also removed the flexibility that many faculty members wanted and ability to complete modules at their own pace.

The pandemic exacerbated the inflexibility of the course and increased the need for changes in the original OTI. When it was clear that all courses would have to be taught online, faculty needed rapid, flexible support—two adjectives that did not describe the OTI course. While the existing OTI course was successful at preparing faculty to teach online, it was not designed to provide the professional development for “emergency remote teaching” (Hodges et al., 2020). It had to be re-designed to support faculty in ways that were more flexible and personalized. Furthermore, we knew that many faculty members would be teaching their courses synchronously and the OTI course did not offer the level of support that they required.

Phase 1: Our Initial Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In response to the new, immediate needs of our faculty, we developed an on-demand version of the OTI course that offered six self-paced and unfacilitated modules with only essential information but numerous examples. We removed the introductory module and added a new module on synchronous online teaching. We also promoted synchronous webinars that a

faculty member in the college provided multiple times to prepare faculty to teach synchronously online.

Unlike the original course, the on-demand version was self-paced and unfacilitated. It did not require participation in discussions or submission of assignments. Instead, the workshops were re-designed as “challenges” for participating faculty. They could practice their newly developed skills through these challenges, but did not submit those and/or received any feedback from the instructor unless they requested that feedback. Faculty had an opportunity to apply what they learned within their individual courses rather than in sandbox courses as had been done previously. Group discussions were replaced with an FAQ discussion board and participants were invited to contact a facilitator who was available to answer any questions or concerns. We also identified successful completers of the original course within each department to help support faculty and respond to their subject-specific inquiries.

While this unfacilitated version of the course did not have any required learner-learner interactions, the on-demand content and instructor availability on the as needed basis were designed to help faculty quickly transfer to emergency on-demand online teaching. This on-demand version provided some support during the pandemic but represented the other side of the continuum from the original OTI course. The original OTI course was highly structured, instructor-led and collaborative, while the on-demand version was self-paced and unfacilitated. In order to ensure both modeling of best practices through facilitated activities, collaborations, and more flexibility, in Phase 2 we had to find the happy medium and further re-design the initiative.

Phase 2: Finding a Sustainable Balance Between Flexibility and Interaction

Our Phase 1 response to the Covid-19 pandemic focused on flexibility, on-demand

content, and providing opportunities for personalized support. This was seen largely as a stopgap measure but not a long-term solution since we were not providing faculty with quality feedback or opportunities to discuss and collaborate with their peers within the course. As a result, in Phase 2 we needed to find a sustainable balance between providing faculty with the flexibility that Phase 1 afforded as well as the collaborative online learning experiences that benefited faculty in the original OTI course and that we wanted faculty to adopt when creating their own courses.

Using Data to Inform Re-Design Efforts

In order to guide our re-design efforts, we reached out to OTI completers. A 26-item questionnaire, containing both Likert-scale and open-ended questions, was sent to the 136 OTI completers. Forty-one faculty responded yielding 30% return rate. They took the course across multiple years: 12% in 2014; 12% in 2015; 10% in 2016; 17% in 2017; 21% in 2018; 19% in 2019; and 9% could not remember the exact year. The vast majority of respondents received all the badges in the course (93%). Before the pandemic and since completing the course, 61% of participants taught at least one course online. This percentage increased to 100% in Spring 2020. Below is the brief description of the results and subsequent re-design decisions. Changes across different phases are also later summarized in Table 2.

Decision 1: Content. The results indicated that the vast majority of the 41 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the OTI provided them with the skills and knowledge necessary to...:

- ... teach an online course – 97%
- ... assess student learning using a variety of methods – 93%
- ... facilitate online discussions – 93%

- ... establish an online learning community – 85%
- ... facilitate student collaboration – 93%
- ... use Blackboard – 97%

These results confirmed that the organization of the OTI was successful in addressing the online teaching essentials and could remain the same covering the aforementioned topics. The open-ended question about any additional content that could be better represented in the OTI did not yield any additional topics. Faculty offered suggestions on how some areas could be presented in more detail (e.g., more on accessibility, the use of LMS analytics, more about grade center in the LMS). Several respondents also desired more information on the use of synchronous tools for both teaching and conducting office hours. As one faculty noted, “I'd love to know more about how to teach synchronous sessions using available tools.”

Decision 2: Knowledge & Skills. The majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the OTI course encouraged them to:

- ... to use technological representations (e.g., multimedia, visual demonstrations, etc.) to explain and demonstrate specific concepts in my content area – 100%
- ... to use alternative assessments in my courses (online and/or blended) – 81%
- ... to include more group/collaborative projects in my courses (online and/or blended) – 85%
- ... to establish instructor presence in my courses (online and/or blended) – 95%

OTI completers appreciated all the knowledge and skills they had received: from logically organizing a course in the learning management system to having an online presence and developing a community. Some, especially those with very limited experiences reported checking notes from the OTI course when creating content and designing learning experiences. Teacher educators more experienced in online teaching benefited from learning different programs and tools (e.g., Popplet, VoiceThread) and ways to incorporate those meaningfully into

the courses. A comment like this was not uncommon, “Coming in as someone with a lot of online teaching experience, I was surprised by how much I took away.” This reassured us that initiatives like OTI are important to provide to faculty, including those with online teaching experience. Moreover, those who have successfully completed the initiative were eager to have the refresher courses afterwards. In addition, many faculty members reported using what they learned to establish high-quality blended environments (e.g., multimedia presentations, alternative assessment ideas, using video to offer directions and clarifications on completing an assignment). Faculty appreciated the opportunity to incorporate hybrid learning activities, “especially when unexpected disturbances in the schedule occur[ed].” As one faculty noted, “I’ve been able to implement things I learned in the OTI course when I had to cancel class and the students had an online week.” This knowledge became crucial as the COVID-19 pandemic happened.

Decision 3: Flexibility. The main question we were trying to answer was how to make the OTI course more flexible and personalized while also modeling best practices and offering opportunities to collaborate. Seventy nine percent of respondents agreed that some topics such as introduction to online teaching, course organization in the LMS, and assessments could be effectively delivered in a self-paced format. As one respondent said, “It would permit those who have extra time the option of moving ahead.” The other 21% could envision this content presented in a self-paced, but facilitated format. All faculty noted how much they appreciated the feedback and accountability from the instructors. Thus, a decision was made to make self-paced modules with a facilitated format to allow participants to submit their work for feedback and receive help from the instructor when needed.

Decision 4: Interaction. At the same time, while some modules could be delivered in

self-paced and a facilitated format, faculty felt strongly about the benefits of interacting with peers and having the instructor model best practices. As one faculty noted, “I think we could work [independently] through some modules, but at some point we would need to collaborate with peers.” Such content as social presence and support, collaboration, discussions and synchronous instruction were identified by 63% of respondents as topics that needed an instructor-led, collaborative format as in the original OTI course. Even those who were open to the possibility of having these topics presented in a self-paced format noted the benefits of discussions and interactions with peers in these modules. According to one faculty, “Yes [these modules could be presented in a self-paced format], but I think the discussions around each really helped deepen my thinking and understanding of each [topic].”

Final Plan. Based on insights from the survey and our own personal reflections and experiences, we divided the OTI course into two portions. The first portion would be self-paced but facilitated with lessons and tasks. Faculty would also receive feedback on all submissions, but there would be no opportunities for discussion and/or collaboration with their peers. This allowed us to offer the first portion any time during the year with open, rolling enrollment. The second portion would be similar to the original OTI course and would provide robust opportunities to discuss and collaborate with other faculty enrolled in the course. The need for discussion and collaboration required us to set regular deadlines that would result in similar pacing across faculty participants. As a result, we planned on offering the course only at specific times during the year.

The faculty survey responses helped us to identify topics for each portion. The three self-paced modules would focus on designing and developing quality online learning experiences and the four collaborative modules would focus on facilitating strategies (Table 1).

Table 1

Plan for a Balanced OTI in Phase 2

	Self-Paced, Facilitated Portion	Instructor-led, Collaborative Portion
Modules (n=)	3	4
Focus	Online course design and development, assessments	Facilitation, discussion, collaboration, and synchronous
Pacing	No deadlines	Weekly deadlines
Peer Communication	None	Weekly discussions and collaborative activities
Feedback	Provided on all submissions	Provided on all submissions

Discussion

When faced with an emergency such as Covid-19, instructors need rapid and flexible support. In Phase 1 of our response, we provided faculty with a combination of asynchronous and synchronous professional development opportunities while still modeling some best practices for emergency remote teaching. Overall throughout the college, 293 courses (excluding internships, independent studies, and dissertation/thesis writing) in Spring 2020 semester were transferred from an in-person format to synchronous and asynchronous online environments. Continuity of instruction was maintained for more than 5,300 students. However, our Phase 1 response needed to place a high premium on flexibility even at the sacrifice of collaboration and communication. As a result, immediately following the initial shock of the pandemic, we began

designing a Phase 2 response that would provide more balance between flexibility and communication/collaboration.

Professional development contains three types of interaction: participant-content, participant-facilitator, and participant-participant (Moore, 1989). Each has its own purposes and affordances. Of the three, participant-content interactions can be on-demand and the most scalable. Once it was announced that all courses would be offered online to comply with social distancing and isolation recommendations, faculty needs were extremely high and overwhelmed our capacity to support faculty individually. As a result, during our initial response to the pandemic we focused on providing meaningful content and learning activities that could be accessible to faculty 24-7.

However, participants' ability to learn by interacting with the content and meaningfully applying their learning is limited and largely dependent on the participant's background and metacognitive skills (Bandura, 1986). In other words, learning is best when it is social. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the need for participants to interact with a highly skilled and knowledgeable facilitator. While these interactions cannot be completely on-demand, they can be personalized to each participant's needs and still allow for a high degree of flexibility. These one-on-one interactions between facilitators and participants can be time-consuming and can overwhelm facilitators when participant needs are high or when the number of faculty who need support far outnumber the facilitators, as was the case when campus was closed and all courses moved online. As a result, we had to leverage the online teaching expertise throughout the college. Thankfully we had been developing online teaching capacity for years and were able to depend on some of the 136 OTI completers to support less-experienced faculty within their academic units. We were also able to promote webinars as a way to provide synchronous professional

development opportunities.

Of the three types of interaction, formal participant-participant interactions are the least flexible and require the most synchronization and coordination. However, they are still extremely important when the goal is to improve participants' motivation, perceptions, and attitudes (Bandura, 1986). Anecdotally, we knew that these interactions were naturally occurring throughout the college, but we were unable to facilitate participant-participant interactions during Phase 1. Participant-participant became an important component to our Phase 2 OTI re-design that offers three collaborative and discussion-rich weekly modules.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

Findings from this research—as with all case studies—cannot be generalized since we examined “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998). As Stake (2010) explained, the goal of case studies is not to generalize but to understand and improve how things work. While not generalizable, this study can provide important insights to other colleges of education that are facing similar challenges and to researchers seeking to answer similar questions.

Based on our initial faculty response, our recommendation for other colleges of education is to start by taking inventory of their current resources and expertise. Once they have compiled resources for best online practices, they should explore ways to provide professional development in ways that meet the specific needs of faculty. Our experience also stressed the importance of balancing both on-demand and collaborative professional development. Based on the feedback from the course completers, our Phase 2 efforts would focus on re-designing our OTI course so that we offer both self-paced and facilitated modules as well as instructor-led and facilitated modules to teacher educators in our college (see Table 2).

Table 2

OTI Module Topics, Areas of Focus, and Formats across Course Versions

Modules	Areas of Focus	Original OTI	OTI On-Demand (Phase 1)	Balanced OTI (Phase 2)
Introduction to online teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to online learning • Common misconceptions of online learning • Technology affordances 	Instructor-led Collaborative	N/A	Self-paced Facilitated
Course Design and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Backwards design • LMS Basics • Different types of content • Course accessibility and copyright 	Instructor-led Collaborative	Self-paced Unfacilitated	Self-paced Facilitated
Assessment and Grading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advantages & disadvantages of traditional & alternative assessments • Qualities of effective feedback 	Instructor-led Collaborative	Self-paced Unfacilitated	Self-paced Facilitated
Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dimensions of online interactions • Facilitating online discussions • Effective discussion prompts 	Instructor-led Collaborative	Self-paced & Unfacilitated	Instructor-led Collaborative
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student collaboration online • Facilitating online collaboration • Tools for collaboration 	Instructor-led Collaborative	Self-paced & Unfacilitated	Instructor-led Collaborative
Presence, Feedback, and Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of establishing presence • Nurturing a sense of community • Strategies for responding to student needs 	Instructor-led Collaborative	Self-paced & Unfacilitated	Instructor-led Collaborative

Synchronous Learning Sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities for synchronous meetings • University-supported platforms • Case studies from within the college 	Included in the previous module	Self-paced Unfacilitated	Instructor-led Collaborative
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Professional Learning Communities

During the pandemic, we also recognized a need for faculty to receive personalized, one-on-one support. Knowing that we could not offer that level of support within on-demand OTI, we decided to leverage the expertise of the OTI faculty alumni by developing the Online Teaching Support Group. The group comprised of faculty across all academic programs within the college. All members of the group had extensive experience in online teaching and the large majority were successful OTI completers. The group became the primary contacts for faculty when they had questions or needed support.

Teacher education is a highly collaborative field, and the possibilities of establishing professional learning communities (PLCs) should be explored even after the pandemic is over (Boutelier et al., 2020). These PLCs can be a space to share examples of effective online teaching activities, ask any specific questions, and engage in conversation about experiences and challenges. As one of our OTI completers noted, “To be honest, sometimes it is just good to know that you are not the only one with challenges!” As faculty may or may not be teaching an online course while enrolled in the professional development course, such PLCs may provide a great opportunity to interact with others instructors when actually teaching online. PLCs can also significantly reduce the demands on professional development facilitators’ time. Perhaps most importantly, PLCs can be especially important when overcoming second-order barriers to change, a topic that requires additional research.

Conclusions

We understand that as a field we need to leverage our expertise to better understand the needs faculty have during this unprecedented time and how to best provide meaningful support. Similar to our previous research on the original OTI course (Borup & Evmenova, 2019), we have planned research to examine how our approach during this crisis helped faculty to overcome both first- and second-order barriers. For this event to have a long-lasting positive impact on future online teaching and learning, we recognize that faculty not only need to develop skills (first-order barriers) but also need to have positive attitudes and beliefs (second-order barriers) towards online learning (Ertmer, 2005). We strongly believe that collaborative efforts will be the most successful at meeting this global need. As a result, we will place a creative commons license on the new OTI course currently under development and invite others to collaborate.

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Building Community in a Pre-Service Teacher Cohort During a Pandemic

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Abstract

The onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020 impacted not only how students in our public and private schools were taught, but also how the professors prepared preservice teachers to become future teachers. Striving to build a community of practice among a new cohort of M.A.Ed-Elementary Education preservice teachers, faculty worked collectively to transition from face to face to virtual instruction, selected materials that encouraged hands-on learning, adapted assignments to allow for the building of community among our students, and built positive relationships with students to allow for open lines of communication. Though we felt like we were building the bridge while crossing it, the ultimate goal was to form a cohort of preservice teachers that supported one another as a community during the transition to an online learning environment while managing the challenges of both the in-person and hybrid field placements.

Keywords: cohort, pandemic, remote learning

The formation of “communities of practice” and “learning communities” are a relatively new way of thinking about how students share knowledge and experiences while earning both undergraduate and advanced degrees (Trust et al., 2017; Wenger, 2018). One example of this design is what is called the cohort model often found in the field of teacher preparation. A cohort for this purpose is loosely defined as “a group of about 10 to 25 students who begin a program of study together, proceed through together, and end at approximately the same time” (Maher, 2005, p. 195). This type of design was initially popular in the field of law and medicine, but it is now commonly found throughout higher education including teacher education programs.

Benefits of a cohort model for teacher preparation include the bonds that are made between the

students, a sense of affiliation to the group, shared experiences, and the structured format that establishes a clear pattern of courses to be taken.

The professors in the program were aware that building a community of practice (Wenger, 2018) in an online setting for a cohort of students would require ensuring students were engaging with one another both during the synchronous meetings and asynchronous assignments. Research into engagement in online classes is not a new topic but one that has received an increased interest due to the influx of online degrees, remote learning, and in light of the current pandemic. Respondents to a national survey on online education indicated that students often perceive that online courses typically include a lack of connection with other classmates and the instructor, issues with motivation and remaining focused, and an instructor that was unavailable or inconsistent with communication (Aslanian & Clinefleter, 2012). The professors knew that if the online program was going to be successful in addressing these issues, the classes and coursework would need to be designed to include many of the same strategies used for creating an in-person community of learners.

A review of recent literature focused on building community in online classes and provided several key elements that are essential for students to feel engaged and connected. Included in these elements are that the professor sets the tone for the class through the establishment of an environment of open communication, availability, and interaction (Karchmer-Klein, 2020; O'Malley, 2017; Ornelles et al., 2019; Wehler, 2018). The reality is that many online courses are “based solely on text discussion...that really results in an anemic experience” (O'Mally, 2017, para. 2). It is important that the professors and students connect with one another socially, cognitively, and through the instructional learning environment (Ornelles et al., 2019). This is most efficiently done when a professor acknowledges the personal

factors each student brings to the class, encourages social interaction both during synchronous meetings and when students are working asynchronously, and designing projects that incorporate elements of problem-based learning. Structuring assignments that require interaction both inside and outside of the classroom provides for opportunities with engagement and interaction that supports the building of community and the connectedness needed for students to overcome the traditional feeling of isolation often associated with online learning (Ornelles, et al., 2019).

The Elementary Program

The university where the program is located is a public land-grant research institution in the southeastern part of Virginia. The students apply to the program seeking an M.A.Ed and licensure in Elementary Education PreK-6. Students traditionally apply in the fall or spring during their senior year in their undergraduate program. A traditional cohort includes approximately 30 students who then begin the program immediately following their spring undergraduate graduation. The Curriculum and Instruction M.A.Ed with licensure for teaching grades PreK-6 can be completed within 12 months if students have completed two additional courses required for licensure (usually completed during their final semester of their undergraduate program). Those courses are Psychological Foundations for Teachers and Educating Exceptional Learners across the Life Span. These can be taken at the end of their master's program which would then result in 14 months for completion of the program. Table 1 demonstrates the schedule for completing coursework in the M.A.Ed program.

Table 1

Overview of the M.A.Ed : Curriculum & Instruction (Licensure-PreK-6)

Summer One (6 Hrs)	Summer Two (6 Hrs)	Fall (18 Hrs)	Spring (18 Hrs)
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Theory & Practice in Early Literacy Instruction PK-3	Linguistic Theory & Instruction in Reading and Written Expression	Theory & Practice in Content Literacy Instruction 3-6	Culturally Responsive Teaching & Classroom Management
Adv C & I Elem/Middle Math	Research on Assessing Student Achievement	Adv C & I Elem Math 4-8	Elementary School Curriculum
		Adv C & I Elem/Middle Science	Elementary STEM Education
		Adv C & I Elem/Middle Soc Studies	
		Field Studies (6)	Internship in Education (9)

Completing the master's degree program over the course of 12 to 14 months means that the students who enter this program spend many hours together in courses and field placements with the members of their cohort. Though many natural bonds form between the students and the leaders and primary professors in the program, we also work to encourage camaraderie, collaboration, and a true community of practice (Wenger, 2018). For most of the students, this community of practice continues during their internship and student teaching placements and after graduation as they embark on their teaching careers and continue to network with their former cohort members.

Covid-19 Challenges

During the spring of 2020, the cohort of 27 students were approximately halfway through their student teaching experience and most had already taken over as the primary teacher in the classroom when schools closed. Though the closure was anticipated, it still came as a shock when the Governor announced on the 13th of March 2020 that all schools would close until further notice. With little preparation, teachers across the commonwealth had to quickly learn how to teach their students virtually, and many of the school divisions were unsure of how to

incorporate the student teachers into this new model. This left the student teachers feeling lost and confused; and although some were permitted to support or teach during the shutdown, some school districts did not allow them to participate. The sadness that settled over the cohort was palpable. The students worked diligently to try to find ways to assist their cooperating teachers and the students in their placements, however, the overall experience fell short of the high expectations held for the student teaching semester.

We, as their professors, continued to meet with them for our scheduled seminar virtually rather than in person. Additionally, contact was made with the cooperating teachers to help identify areas where the student teachers might provide instructional assistance with students through online lessons, materials production, or preparing packets to send home to those without internet access. All student teachers within this cohort were able to complete the required number of hours for licensure due to some flexibility provided by the state department of education. The students and professors gathered online prior to the virtual graduation to allow for a congratulatory celebration on completion of the program and to commend the students for flexibility and determination during a global pandemic, but, nonetheless, it all fell short of expectations.

As the cohort was completing their less than desirable end to the program, a new group of 28 new students was nervous to begin their journey to becoming a teacher. These students submitted their applications during the previous fall or spring. In early May, the university announced all summer classes would be held virtually. The summer sessions had traditionally been the catalyst for the cohort to become a community of practice (Wenger, 2018). Due to the intense nature of the summer sessions, students would spend long hours in class getting to know their cohort, work collaboratively on projects, and form bonds that would carry them through the

more challenging components of the program. Additionally, field trips were planned to local educational settings, social events, and other collaborative exercises to help them grow as a community. The question that loomed was how to build a cohort that would be a community of learners through virtual classes?

Overview of a Typical Cohort Experience

As demonstrated in Table 1, students enroll in two courses in each of the Summer I and Summer II sessions. Each class normally meets for three hours (one section in the morning and one section in the afternoon) Monday through Wednesday. This schedule was designed to give students opportunities to engage in partner work for either/both of their classes on Thursdays or Fridays. So, although there were only three scheduled class days, the additional two weekdays were included in the design of the courses. Multiple opportunities for partner work were embedded into classes to continue building community.

Transitioning from Face to Face to a Virtual Cohort

All of the professors for both summer sessions met as soon as the announcement was made that all classes would be virtual. As professors, we knew that teaching the courses with the original schedule would be a challenge, not only for the professors, but more specifically for the students. It was difficult to imagine students sitting at a computer for two virtual three-hour classes back to back each day and we knew it would not be conducive for active learning or processing of information.

Through virtual discussions, a compromise was developed that courses would be taught in a hybrid format integrating both synchronous and asynchronous instruction. Instead of the classes meeting Monday through Wednesday (three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon), the schedule was adjusted to allow more flexibility for the students. In each session,

the literacy class would be taught two mornings a week while math would be taught the other two mornings. It was determined that this compromise would be better suited for student instruction.

This schedule was shared with students for feedback prior to finalizing it and was met with approval and relief. The students did not want to sit in front of their screens for six to seven hours a day and then spend even more time on their computers preparing for the next day's class. At this point, the professors had not yet determined how we would build community within a virtual cohort.

Curriculum Components and Resources

Traditionally, the courses involved a lot of hands-on work with both early literacy and math manipulatives. In previous semesters, course professors prepared, and distributed manipulatives owned by the university for instructional activities. This practice ensured students could engage in authentic practice using the literacy and math manipulatives that they might use in their own classrooms. Because distributing hands-on manipulatives was not possible in a virtual setting, it was decided that in addition to the textbooks selected for the courses, students would also be required to purchase kits and other materials for all summer courses. The kits selected for the literacy courses included upper- and lower-case magnetic letters, leveled readers, chart paper, and a choice from a list of picture books for comprehension instruction. Math manipulative kits included colored pencils, index cards, graph paper, and a designated hands-on collection of resources. The use of the manipulatives for instruction was modeled in class and then students were given opportunities to actively practice using them. Additionally, students were assigned to breakout rooms to work collaboratively with classmates to design and practice

lessons. This allowed for establishing relationships with both professors and classmates through the interactive lesson development and practice.

For fall courses, the university gave professors the option of holding classes smaller than 50 in person, in a hybrid format, or all online. All classes with enrollments over 50 were to be held remotely. Again, the professors who would be working with these students met to discuss how to address the fall semester. Many of the area school districts opted to follow a hybrid student grouping protocol that included students broken down into smaller groups and assigned days of attendance by letters of the alphabet. For most divisions, students would be in the buildings, depending upon grade levels, on Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays with Wednesdays held open for cleaning and professional development. In order to allow students as much opportunity to be in the schools as possible, we moved classes previously scheduled for Tuesdays to Wednesdays since students could not be in their placements on Wednesday.

The university mandated that all classes begin remotely for the first two weeks of the semester to allow students to quarantine before in person classes could meet. We knew it was imperative to try as much as possible to allow for the building of community and to check in on the wellbeing of our students. We also understood that the summer course schedules had led to many of them feeling isolated and afraid of contracting the virus. Of the five classes the cohort was scheduled to take in the fall, three of the courses were meeting remotely in a synchronous online format and two were scheduled to meet face to face on campus. Students were also assigned a 20 hour a week internship placement, for which they had the additional requirement of following their specific school division's Covid-19 guidelines.

After the first two weeks of classes, an increase in Covid-19 cases both on campus and in the region forced the cohort to continue classes virtually. Additionally, some of the school

divisions who had started in-person instruction switched to remote instruction for two weeks with the rise in cases. Although it was important to start in-person instruction, the professors decided to survey the students to determine their comfort level for meeting campus. The overall response from the students was that they wanted to meet face-to-face but would prefer to meet virtually to limit the possibility of exposure to the Covid virus. The students wanted to earn as many internship hours as possible even if this meant they would have to isolate themselves from classmates. Their requests were honored and all courses were online through the end of October.

Strategies Implemented to Build A Community of Practice

Morning meetings. Several strategies used during the summer courses that allowed for a sense of community included whole cohort virtual town hall meetings to address common concerns and questions, in class group assignments that encouraged interaction and collaboration with class members, and in-class breakout rooms tasks that allowed for mixed groups to work toward a common goal or accomplish a task. Additionally, morning meeting activities (Kriete & Davis, 2017) were used as “getting to know you” activities to facilitate opportunities for students to engage in informal discussions related to more personal or shared experiences for building community. Examples of morning meeting themes that helped students to get to know one another and helped to build community included the sharing of bags with personal items, poetry slams (with props and personal poetry), and temperature checks (how are you feeling activities). Students were also challenged to lead the morning meetings to allow for practice engaging others in a virtual environment.

Group assignments and presentations. Group projects and presentations had always been foundational in the coursework across the program. Therefore, extra effort was put into designing assignments that would allow for collaboration and the building of community. Many

assignments were structured to include opportunities for students to share their background, experiences, and personal characteristics. This was accomplished through the creation of poetry, stories, and the sharing of educational experiences and challenges. Once completed, items such as “the best part of me” poems were combined into a class anthology that was shared digitally with the students. Additionally, Zoom breakout rooms were utilized to assign students both randomly and manually to allow for multiple opportunities to be grouped with different individuals.

In the past when the courses met in person, students would collaborate more during scheduled course meetings but then work on bigger projects independently outside of class. Due to the hybrid format and the limited amount of synchronous time, much of class time was spent sharing the content and meeting for small group discussions. Larger assignments, including unit planning, were done outside of class in small groups or with partners. Originally, students were allowed to self-select their partners for projects but found they preferred the automatic group assignment feature on Zoom because it was difficult to find group partners when you were not physically in class together.

The incorporation of different technology platforms also increased engagement during class and groups assignments. Students created FlipGrid book walks (<https://info.flipgrid.com/>), Jamboard word sorts (Google Suite), Storyboard (<https://www.storyboardthat.com/>) poetry collections, and Canva (<https://www.canva.com/>) anchor charts. The professors also took advantage of materials that would have traditionally required a membership fee, like Raz-Kids (<https://www.raz-kids.com/>) that allowed for free access due to the challenges of teaching during a pandemic. The goal was to not only increase class engagement but also to encourage

exploration of technology they could use in their internship, student teaching, and future classroom.

Field trip. As the fall semester progressed, it became apparent that a group gathering was needed in order to continue to build our community of practice and to further the relationship we were striving to build with the students. The decision was made to schedule a visit to a local pumpkin patch and Christmas tree farm to provide just this type of experience. The outdoor space and ability to social distance would allow engagement with one another on a personal level. Of our 28 cohort members, only 25 were able to attend due to three members needing to quarantine as a result of Covid-19 exposure. Others who attended included two professors, four university supervisors, and the Associate Director of Academic Programs. The pumpkin patch chosen for our event often hosts elementary students and provided an experience that was both enjoyable and educational. Students were able to collect instructional ideas for teaching the difference between evergreen and deciduous trees, the need to rotate crops for optimal production of pumpkins, and the use of children's literature in teaching about agriculture. This face-to-face meeting proved to be a highlight of our fall semester and a welcome change from our traditional zoom classes.

Availability. Throughout the summer and fall, students were reminded continuously that we were available to them should they have any concerns or if they just needed to talk. When possible, classes were ended 15 minutes early to allow for individual students to have one-on-one meetings with the professor or for small groups of students to ask questions about assignments. Open lines of communication and flexible availability assisted with making connections with the students and provided opportunities to alleviate anxiety and fear that naturally occurs during periods of isolation and uncertainty.

Additionally, town hall meetings were scheduled that brought together all of the members of the cohort at one time to address questions, concerns, and essential program information. This allowed for control over the flow of information to the students and limited confusion that comes when information is passed from student to student rather than from program leaders. University Supervisors, Professors, and the Associate Director of the Office of Academic Programs were included in these group meetings so as to give students access to all information for their placements, the campus guidelines, as well as information about their courses. These meetings were especially helpful as fall semester placements progressed to allow for the sharing of updates from our school district partners. Over the course of the summer and fall semesters, a total of four town hall meetings were utilized to disseminate information, address misunderstandings, and answer questions.

Internships Placements and Experiences

Internship placements proved to be a challenge for programs across the commonwealth. In previous years, students were placed at one of three districts for their fall field-based internship and were then placed in a different district for their spring student teaching placement. The different placements provided experiences both in regard to the diversity of student populations within the districts and opportunities to teach at both lower and upper grade levels. Placement requests were disseminated to public-school partners to determine if our students would be able to have face-to-face field experience placements in the fall. The professors were well aware that area districts were still grappling with what their opening plans would be and how they could best provide for the safety of their students and teachers. Of the three districts we reached out to for placements, two of the districts were still willing to commit to allowing our students to participate to whatever degree was possible. The third district, the most diverse of our

placements, was not willing to commit to accepting interns or student teachers. This information forced us to scramble, along with other colleges and universities in the region, to make other arrangements for student placements. By late August we had confirmed placements for all of the students, but we still do not know what type of experiences our students would get or what restrictions would be placed on them in order to be able to remain in the schools. We were fortunate that the southwest region of Virginia had not experienced the spikes in Covid-19 cases that other regions in Virginia had experienced and that the majority of our students would be able to get experiences in a face-to-face environment.

Expectations for field placements. Through virtual town hall meetings and email communications, we continued to inform our students of the expectations of the university, the local school districts, and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). Thankfully, our local school divisions followed the guidelines from the CDC when establishing protocol for social distancing, the wearing of masks, and exposure to or diagnosis with Covid-19. It was not easy to tell 28 college students that they needed to wear masks/face shields at their placements, continue to social distance whenever possible, stay away from groups of people larger than 10, and to constantly track their health.

One of our biggest challenges was working with them to handle the social engagements, primarily weddings, that they had committed themselves to attending prior to the start of the semester. Many of their friends had postponed weddings from the spring to the fall when the pandemic hit, and they wanted to attend these events. Multiple meetings were held with students, program leaders, and the Associate Director of Academic Programs trying to determine that, if the student attended a wedding on a specific Saturday, they would have to wait five days to get a Covid-19 test, and then quarantine until their results became available. Several students came to

the realization that staying on campus and attending the wedding virtually was the safest option, but not without a profound feeling of loss for the celebrations being missed.

Covid-19 exposures and testing also provided challenges throughout the fall semester. Several of the members of the cohort had a roommate or friend who had tested positive or was exposed and then they had to follow the protocol to make sure they did not have Covid-19 leading to missed time in their placements through no fault of their own. This led to several students missing weeks at a time in their placements. The goal for the fall internship placements was for students to accumulate as many hours as possible of face-to-face teaching so that we would have these hours if schools shut down again like they had the previous spring. Students were aware of how lucky they were getting any form of in-person placement and that they needed these opportunities desperately in order to be well prepared for student teaching and their future classrooms.

Intern observations and evaluations. One request from our school district partners was that all field based observations and meetings would be done virtually. Students had traditionally been asked to create a video of one lesson during their fall placement but never for their entire experience. In order to accommodate this request, the number of required formal observations versus informal observations of lessons was reduced and a protocol was established with the school divisions to allow for virtual observations to be conducted without compromising students who had not given permission to have their image recorded. Ultimately, it was decided that the interns would continue to submit one lesson in a video format but that the remainder of the observations, mid-term conferences, and final conferences would all be done virtually by the University Supervisor and would not be recorded. Due to the smaller class sizes and social distancing being implemented in the classrooms, it was not difficult to set up the computer being

used for the observation to focus on the intern rather than the students within the individual classrooms.

As the fall semester progressed, two of the cooperating teachers with interns switched from a hybrid format to a totally virtual format. Rather than changing their placement, these students were permitted to continue with their assigned teacher and to teach their formal and informal (observed) lessons, virtually. For all students, the log of hours was redesigned to include a column to designate whether the hours were earned in a face-to-face setting or remotely. Students who were in quarantine due to attendance at a social event, a Covid-19 exposure, or a positive test result, worked with their sponsoring teacher, whenever possible, to teach remotely while quarantining.

Conclusion

Though the program leaders felt like we were trying to build a bridge while crossing it, the overall conclusion was that success was achieved in building a connected cohort of students who were beginning to include many of the key elements of a community of practice. This connection was evident in the group projects submitted, the observed support students gave one another when faced with Covid-19 exposures, during the face-to-face group gatherings at the pumpkin patch, and the feedback received at the conclusion of the semester. Though the experience of going from face-to-face to a virtual cohort model went well, challenges along the way allowed the opportunity for program leaders to pause and reflect on practices when working with students in a virtual environment.

One challenge that was ongoing was placement of students for their student teaching experience for the spring semester. Though all students were placed for the fall internship experiences, teachers in the field seemed less likely to take a student teacher for the spring

semester. The human resources contact in the partner school divisions indicated that they were having a difficult time finding enough student teaching placements. Traditionally, the teachers in the partnership districts were eager to volunteer to have a student teacher but given the current challenges they were facing to provide instruction; it seemed that they felt that a student teacher was one more obligation on their already full plates.

Due to the many one-on-one meetings required from students traveling to weddings, family events, or to other engagements, we had a town hall meeting to talk about the upcoming spring semester and student teaching. Though it was not the intention of program leaders, the stern warnings about traveling out of town and remaining vigilant on social distancing came across as insensitive to our cohort. Thankfully, due to the work on creating connections with students and keeping a line of communication open, several students reached out to express their feelings about the message to let us know that they believed they were doing all they could and did not feel this effort was acknowledged.

We understand now, that even as we navigated to create this community of practice for our students, they were also trying to cross the bridge that we were building. More attention was needed on the feelings of isolation students were experiencing while trying to meet the guidelines and expectations for the university, their school divisions, and what we expect from them while they are in the program. Although they were in placements during the week, they were still isolated from their families and most were diligent about socially distancing from the peers because they wanted to be with their students in the field. Balancing expectations with the acknowledgement of the sacrifices that they were making in order to become a teacher needs to always be at the forefront of the decisions that are being made when preparing future teachers in this current climate. Modeling the expectations and practices that we expected of them to utilize

in their future classrooms is paramount to creating a community of practice that promotes a community of learning.

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**Preparing Teachers During a Pandemic:
Virtual Practicum in an Undergraduate Literacy Course**

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Abstract

High-quality field-based experiences are at the core of teacher preparation programs; however, the COVID-19 pandemic severely limited access to such placements for pre-service teachers. This descriptive study examined how virtual tutoring in a summer-semester intermediate literacy course impacted both pre-service teachers and students served. Pre-service teachers worked in dyad pairs to plan and implement reading and writing instruction for a student in the local community in grades three through six using video conferencing platforms. Findings indicated virtual tutoring led to pre-service teachers feeling prepared to work with students in grades 3-6 in one-on-one, small group, and whole-class settings, along with feeling prepared to locate texts for this age group. Tutees felt they learned more and were more excited about reading in virtual tutoring than in their regular school experience. Both groups indicated successes and challenges during the experience.

Keywords: clinical experience; virtual practicum; teacher education

Field-based experience is central to any high-quality teacher education program (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2018); however, the COVID-19 pandemic challenged traditional placements of pre-service teachers in classrooms. Suddenly, schools had to close buildings or limit external guests. Furthermore, schools were wholly focused on adjusting their own instruction and services with minimal capacity left to mentor future teachers, especially those early in their preparation. Despite these limitations, teacher preparation programs were still responsible for offering meaningful clinical experiences.

To explore alternatives to in-school field-based experiences, I crafted a virtual tutoring experience for students in my intermediate literacy course in the summer of 2020. I wanted my pre-service teachers to experience working with actual student readers, aligning with advice I

received from literacy researcher Gordon Wells during a video call in my doctoral work: he suggested if pre-service teachers could meet the needs of one student, then they could meet the needs of a small group, and finally, they could meet the needs of their whole class (personal correspondence, 2012). In this descriptive study, I used a mixed method design to investigate the research question: How does virtual tutoring impact both pre-service teachers and students they serve?

Literature Review

To gain a deeper understanding of the potential impacts of a virtual practicum experience in my intermediate literacy course, I reviewed literature exploring (1) practicum and teacher preparation programs, (2) literacy-focused practicum experiences, and (3) practicum in virtual spaces.

Practicum and Teacher Preparation Programs

High-quality, field-based practicum experiences provide learning opportunities foundational to future teachers' pedagogy that coursework alone cannot replicate (International Literacy Association & National Council of Teachers of English, 2017; Risko et al., 2008; Sailors et al., 2004). Many teacher education programs include university-delivered coursework alongside elements of fieldwork, with placements in local schools (AACTE, 2018). Without careful planning, coursework and fieldwork can feel disjointed and unrelated (Darling-Hammond, 2010); therefore, careful planning for meaningful integration of coursework and fieldwork is at the heart of a high-quality teacher preparation program (AACTE, 2018). Impactful field-based experiences allow pre-service teachers to not only observe, but also to practice pedagogical skills with ample opportunities for clinical coaching from expert mentor teachers and university instructors (AACTE, 2018).

Literacy-Focused Practicum Experiences

The International Literacy Association (ILA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (2017) reviewed research focused on preparing literacy teachers to name key elements of high-quality programs. Four critical quality indicators included knowledge development, application of knowledge within authentic contexts, ongoing teacher development, and ongoing assessments. Specifically, the second quality indicator focused on specific necessary elements of field experiences, such as prolonged engagement and explicit guidance and mentoring; focused field experiences; and engagement with culturally and linguistically diverse students and families. Risko and Reid (2019) described this element as “authentic practice that is extensive, coherent with program content and goals, and well mentored” (p. 424).

Sailors et al. (2004) studied the field experience features of eight undergraduate teacher preparation programs that the ILA identified as high-quality preparers of future reading teachers. Common features across these programs included (1) focusing on developing pre-service teachers’ reflection skills; (2) offering field experiences in a variety of contexts—different grades, backgrounds, and instructional groupings—and with appropriate scaffolding, based on careful course and field experience sequencing and field-based feedback from a more “knowledgeable other” (p. 348), such as classroom mentor teachers and/or university faculty members; and (3) tutoring struggling readers in one-on-one settings, either in classrooms or university reading clinics. All eight of the high-quality programs studied did provide these one-on-one tutoring experiences, with direct supervision from either a classroom teacher or the university instructor.

Nelson, Papola-Ellis, and Giatso (2019) described the outcomes of fieldwork in a literacy methods course. The course involved 95 hours of fieldwork over a 12-week period, with

the coursework delivered at the field placement school. Researchers noticed pre-service teachers developed deep understandings of literacy instruction, an ability to authentically differentiate their literacy instruction, responsive “in-the-moment” teaching skills, and confidence as future literacy teachers.

Hoffman et al. (2019) reviewed 62 studies published between 2000 and 2017 examining literacy tutoring and mentoring as part of pre-service teacher preparation programs. Trends emerged in four overarching areas. Regarding structural or design features, university coursework often occurred alongside a semester-long tutoring assignment, mostly reading-focused and often completed with small groups or individual tutoring at local schools. Additional structural features included coaching support for pre-service teachers during the tutoring experience. The second area addressed the learning and growth of pre-service teachers during the tutoring/mentoring experience, including improvements in literacy knowledge, instructional skills, relationship building with families, students, and colleagues, understanding culturally responsive teaching, and moving beyond deficit views of students being tutored. The third area established long-term learning and growth of pre-service teachers after tutoring/mentoring experiences. Finally, the fourth area was mediating factors associated with pre-service teacher growth, such as building relationships, connecting academic content with tutoring experiences, and coaching pre-service teachers during the tutoring/mentoring experience. Of the studies reviewed, few looked at literacy work in digital spaces.

Allen and Swearingen (2002) studied how both pre-service and in-service teachers developed their understanding of literacy instruction in a university reading clinic for at-risk readers. The pre-service teachers worked in pairs to offer weekly instruction, with one pre-service teacher offering instruction while the other observed through a one-way mirror. The

findings and discussion did not address the partner-based structure of the experience for the pre-service teachers, either the rationale for or results from this set-up.

Practicum in Virtual Spaces

High-quality practicum experiences involve extensive time in field-based placements, with appropriate scaffolding provided by a more expert other. While traditional field-based placements involve physical presence in a classroom or other educational setting, some research examined elements of practicum completed in virtual spaces.

Hixon and So (2009) reviewed literature about virtual practicum experiences and named three categories of technology-enhanced field experiences. Type I field experiences occur in traditional, physical classrooms, with technology used for supervision, reflection, or communication. Type II field experiences involve remote observations of classroom teachers and/or students using videoconferencing or pre-recorded videos. Type III field experiences are fully virtual, using tools such as virtual reality and computer-enhanced simulations.

Billingsley and Scheuermann (2014) reviewed fourteen studies utilizing Hixon and So (2009)'s Type II and Type III technology-enhanced field experiences for pre-service teachers in special education programs. These studies used technology in four main ways: multimedia case studies; videoconference technology for remote supervision of pre-service teachers; audio-cued coaching for "bug-in-ear," real-time feedback; and virtual reality platforms allowing pre-service teachers to interact with avatar "students."

Several studies successfully leveraged technology (such as Skype) to facilitate scaffolding and mentoring through activities such as post-observation reflection and debriefing (i.e., Reese, 2017). However, the actual practicum experiences remained situated in local schools. Using the search terms "teacher preparation," "practicum," "field experience," and

“virtual,” there were no articles using virtual tools, such as videoconferencing, for pre-service teachers to tutor students in real time as a form of clinical experience.

Methodology

This descriptive study used a mixed method design to investigate the research question:
How does virtual tutoring impact both pre-service teachers and students served?

Context

Located in central Virginia, our institution is a public liberal arts university serving approximately 4,400 undergraduate and 300 graduate students. Focused on language and literacy development for students in grades three through six, the intermediate literacy course I teach is in our College of Education’s five-year undergraduate pathway. Pre-service teachers complete 20 practicum hours in certain courses, including this course. Typically, we work with our Director of Clinical Experiences to arrange placements for students based on their schedule availability, course needs (i.e., a literacy- or math-focused setting), and previous practicum settings, to provide candidates with varied placements. In accordance with CDC guidelines and to reduce risk for our pre-service teachers, no in-person practicum experiences occurred during the summer of 2020. Instructors developed alternative practicum experiences to meet their instructional goals.

To offer a meaningful, field-based placement for my intermediate literacy course, I designed a model of virtual tutoring. I structured the experience to include ten hours of planning and ten hours of tutoring, which translated into two hours of planning and two hours of tutoring each week for the duration of our five-week semester, or 20 total hours. Pre-service teachers worked in dyad pairs to plan weekly tutoring sessions. Each week, I provided goals (see Table 1)

to align tutoring with topics discussed in class. I also provided resources for students to read and asked them to work in dyads to plan to meet weekly instructional goals (see Figure 1).

Table 1

Weekly Instructional Goals for Virtual Tutoring

Suggested Pacing	Instructional Goal(s)	Practicum Portfolio Component Due
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting to Know Each Other as Readers & Writers • Baseline Assessments of Reading & Writing 	Practicum Contract Reflection #1
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Comprehension Strategies & Assessment • Writing: Heart Map & Memoir Writing 	E-Text Evaluation
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Fluency Strategies & Assessment • Writing: Heart Map & Memoir Writing 	Reflection #2
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Vocabulary Strategies & Assessment • Writing: Free choice genre(s) 	Literacy Workstation Evaluation
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: Wildcard Strategy (whatever you and the student choose!) • Writing: Free choice genre(s) • Closing 	Reflection #3

Figure 1

Sample Weekly Resources to Support Virtual Tutoring

Activity Set #1: Preparing for Virtual Tutoring

Your practicum goals this week are:

- Getting to Know Each Other as Readers & Writers
- Baseline Assessments of Reading & Writing

To prepare, please complete these experiences.

- Virtual learning tips: "[14 Ideas on Remote Learning with Jennifer Serravallo & Friends](#)"
- Reading: CHOOSE ONE of these articles:
 - McLean (2019), "The Shallows? The Nature and Properties of Digital/Screen Reading"
 - Schugar (2013), "Teaching with Interactive Picture E-books in Grades K-6"
- Writing: Read this article:
 - Portman (2019), "Reflective Journaling: A Portal into the Virtues of Daily Writing"

Given these resources, your own ideas, and prior knowledge, how do you intend to meet those virtual tutoring goals this week? Your response should make it clear you have engaged with the resources above.

My response:

Students submitted weekly reflections following virtual tutoring, addressing questions like, "What did you learn about your student as a reader and a writer this week? What are their strengths and learning needs? How will this information impact your subsequent instructional choices?" I read each reflection and provided written feedback to students, with suggestions for subsequent tutoring sessions including instructional moves (such as fostering engagement or comprehension strategies), books or online resources to read together, or ways to support tutees' writing. I also met with some dyads on Zoom to talk through challenges and problem-solve together. In this way, I filled some of the roles a mentor teacher would in a traditional practicum setting.

Prior to starting the tutoring program, pre-service teacher dyads communicated with families to establish what dates, times, and platform would be best for virtual tutoring; I suggested Zoom or Google Meet, since both are accessible to attendees without requiring an account. Pre-service teachers submitted a practicum contract documenting the logistics of

planning and tutoring, as well as long-range planning for who was responsible for reading or writing instruction in each session.

Participants

In this study, I worked with two distinct groups of participants: pre-service teachers in my course, and literacy student tutees in grades three through six.

Pre-service teachers. I used convenience sampling (Patton, 2002) to recruit participants from pre-service teachers in my class. I invited students to participate in the research project via emails and announcements on our learning management system. A colleague collected consent forms and communicated with participants to protect their identities until the semester ended.

Of my 24 students, nine agreed to participate in the study. Six students returned the pre- and post-assessments, for a response rate of 67%. All participants identified as female; half had finished their sophomore year and half their junior year of college. Because of the sequencing of the class, this was not the students' first practicum experience: they had a minimum of two other 20-hour practicum experiences prior to enrolling in this course.

Literacy student tutees. I worked with the Resident Services Coordinator of a local housing project with an established relationship to our university to recruit students in grades three through six living in the community via convenience sampling (Patton, 2002). Another teacher in the school district who graduated from our literacy specialist program the previous year provided recommendations for students who would benefit from free literacy tutoring to fill remaining spots.

All twelve students who participated in virtual tutoring agreed to participate in the study and completed the survey, for a response rate of 100%. Twenty-five percent of participants

recently completed each of second, third, fourth, and fifth grades. Most participants identified as female (66.7%), with 33.3% identifying as male.

Data Collection and Analysis

I collected data from three surveys, all administered anonymously via Google Forms. Pre-service teachers completed two surveys, one as a pre-assessment and one as a post-assessment and created an identifier so I could pair their responses for analysis. Literacy student tutees completed a survey at the end of their experience. All surveys included both quantitative questions, asking participants to respond on a Likert scale between 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree), and open-ended qualitative questions.

I utilized descriptive statistics and *t*-tests for quantitative data collected, and thematic analysis using the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) for qualitative, open-response data collected in the surveys. All analyses were completed using Excel.

Findings

Based on results from surveys, virtual tutoring impacted both pre-service teachers and literacy student tutees in different ways.

Pre-Service Teachers

On the survey, quantitative questions addressed three main areas. First, I established pre-service teachers' level of comfort working with intermediate (grades 3-6) students in literacy in one-on-one, small-group, and whole-group settings (survey questions 1-3), mirroring the realities of literacy instruction in an elementary classroom. Question 4 addressed the uniqueness of the virtual practicum experience. Questions 5 and 6 examined the pre-service teachers' level of comfort with elements related to planning, such as collaboration with peers and locating texts for

students to read. The results for each question are in Table 2. Statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-assessment occurred in Questions 1, 2, 3, and 6.

Table 2

Paired Samples t-Test Comparing Pre-Service Teacher Pre- and Post-Survey Results (n=6)

Question	Pre		Post		<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>P</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Q1: I feel prepared to work with intermediate (grades 3-6) students in literacy in one-on-one settings.	2.67	1.47	4.5	0.3	-5.97	5	0.0019*
Q2: I feel prepared to work with intermediate (grades 3-6) students in literacy in small-group settings.	2.83	1.77	4.5	0.3	-5	5	0.0086*
Q3: I feel prepared to work with intermediate (grades 3-6) students in literacy in whole-group settings.	2	0.8	4	0	-5.478	5	0.00012**
Q4: I feel in-person literacy instruction is more effective than virtual instruction.	3.83	0.97	3.83	0.97	-0.349	5	0.52
Q5: Working with a partner/colleague to plan and implement literacy instruction is helpful.	3.83	0.97	4.5	0.3	-1.195	5	0.11
Q6: I feel comfortable locating texts for	2.83	0.97	4.17	0.57	-2.697	5	0.012*

intermediate (grades
3-6) students to read.

Note. *Indicates significance at $p < 0.01$. **Indicates significance at $p < 0.001$.

The two areas without statistically significant differences—questions 4 and 5 on the survey—also had the highest pre-assessment means. Pre-service teachers’ responses to question 4 increased slightly after completing the virtual practicum experience, meaning they did not lower their opinions of virtual teaching after trying it. As for question 5, pre-service teachers may already realize the power of collaborating with a partner or colleague to plan and implement literacy instruction.

In the post-assessment, I asked two additional questions to reflect on the impact of virtual tutoring on students’ growth. Pre-service teachers agreed with the statement “I felt virtual tutoring had an impact on students’ reading skills,” ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.57$), and agreed slightly more strongly with the statement, “I felt virtual tutoring had an impact on students’ writing skills” ($M = 4$, $SD = 0.67$).

Open-ended questions. On the pre-assessment, pre-service teachers addressed potential benefits of and concerns about tutoring a child virtually. Commonly identified potential benefits included the personal, one-on-one nature of tutoring, and the ability for instruction to continue without location-based restraints. Other potential benefits included families being more involved, students and tutors getting to stay at home while continuing instruction, and needing fewer materials. One response indicated no potential benefits. The most common concerns about tutoring a child virtually included accessibility of materials, especially internet access; limited proximity to gauge a child’s performance; the ease of re-teaching and explaining misconceptions; building and maintaining personal connections with tutees; and keeping tutees engaged.

On the post-assessment, pre-service teachers identified successes, challenges, and impacts of virtual tutoring on their future classroom teaching. Table 3 lists emergent themes ranked in order of popularity. These responses indicated that pre-service teachers felt successful developing students' literacy and digital literacy skills, personalizing instruction, and building relationships with students, while they faced challenges with engagement, writing instruction, communication, and internet connectivity.

Table 3

Pre-Service Teachers' Successes, Challenges, and Lasting Impact of Virtual Tutoring

Response Category	Emergent Theme	Example Student Responses
Successes	Literacy Skills	<p>"My student learned several new vocabulary words. We saw an increase in reading level from the beginning to the end."</p> <p>"We had successes with writing; my student initially mentioned challenges with brainstorming, but the heart map activity helped her come up with new ideas for writing. My student enjoyed listening to part of an audiobook and reading an e-book. She made many inferences and improved her visualization, summarizing, and synthesizing skills over the course of the tutoring experience."</p>
	Digital Literacy	<p>"Graphic organizers became very useful when sharing the screen on Zoom."</p> <p>"My student loved the chat feature on Zoom and used it to pose questions he thought of during reading and for writing activities."</p> <p>"[We used] Google docs for writing sessions."</p>
	Personalization	<p>"The child liked to be creative with their writing instead of being told what genre they had to focus on."</p> <p>"I was able to figure out what my student's interests were and incorporated them in our reading and writing activities."</p>

	Relationships	<p>“I formed a great relationship with my student and already had a good relationship with my partner.”</p> <p>“It was nice to have one-on-one time with the student that an in-class environment might not have offered.”</p>
	Literacy Identity	“They referred to themselves as a writer for the first time!”
	Enjoyment	“We had fun working during our tutoring experiences!”
Challenges	Engagement	<p>“I found family interruptions and background noise to be a challenge keeping my student focused.”</p> <p>“Student motivation in working at home [was lacking].”</p> <p>“[We had] challenges with attendance/tardiness.”</p>
	Writing Instruction	<p>“[It was hard] not being able to see her writing because she didn't turn on her screen or utilize the chat option in Zoom, so she always read her writing aloud.”</p> <p>“[It was hard] monitoring my tutee's writing assignments and having them show me things they wrote and drew in their journals.”</p>
	Communication	“Difficulties [arose] with gauging her interest in activities because she was reserved and hesitant to answer questions reflecting her perceptions of our lessons.”
	Materials	“[We had] Internet issues.”
Impact as a Future Teacher	Literacy Instruction	<p>“I found resources I can use in my future class room, and it made working with students on reading and writing seem less scary.”</p> <p>“My virtual tutoring experience solidified my readiness to become a teacher. I feel confident I'll be able to meet my students' learning needs in the future and find plenty of resources to support them.”</p>
	Online Learning & Resources	<p>“It provided me with insight into navigating online learning as an instructor.”</p> <p>“It taught me to have an abundance of interactive activities with short lectures.”</p>

	“It allowed me to realize that virtual tutoring is possible and students can still learn even if it's through a screen.”
Personalizing Instruction	“It made me feel more prepared for working with a student one-on-one.”
Adaptability/ Flexibility	“It taught me that as teachers we have to be able to adapt at any time to several different methods of teaching. We must do anything we can to continue instruction time even if there are bumps in the road or if we are uncomfortable with something new.”

The pre-service teachers’ anticipated benefits and challenges did align with actual successes and challenges, with a few exceptions. While pre-service teachers anticipated the benefit of one-on-one instruction, they did not anticipate specific literacy and digital literacy skills students would develop under their instruction, nor did they anticipate the power of relationships formed with both tutees and dyad partners. Interestingly, building relationships was initially mentioned as an anticipated concern instead of an anticipated benefit. Anticipated concerns and actual challenges strongly aligned, including student engagement and the lack of proximity in assessing students’ work, especially for writing instruction. Pre-service teachers stated they learned important lessons for their future teaching, including strategies for literacy instruction as well as online learning; ways to personalize instruction to meet individual students’ needs; and the importance of flexibility.

Literacy Student Tutees

On the survey for literacy student tutees, quantitative questions compared perceptions from the previous school year and virtual tutoring in two main areas: students’ learning of reading and writing skills (survey questions 1-2), and students’ excitement about reading and writing (survey questions 3-4). Table 4 summarizes the results.

Table 4

Paired Samples t-Test Comparing Tutees' School and Virtual Tutoring Experiences (n=12)

Question	School		Virtual Tutoring		<i>t</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>P</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Q1: I learned a lot about reading.	3.75	0.75	4.33	0.61	-2.24	11	0.046*
Q2: I learned a lot about writing.	3.92	0.63	4.42	0.45	-1.73	11	0.11
Q3: I felt excited about reading.	3.42	2.81	4.08	1.72	-1.38	11	0.19
Q4: I felt excited about writing.	4.08	1.36	4.17	1.06	-0.22	11	0.83

Note. *Indicates significance at $p < 0.05$.

While tutees' responses were only statistically significant in Question 1, all of their averages were higher for virtual tutoring as compared to their experiences during the previous school year.

Open-ended responses. In addition to the quantitative questions, literacy student tutees were asked two open-ended, qualitative questions about their favorite and least favorite aspects of virtual tutoring. Reading was most often listed as a favorite aspect, aligning with the statistically significant results for Question 1. The next most popular response was liking their tutors: they liked talking to their tutors, and their tutors made learning fun. Other responses about favorite aspects included writing and being able to complete the tutoring experience from home. For the least favorite aspects of virtual tutoring, the most common response related to time. Some tutees said it was too long; others said it was too short. Other least favorite aspects of virtual tutoring involved activities like taking notes, coloring, reading online, and writing.

Discussion

Even though this virtual tutoring model involved only one-on-one instruction, the pre-service teachers noted statistically significant improvement in their levels of preparation to teach one-on-one, in small groups, and especially in whole-group settings. This finding aligned with Sailors et al. (2004), who found all eight high-quality literacy programs analyzed included opportunities for one-on-one literacy tutoring, among other placement contexts (small group, whole group, and individual).

Furthermore, pre-service teachers' open-ended survey responses aligned with the findings of Nelson, Papola-Ellis, and Giatsou (2019), who noted participants developed deep literacy content knowledge, instructional differentiation skills, responsive teaching skills, and increased confidence as future literacy teachers. The survey results indicated that this virtual tutoring experience impacted future teaching through raising awareness of literacy instruction, online learning and resources, ways to personalize instruction, and the importance of adaptability and flexibility.

Relationship building was another finding supported in the literature. Tutees commented on enjoying reading instruction their tutors offered and personal relationships with their tutors. Hoffman et al. (2019) also found pre-service teachers grew in building relationships. Allen and Swearingen (2002) paired pre-service teachers together to offer individual tutoring sessions, though they did not explicitly investigate the nature of collegial relationships of dyads. While survey results did not indicate a statistically significant difference in pre-service teachers' perception of working with a partner to plan and implement instruction, the pre-survey data revealed they agreed with this idea ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 0.97$), and agreed even more strongly in the post-survey ($M = 4.5$, $SD = 0.3$).

Timely feedback or coaching on field-based performance is a key component of high-impact clinical experience (AACTE, 2018; ILA & NCTE, 2017, Risko & Reid, 2019; Sailors et al., 2004). In lieu of a mentor teacher, I served as the “knowledgeable other” (Sailors et al., 2004, p. 348) coaching pre-service teachers by reading and commenting on weekly plans for instruction and reflections after tutoring. While no pre-service teachers directly commented on the nature of coaching I provided, the literature confirms this element should remain part of any virtual practicum experience.

Finally, defining the nature of a virtual practicum remained elusive. Hixon and So (2009)’s Type I, Type II, and Type III field experiences did not completely align with the present model. While the field experience was fully virtual, it also did not rely upon tools such as virtual reality and computer-enhanced simulations; rather, technology facilitated real-time interactions between pre-service teachers and literacy student tutees.

Implications

While we long to return to the “normal” we knew before COVID-19, the reality is clear: pre-service teacher preparation programs will continue to face the challenge of providing meaningful field-based practicum experiences while working around limited access to in-person placements. A dyad-based virtual tutoring experience offers one potential work-around for teacher preparation programs to consider.

Based on existing literature, elements of this model appearing critical to its success included:

1. Pairing pre-service teachers in dyads to design and implement instruction;
2. Building partnerships with local schools and community agencies to identify students who would benefit from individualized tutoring;

3. Ensuring access to technology for both pre-service teachers and literacy student tutees (i.e., computers, tablets, and/or phones with internet connectivity);
4. Providing coaching and feedback from a skilled educator, either a mentor teacher or a university supervisor or instructor, on both planning and implementing instruction; and
5. Maintaining open communication with families about expectations and ways to support their child's participation in tutoring (i.e., scheduling, best platform for tutoring, and finding a productive space to work).

Limitations

Naturally, the small sample size and exploratory nature of this research design means results cannot be generalized. In addition, this study occurred during a condensed five-week summer semester. The context of the pandemic could be another limitation, as participants were facing additional stressors that may have impacted the results.

Further Research

Further research could investigate the impacts of dyad-based virtual tutoring in other content areas, like math. In addition, this model's viability with different age groups should be examined. Primary students (grades K-2) face distinct challenges as they acquire basic digital literacy skills some intermediate students (grades 3-6) already have exposure to, if not mastery of. Furthermore, this model could be extended to serve students not only in one-on-one settings, but also in small-group settings. Examining the impact of this model both during a pandemic and beyond would be a potential research area. Because virtual tutoring requires more responsibilities of the course instructor than a traditional classroom-based practicum experience, future research should consider the implications of virtual literacy instruction on the instructor. Looking at the types of support the instructor provides in this tutoring model could also yield enlightening data.

Conclusion

Preparing future teachers requires an intentional balance of learning pedagogical and content-area skills and applying them in authentic, field-based contexts, and preparation of future teachers continues even during a pandemic. Amidst barriers to placing pre-service teachers in the field, whether due to COVID-19 or even a lack of transportation, virtual practicum experiences offer a novel possibility, transcending barriers and providing future teachers opportunities to practice meeting the needs of students, even beyond the walls of a classroom.

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COVID-19 Practices in Special Education: Stakeholder Perceptions and Implications for Teacher Preparation

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Abstract

In light of COVID-19, school divisions across the country closed their doors and shifted to remote instruction. In Virginia, little guidance was provided to assist educators and teacher educators with making this transition, particularly for students with individualized education programs (IEPs). In May of 2020, researchers surveyed Virginia stakeholders involved in special education to assess the effectiveness of instructional delivery and procedural compliance as it related to students' IEPs. Quantitative and qualitative data analysis reveal that while schools and school divisions were generally viewed as effective with the procedural components of a free and appropriate public education, they were less effective, or ineffective, with the provision of specialized instruction. Implications for teacher preparation programs are discussed.

Keywords: FAPE, COVID-19, Teacher Preparation

As a result of the global COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia's Governor ordered the closure of K-12 schools beginning March 16, 2020, for a minimum period of two weeks (Office of the Governor, 2020, March 13). The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) attempted to minimize disruption to instruction, so schools initially provided short-term assignments or packets of work, which could be completed independently at home. Ten days after the temporary closure, the Governor of Virginia issued another executive order closing K-12 school buildings for the remainder of the academic year (Office of the Governor, 2020, March 23).

In addressing building closures, Virginia school leadership followed guidance from the United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2020, March 16) which stated that no individualized educational services were required for students with individualized education plans (IEPs) when educational programming was not occurring for general education

populations. However, once school resumed with educational programming, the USDOE was clear that Local Education Agencies were required to provide special education and related services to students. Little guidance came from the USDOE or VDOE about instruction, particularly as it related to students with special education needs. USDOE indicated that special education services should be provided “to the greatest extent possible,” while also acknowledging “there may be exceptional circumstances that could affect how a particular service is provided” (USDOE, 2020, March 16, p. 3). VDOE stated, “there is no prescribed right way to provide services” and special education and related services could be provided “virtually, online, or telephonically” (2020, Introduction). Although the VDOE guidance was updated and clarified as the pandemic continued, this unique situation created many unknowns about IEP implementation and the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Simultaneously, there was litigation indicating that when school divisions failed to implement the IEP as written, even under emergency conditions, it could be considered a denial of FAPE (Natanson, 2020). The message was clear that the requirement for FAPE had not changed as a result of school-building closures, necessitating the transition to virtual and remote learning.

Requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

Regardless of the modality of instruction, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) ensures FAPE for all students. Specifically, FAPE guarantees special education and related services are provided at public expense according to a student’s IEP (Yell, 2019). Procedurally, FAPE is provided through the IEP process which requires notice to parents or guardians, parent or guardian input, individualized evaluations, the attendance of required members at meetings, adherence to timelines, the inclusion of required components in the IEP, and implementation of the IEP (Yell et al., 2013). Substantively, the provision of FAPE

occurs with the development and delivery of services that are “reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress in light of the child’s circumstances” (*Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District*, 2017, p. 15). Despite the emergency conditions created by the COVID-19 pandemic, both procedural and substantive requirements of FAPE remained intact.

Teacher Preparation to Provide FAPE through Virtual Instruction

Virtual learning was becoming increasingly prevalent in K-12 schools in the decade leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Greer et al., 2014). Fully online and hybrid formats require teachers to develop and present curriculum, conduct assessment, promote positive learning behaviors, and communicate information to both learners and families in ways that differ from traditional brick-and-mortar education (Greer et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016). Additionally, special educators teaching through virtual formats must provide specialized instruction and address legal requirements to ensure FAPE. In recognition of these demands, the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (2011) developed *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* to promote teacher preparation and positive student outcomes. These standards, however, are not directly tied to any accreditation body and therefore have limited integration into teacher preparation programs and are particularly limited in special education teacher preparation (Smith et al., 2016). In a study of 48 institutions of the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education, Smith and colleagues found that a majority of special education teacher preparation programs did not address aspects of virtual learning. These included legal issues in special education, creating and implementing assessments for online formats, aligning curriculum to content standards, or modifying assessments. The teacher educators in the study did, however, report an emphasis on integrating technology to support student engagement.

Virginia's requirements for teacher preparation programs align with the aforementioned research findings. Teacher preparation programs include standards that directly relate to FAPE, leading to coursework addressing federal and state special education laws, the application of assessment and evaluation measures, and the development and implementation of IEPs (Virginia General Assembly, n.d.). However, specific coursework about remote or virtual teaching modalities is not required.

Purpose

Given that core expectations of FAPE remained the same when school divisions shifted to remote and virtual learning formats, and research suggesting that special educators may have been underprepared to address legal and instructional components of FAPE through these formats, this study sought to understand special education stakeholder perceptions of how schools and school divisions addressed these requirements following school-building closures caused by COVID-19. Research questions were:

- How did Virginia special education stakeholders perceive their school and school division's efficacy in addressing instructional requirements of special education following COVID-19 school-building closings?
- How did Virginia special education stakeholders perceive their school and school division's efficacy in addressing legal and procedural requirements of special education following COVID-19 school building closings?

Implications of these findings may impact pre- and in-service teacher development programs.

Methods

Participants

Snowball sampling via social media platforms was used to recruit participants. To ensure broad distribution, the researchers posted the research invitation and survey link on at least two social media sites associated with special education in each of Virginia's eight TTAC regions.

One hundred forty-two stakeholders participated in the study and 111 completed the survey. The participants represented all eight of Virginia's TTAC regions. However, the greatest number of participants (77.46%) reported they were involved in special education in the Northern Virginia region. Conversely, participants from the Southwest and Southside regions each represented approximately 1% of the sample. The remaining regions were represented by 3% to 5% of the participants.

Participants represented a broad array of special education stakeholder roles including parents of learners with disabilities, special education teachers of standard and adapted curricula, related service providers, special education leaders, school social workers, and school psychologists. Approximately 46% of participants were parents and 44% were special education professionals. Just over 9% of participants reported they were parents of learners with disabilities and also special education professionals.

The participants were engaged with learners representing the full range of ages and grade levels served under IDEIA. Forty-six percent of participants reported supporting students with disabilities in multiple grade levels. Early childhood education or preschool programs were represented by 21% of participants, each elementary grade (K-5) was represented by 26% to 29% of participants, each middle school and high school grade was represented by 13% to 17% of participants, and 9% of participants supported students with disabilities in the post-graduate or transition years of public education.

Instrument

A cross-sectional online survey was developed to capture special education stakeholders' perceptions of school and school division effectiveness at meeting the instructional and procedural requirements of FAPE following COVID-19 building closures (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Survey questions were drafted to focus on identification and evaluation, delivery of special education and related services, parent participation, and technology-related assistance (Yell, 2019). The drafted questions were piloted with six individuals representing various stakeholder roles in special education, including special education teachers, parents, a related service provider, and a special education administrator (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Feedback from pilot participants resulted in minor revisions to the wording of the survey to improve clarity.

The final survey consisted of five questions related to participant and school division characteristics, two open-ended questions inviting participants to identify areas of concern and areas of strength in school or division responsiveness to special education needs, nine questions asking stakeholders to rate school and division effectiveness in addressing instructional factors, and seven questions asking participants to rate school and division effectiveness in addressing procedural factors. (The instructional and procedural factors are listed in the first columns of Tables 1 and 2, respectively.)

Participants were asked to rate the effectiveness of each instructional factor on a scale of 1 to 5 using an ordered-category rating system (Brill, 2008). The rating scale defined levels of effectiveness by the degree to which instructional services or materials were available, accessible, and meeting special education needs. The rating scale for procedural factors used a similar 5-point scale basing effectiveness on the degree to which information was available to support team members in completing procedures in compliance with regulatory timelines. There

was no neutral response option for either rating scale because there are no situations in which these factors would be viewed as neither effective nor ineffective (Brill, 2008). Stakeholders did have the option of selecting *not applicable* if any instructional or procedural factors were not relevant to their students. The rating scale descriptors can be found in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

The survey resulted in both quantitative and qualitative data. Open-ended questions created a qualitative data set capturing participants' perspectives of concerns related to special education following building closures, as well as aspects that schools and divisions handled well. Rating scales resulted in a quantitative data set describing school and division effectiveness at addressing instructional and procedural factors that were identified by the researchers. Data analysis occurred in three phases.

First, a preliminary exploratory analysis of the qualitative data was completed. This initial analysis revealed that the quantitative questions developed by the researchers addressed many of the topics that were at the forefront of special education stakeholders' minds as the school year came to a close. The preliminary exploratory analysis also revealed an informative data set that was worthy of more in-depth thematic coding. The researchers hand coded the data using a combination of organizational and substantive themes, as well as in-vivo codes (Maxwell, 2013).

Following completion of the qualitative coding, the data from the rating scales were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Participants who indicated that a service or procedure (e.g., assistive technology) was not applicable to their students were excluded from calculations for that specific service or procedure. Modes and medians were calculated for each factor. Then, the rating scale was collapsed to reflect stakeholder perceptions of general effectiveness (ratings of

somewhat effective, effective, or highly effective) or ineffectiveness (ratings of *ineffective* or *somewhat ineffective*; Brill, 2008). Percentages of participants rating each factor as effective or ineffective were calculated for the collapsed scale.

In the final phase of data analysis, the researchers integrated the quantitative and qualitative data seeking points of convergence or divergence in the two data sets. Specifically, codes from the qualitative data were reviewed looking for evidence to support or reject conclusions drawn from the quantitative data or elaborate on the quantitative findings.

Findings

Stakeholder Perceptions of Instructional Efficacy

Data from the rating scales yielded quantitative information about stakeholder perceptions of school and division efficacy in addressing instructional requirements of special education following COVID-19 school-building closures. The descriptive data calculated from the rating scales are reported in Table 1.

Table 1

Participants' Ratings of Effectiveness for Instructional Factors

Instructional Factor	Collapsed Scales							
	Mode		Median		% of Participants Rating Effective*		% of Participants Rating Ineffective**	
	Division	School	Division	School	Division	School	Division	School
Provision of instructional materials	3	3	3	3	61.72	73.73	38.28	26.27
Access to online learning platforms	3	4	3	3	69.47	73.99	30.53	26.01

General education instruction	3	3, 2	3	3	66.67	64.66	33.33	35.34
Modification of instructional materials	1	3	2	3	45.69	52.30	54.31	47.70
Specialized instruction for IEP goals	1	1	2	2	43.70	49.57	56.30	50.42
Provision of accommodations	1	1	2	2	42.86	46.15	57.14	53.85
Provision of assistive technology	3	3	3	3	52.87	54.65	47.13	45.35
Delivery of related services	1	1	1	2	23.40	33.72	76.60	66.28
Opportunities for communication	3	4	3	3	70.77	71.07	29.23	28.93

* Ratings of *somewhat effective* (3), *effective* (4), and *highly effective* (5) were collapsed into effective.

* Ratings of *ineffective* (1) and *somewhat ineffective* (2) were collapsed into ineffective.

Looking at the modal responses, schools and school divisions were most often described as *ineffective* (1) at providing specialized instruction for IEP goals, providing accommodations, and delivering related services. School divisions were also rated *ineffective* (1) at modifying instructional materials, whereas schools were rated *somewhat effective* (3) for this factor. Stakeholders most frequently rated both schools and divisions *somewhat effective* (3) at providing instructional materials and assistive technology. School divisions were rated *somewhat effective* (3) in providing general education instruction, while schools had a bimodal rating for this factor indicating that stakeholders were equally divided in rating schools *somewhat*

ineffective (2) and *somewhat effective* (3). School divisions were also described as *somewhat effective* (3) in providing access to online learning platforms and opportunities for communication. Schools were rated *effective* (4) for these two factors.

The collapsed data provide information about the percentage of participants who rated each instructional factor as broadly effective (ratings of 3, 4, or 5) or broadly ineffective (ratings of 1 or 2). Less than half of stakeholders described schools and school divisions as being effective, to any degree, in providing specialized instruction for IEP goals or accommodations. Further, approximately 34% of stakeholders used an effective rating when describing the delivery of related services by schools and approximately 23% of participants described school divisions as effective in addressing this instructional requirement. Conversely, over 60% of participants assigned one of the effective ratings to schools and divisions when describing provision of instructional materials, access to online learning platforms, general education instruction, and opportunities for communication. When combining the collapsed scale data with the median data, it is evident that, even for the factors that had higher percentages of broadly effective ratings, no instructional factor was rated as more than *somewhat effective* (3) by more than 50% of the stakeholders.

Qualitative Descriptions of Instructional Efficacy

As with the rating scales, narrative data provided mixed perspectives related to the efficacy of instructional factors. An overarching sentiment of the qualitative data is well-captured by a special education team leader who wrote, “Students who have some level of independence, access to technology, and strong parental support have been maintaining skills. If any one of those pieces is missing it all falls apart.” Holistically, participants conveyed the need for many instructional factors to come together to meet the learning needs of students with

disabilities and deep frustrations about what did not work and how those failures impacted learners with disabilities. Of note, when asked what special education needs were addressed particularly well following building closures, over 25% of stakeholders responded, “Nothing” or something similar.

Qualitative findings support the quantitative data indicating communication was an area of relative strength. Parents frequently commented special educators were in regular contact with them. School counselors reached out to families of students who were not present for online learning, and early childhood special educators described establishing a “coaching model” with parents. While many expressed frustration about the amount of “unknowns,” communication was generally described in a positive light.

Stakeholder comments also elaborated on the *effective* and *somewhat effective* ratings for access to online learning platforms, provision of instructional materials, and general education instruction. Schools and divisions were praised for providing laptops and using a variety of web conferencing tools to provide instruction. Stakeholders described the creation and dissemination of “packets” as something handled well. Parents acknowledged special educators for “checking-in” and “monitoring” general education class time. However, parents and educators expressed concern about a mismatch between these instructional opportunities and individualized student needs, which aligned with *ineffective* and *somewhat ineffective* ratings for specialized instruction and provision of accommodations. Specifically, parents and educators indicated packets often lacked individualization or accommodations and remote learning was described as incompatible with the needs of many students with disabilities. “Lack of structure” and reduced opportunities for “hands-on instruction” were frequently cited as challenging. Parents and educators conveyed concern that materials could not be differentiated enough to meet the needs of these learners and

many required direct parental support to participate. Further, educators expressed concern that research-based practices were not used during remote instruction. A special educator and parent of a child with a disability commented that no research-based programs for math or reading were used. Another teacher wrote, “We received no training or guidance on using technology or developing/implementing appropriate lessons. Our students have individual and specific needs and we were left to figure it out.”

An additional concern related to the delivery of specialized instruction was reduced or discontinued special education services, including related services. An individual identified as both a parent and educator stated, “My students have not received their required special education services.” Another parent explained that their child’s special education service time had decreased from 15 hours per week in school to 40 minutes per week during remote learning. Multiple participants indicated related services were not provided, supporting the large percentage of participants who rated schools and divisions as broadly ineffective at providing these services. A parent commented, “He could have been receiving his speech therapy...He continued to (receive) his private therapy via Zoom. The school system just chose never to provide services.” Another shared, “No supports either from OT or Speech or even a one on one chat with ABA from the county.”

Stakeholder Perceptions of Procedural Efficacy

The data from the rating scales about stakeholder perceptions of school and division efficacy in addressing procedural requirements of special education are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

Participants’ Ratings of Effectiveness for Procedural Factors

Collapsed Scales

Procedural Factor	Mode		Median		% of Participants Rating Effective*		% of Participants Rating Ineffective**	
	Division	School	Division	School	Division	School	Division	School
Developing IEPs for services during closures	3	3	3	3	59.81	67.00	40.19	33.00
Developing IEPs for services once schools reopen	4	4,3	3	4	70.59	77.78	29.41	22.22
Scheduling and conducting IEP meetings	4	4	4	4	83.17	90.43	16.83	9.57
Scheduling and conducting transition meetings	4	4	4	4	72.86	79.17	27.14	20.83
Conducting special education evaluations or assessments	1	1	1	2	26.76	34.78	73.24	65.22
Scheduling and conducting special education referral or eligibility meetings	1	4	3	3	56.16	69.44	43.84	30.56
Including all required team members in meetings	4	4	4	4	82.18	85.85	17.82	14.14

* Ratings of *somewhat effective* (3), *effective* (4), and *highly effective* (5) were collapsed into effective.

** Ratings of *ineffective* (1) and *somewhat ineffective* (2) were collapsed into ineffective.

Procedures such as developing and conducting IEPs; transition, and eligibility meetings; conducting evaluations; and including all required team members in meetings were rated.

Modes and medians for each of the procedural factors indicate that stakeholders viewed schools and school divisions as being *somewhat effective* (3) or *effective* (4) at addressing procedural factors, with the exception of conducting special education evaluations or assessments, which was most frequently rated *ineffective* (1). School divisions were also most frequently assigned an *ineffective* rating (1) for scheduling and conducting referral or eligibility meetings.

The collapsed data show that for each of the procedural factors, with the exception of conducting evaluations, more than 55% of stakeholders assigned a broadly effective rating to school divisions and more than 67% of stakeholders did so for schools. Within these collapsed scales, an analysis of medians yields at least 50% of stakeholders rated schools and divisions as *effective* (4) or higher for scheduling and conducting IEP and transition meetings and including all required stakeholders. Schools also received *effective* ratings (4) or higher from more than 50% of stakeholders for developing IEPs to identify services once schools reopen. Conversely, only 35% of stakeholders believed school divisions were broadly effective at conducting special education evaluations. Even fewer stakeholders (approximately 27%) viewed schools as broadly effective.

Qualitative Descriptions of Procedural Efficacy

Procedural factors were mentioned far less than instructional factors in participants' narrative responses. When discussing special education factors that schools or divisions handled well, stakeholders mentioned use of virtual tools to schedule and conduct IEP meetings. This favorable opinion was evident in the rating scales, as scheduling and conducting IEP and

transition meetings and including all required team members were among the highest rated factors in the survey. Stakeholders described meetings as including “all providers available” and “meeting special education timelines.” A school social worker commented, “I feel my assigned schools have done an excellent job of answering parent questions and managing the eligibility and IEP development processes.”

IEP amendments and Temporary Learning Plans (TLPs) received mixed feedback. IEP development was rated as broadly effective (59% for divisions and 67% for schools), but qualitative comments were sometimes critical of the process, specifically when discussing TLPs. The divide in comments was primarily delineated by participant role. More educators found the process helpful, while parents indicated dissatisfaction. Educators described TLPs as a tool that “saved a tremendous amount of work” and allowed educators to “cover the most important pieces of each student’s education.” Parents tended to view the TLPs as an “attempt to reduce services in the IEP.”

Special education evaluations were minimally mentioned in the narrative responses, and then only as a concern. One parent stated, “My child was supposed to be assessed for OT and visual impairment but can’t because schools are closed.” A school psychologist expressed concern there would be a backup of evaluations upon return to school due to the inability to complete assessments through virtual formats. This limited narrative commentary provides some insight into the ineffective ratings assigned to both divisions and schools for their handling of special education evaluations and assessments.

Discussion

Virginia special education stakeholders had mixed perceptions of school and division effectiveness at addressing the instructional and procedural requirements of FAPE when school

buildings closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders largely viewed schools and divisions as effective at addressing procedural requirements of special education and providing general education instruction and instructional resources. Conversely, schools and divisions were predominantly rated as ineffective at providing specialized instruction, accommodations, and related services in the instructional category and conducting assessments for special education evaluations in the procedural category. It is notable that these are the factors that most clearly distinguish special education from general education and are the substantive essence of FAPE.

While the root causes of the instructional difficulties cannot be fully ascertained by this research, the qualitative findings suggest that many stakeholders perceived a mismatch between the individualized learning needs of students with disabilities and virtual learning experiences. Given research findings related to special education teacher preparation for virtual learning (Smith et al., 2016), it seems plausible that teachers were underprepared to address the learning needs of students with disabilities through virtual formats.

Similarly, the root causes of the more effective instructional practices cannot be ascertained by this research. However, school and division effectiveness at providing instructional materials, access to online platforms, general education instruction, and opportunities for communication may be, at least partially, attributed to the fact that these were required by both general and special education students. Therefore, additional planning may have been implemented to ensure these were in place.

Procedurally, schools and districts were rated in ineffective ranges for conducting assessments and evaluations needed for special education eligibility. These ratings are not entirely unexpected. Since evaluating and testing students for special education eligibility often requires face-to-face administration for reliability and validity purposes, it is not surprising that

the evaluation process was halted or delayed. In fact, USDOE guidance (2020, March 16) indicated that face-to-face evaluations would need to be delayed during school-building closures to mitigate health risks.

In contrast to the procedural challenges associated with conducting evaluations, schools and divisions were described as broadly effective at scheduling and conducting IEP meetings to plan for services during and after school closure and including all team members in meetings. Guidance provided on the topic of virtual IEP meetings (USDOE, n.d.) may have contributed to this outcome.

Implications for Teacher Educators

While most everyone would agree the circumstances created by a global pandemic are unique, the lessons learned from this period in education are still of value to teacher preparation programs, particularly as they relate to virtual learning experiences. Improved pedagogy for virtual learning could prepare teachers to deliver instruction following natural disasters, during inclement weather, or during any disruption in instructional delivery. Virtual learning has been on the rise in general education for many years and may provide an additional way to lessen regression and recoupment for students with disabilities. However, the findings of this research highlight specific challenges Virginia educators faced in providing FAPE through virtual and remote learning formats. While some of these challenges cannot be easily resolved through teacher preparation programs, there are take-aways and implications for teacher educators.

The findings of this research and previous research related to teacher preparation for virtual instruction suggest the need for teacher educators to evaluate how teacher preparation programs currently address virtual instruction and the individualization of services as related to FAPE (Greer et al., 2014; Smith et al., 2016). Teacher preparation for virtual instruction may be

enhanced by incorporating the *National Standards for Quality Online Teaching* into coursework (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2011) and possibly into state licensure requirements. At this time, Virginia licensure requirements address the use of technology to “promote student learning” (Virginia General Assembly, n.d.), but do not specify requirements related to virtual instruction. Therefore, most teacher preparation programs address the requirement by embedding technology as part of in-class instruction, not as a stand-alone remote instructional tool.

Moving forward, teacher preparation programs should expand the application of technology by integrating both the pedagogy of virtual instruction and its application. Coursework and clinical experiences could embed opportunities for creation, delivery, and assessment of virtual instruction. This might involve an exploration of virtual learning platforms, ways to individualize for student needs, data collection tools, and provision of accommodations and modifications during remote instruction.

Given the results that showed the “special” and individualized components in special education were the most ineffective factors during remote instruction, teacher preparation programs should specifically consider how they can better prepare special educators to deliver FAPE under a variety of learning conditions. A first step for teacher educators could be ensuring that requirements of FAPE are clearly embedded in programming; teaching pre-and in-service teachers that FAPE can be delivered remotely and demonstrating and assessing delivery of FAPE in remote environments. This could be accomplished through synchronous or asynchronous experiences, including bug-in-ear opportunities to practice through eCoaching (Rock et al., 2014).

Conclusion

While educators demonstrated effectiveness with procedural matters related to special education, the instructional delivery and individualization required for FAPE were less effective, and often ineffective. Stakeholder ratings of ineffectiveness were elaborated by narrative commentary expressing concerns about student regression in academic skills, behavior, communication, and social interaction. The concern was not only that students with disabilities would experience loss of skill but would also have greater losses than students without disabilities. To mitigate these risks, teacher educators must engage in careful consideration and dialogue about these concerns, so we better prepare special education teachers for future virtual instruction.

Appendix A

Descriptors for Ratings of Effectiveness

Instructional Factor Ratings		Procedural Factor Ratings
Rating	Descriptor	Descriptor
<i>Highly Effective</i> (5)	These services or materials are consistently provided, readily accessible, and fully address the special education needs of my student(s).	All team members have the information needed to implement procedures and meet legal requirements well in advance of meetings or due dates.
<i>Effective</i> (4)	These services or materials are consistently provided, generally accessible, and address most of the special education needs of my student(s).	Most team members have the information needed to implement procedures and meet legal requirements prior to meetings or due dates.
<i>Somewhat Effective</i> (3)	These services or materials are generally available and accessible. Some of my students' special	One or more team members has the information needed to implement procedures and meet legal requirements. Information may be

	education needs are not met, but the most critical needs are still addressed.	shared just prior to meetings or due dates.
<i>Somewhat Ineffective (2)</i>	These services or materials are not consistently available. Some of my students' special education needs are not met, including some critical areas.	One or more team members is able to obtain needed information during meetings or on due dates allowing legal requirements to be met. There may be some inconsistent guidance regarding procedures.
<i>Ineffective (1)</i>	These services or materials are not available. My students' special education needs are not being met.	Information is not readily available to team members when needed. Guidance related to procedures is inconsistent or absent. Due dates and timelines are missed with no clear plan for addressing these issues.
<i>Not Applicable</i>	These services or materials are not elements of my students' education or IEP, even when school is open.	I have not had any requirement to participate in this type of meeting or activity since the COVID-19 closures.

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**Portrait of the Teacher Educator as a Weary Pedagogue:
Narrating our Way to a Post-Pandemic Vision of Educator Preparation**

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Abstract

In mid-March 2020, the spread of COVID-19 prompted colleges and universities to pivot to online instruction, resulting in myriad unanticipated challenges. As teacher educators working in distinct capacities across the Elementary and Secondary Education programs at George Mason University, we gathered to make sense of this shift and have engaged in a collaborative inquiry over the past seven months, with conversations focused on three main topics: how the pandemic confronted our philosophies of teacher education, how our teaching responded to external factors, and how we attempted to understand these new demands of teacher education. To examine what we most valued in our work, we used a “portraiture” methodology to construct self-narratives framed around these topics. Our portraits revealed that, despite facing a deep professional intensification, there were positive outcomes of this evolution from face-to-face to online teacher education. These insights suggest implications not just for a temporary distanced instructional mode, but for reimagining teacher education in the future.

Key words: portraiture, narratives, continuum, teacher educators, pedagogies

In mid-March 2020, the United States began to realize the dangers associated with the spread of COVID-19. PK-12 schools, colleges, and universities paused operations and pivoted to online instruction, many without the resources or expertise to do so. This turn was challenging for teacher education stakeholders, who had to learn how to balance a host of unanticipated challenges (e.g., working from home, quarantining, and the resultant anxiety). Many teacher

educators assumed new roles in supporting their own families with virtual learning, while attempting to instruct future teachers how to engage and educate other people's children. While many of these difficulties have been considered as pedagogical matters—questions of “how” to teach via online modes—teacher educators faced another dilemma: a sudden shift in their professional personas.

We—the first four authors of this manuscript, whose experiences we explore here—represent a continuum of university-based teacher educators: from a newly minted PhD in elementary teacher education (Glaser), to an established but pre-tenure early career assistant professor in secondary education (Helmsing), to a mid-career full professor serving as the program administrator for her elementary education program (Parker), to a more established full professor serving in a parallel administrative capacity with his secondary education program (Zenkov). The fifth author (Bean) is an established early career clinical professor in elementary education who is a member of our program teams but chose not to examine her experiences for this article. In search of practical support for our teacher education pedagogies, we (all five article authors) gravitated toward each other in May 2020 and have met almost weekly since.

As teacher education practitioners, our experiences mirror those of most of our US college/university counterparts in this pandemic: navigating the transition to virtual instruction despite limited experience in online teacher education environments, much less an understanding of virtual PK-12 learning for which we were preparing future teachers to teach. However, over the course of our conversations we have recognized how our experiences differ from our colleagues in other college and university disciplines.

Despite facing a deep professional intensification, we have discovered positive outcomes of this overnight evolution to online teacher education by examining stories shared in our weekly

gatherings over the past six months. In this article we offer “portraits” from four of our team members to illustrate these insights. These findings suggest implications not just for a temporary distanced instructional mode, but for teacher preparation in future times.

Teaching Teachers Online

Online programs and courses are not a new phenomenon in higher education, and they represent an increasingly popular option as they afford students flexibility in terms of time and location (Duesberry, Frizelle, Twyman, Naranjo, & Timmermans, 2019; Ragusa & Crampton, 2017). In teacher education, online programs have historically been more prevalent in post-licensure and alternative certification routes than in traditional undergraduate and graduate licensure programs like those within which we, the authors, teach (Thompson, Miller, & Pomykal-Franz, 2013; Thornton, 2013). Online learning options in PK-12 contexts have followed a similar trajectory. The movement began with isolated virtual charter schools and online courses offered through a few state-supported virtual schools, but has grown to include myriad online private vendor programs and fully-online cyber schools across many states (Watson & Murin, 2020). Given the wide variety of offerings, it is not surprising to report the effectiveness of online learning both at the university level and in PK-12 settings is often context-specific, with researchers noting both positive and negative outcomes in studies of online learning (Prettyman & Sass, 2020; Watson & Murin, 2020).

The proliferation of online learning options for PK-12 students and online program options in teacher preparation has not translated into shifts in how teacher candidates are prepared for teaching in these contexts. In fact, teacher preparation programs often offer technology courses or methods courses online, but the pedagogies for teaching PK-12 online have not been routinely included in the curriculum. As a result, teachers report feeling

unprepared for such contexts (Koenig, 2020). Archambault and Kennedy (2014) suggest colleges of education could ameliorate this disconnect by recasting the definition of career-ready effective teachers as those who “can blend together the best technology-based resources with engaging pedagogical strategies in both online as well as face-to-face settings” (p. 226). They assert this transition should be informed by the TPACK framework (technological pedagogical content knowledge), and they note the foundations of effective teaching remain consistent regardless of learning environment. Because the principles of effective pedagogical implementation necessarily change in virtual contexts, Archambault and Kennedy recommend teacher preparation programs should include emphases on instructional design, online student engagement, and online student assessment.

A similar disconnect exists with regard to the clinical components of teacher preparation. Clinical—or field—experiences play a vital role in providing opportunities for theory-to-practice connections (AACTE, 2018; Zeichner & Bier, 2015). However, much like the lack of attention to the pedagogies of online teaching in methods courses, field experiences in virtual contexts have been largely absent from teacher preparation programs (Archambault & Kennedy, 2014; Koenig, 2020). Archambault and Kennedy suggest that virtual field experiences with mentors who are experts in online teaching are essential for preparing the next generation of teachers.

Given the current—and likely future—need for preparing teachers for online teaching and learning, we came together to share our experiences as teacher educators navigating our own pedagogical shifts. Given our roles, our own professional evolutions naturally extended to consider future teachers’ online pedagogies. In this paper, we reflect on moments we have felt resistant, ill-prepared, and even hopeful in readying teacher candidates for online teaching and learning.

Methodology

This paper is the culmination of a collaborative inquiry we undertook during summer and fall of 2020 when we realized we were facing common dilemmas about our online pedagogies and the nature of our work across our teacher preparation programs. The emergence of these concerns began with the technical (e.g., How do we teach classroom management online?) and morphed into the existential (e.g., How do we face the altered demands of teachers' daily work?). We realized we needed to engage in some form of distancing to examine what we valued as teacher educators, while considering our varied individual teacher identities.

This investigation required a methodological orientation focused on theorizing these identities. Thus, we engaged with each other to produce “self-narratives” for the first four authors (Zenkov, Helmsing, Parker, and Glaser) that considered our values, philosophies of teaching, and moral stances to “support and sustain agency” in our work (Bullough, Jr., 2015, p. 82). The fifth author (Bean) engaged in these conversations but chose not to participate in the crafting of these self-narratives. These self-narratives were constructed from weekly conversations and structured reflections addressing two questions of this issue's call: “What were some of the challenges of transitioning from face-to-face to virtual teaching in higher education?” and “What were some of the unexpected benefits of the transition?”

As analytic frames, the self-narratives we created are similar to what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) term “portraiture,” a research method foregrounding context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. In constructing portraits of our teaching practice, we sought to keep in mind the objective Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) foreground: “to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (p. xv). As a methodology, portraiture enabled us “to organize a narrative

around central themes” and “write layered stories” in which we think and write together as “the subjects, not the objects, of the research” (Hill-Brisbane, 2012, p. 645). The four portraits are organized by themes that emerged in our conversations: how the pandemic confronted our personal philosophies of teacher education; how our teaching responded to external factors; and how we are attempting to understand the COVID-19 demands of teacher education.

Portraits

We were aware from our first gathering of the neat sequence of our membership attributes—alternating genders, a six- or seven-year gap in the career span (from year zero to year 21—Glaser to Helmsing to Parker to Zenkov), and interspersed elementary and secondary emphases. However, these markers were not predictive of our reactions to this swivel to online teacher education. As a result, the elements of our narratives shared in each section do not necessarily align with our demographic continuum.

Personal Philosophies

Our teaching philosophies, personality traits, and prior experiences with, and attitudes toward, online teaching informed our approach to teaching and teacher education during the switch to online learning. We observed a continuum moving from Zenkov, to Parker, then to Glaser, and concluding with Helmsing.

Zenkov. Over more than two decades as a university-based teacher educator, I’ve settled on two intersecting goals for my courses, candidates’ clinical experiences, and my classroom-based research projects: I work to help future teachers develop their teaching identities while orienting them to the teaching profession. I have been able to enact my own identity through the teaching methods I employ and the ways I engage with young people in my research projects, with my future teacher students operating as apprentices in these endeavors.

Thus, one of my greatest sources of stress during the transition to virtual instruction has been my own prior achievement as a teacher education pedagogue. I worked and worried to ensure that my vision of myself as a teacher—as a teacher *of teachers*—would translate to this new format. Across these first months of this implementation of a different instructional mode, I’ve become aware that this was an unreasonable expectation.

As I’ve taught in our master’s licensure program over two semesters during the pandemic, I’m still left with more questions than answers about how I’m “translating” to my students. I worry most about those who are just beginning, in that first instructional methods class. My teaching and my students’ learning are much more sedentary, much less dynamic, and more rooted in orality. I am concerned this group of teacher candidates is having their identity development stunted by the limitations of this mode. But because ours is not a profession oriented around immediate gratification—the evidence of candidates’ growth appears in trickles, not in gushes—we won’t know if that is the case or what the implications are for years or even decades to come.

Parker. As a teacher and teacher educator, reflection is in my professional DNA: each class, each course, and each semester are revised based on reflection and student feedback. The phrase “lifelong learner” seems a bit cliché, but I enjoy trying to upgrade my courses each semester. I also place significant value on what I learn from my professional development school (PDS) site where teacher candidates are based; these experiences with exceptional PK-6 mentors drive course revisions and my personal learning.

Like many teacher educators, I am cognizant of the equal importance of 1) modeling effective teaching and 2) stepping outside of these pedagogies to consider their applications to PK-6 classrooms with preservice teachers. I think of myself as an innovator, but one that is

balanced by a perfectionist orientation. And, like many teacher educators, I have found myself stretched thin in recent months. Teaching, research, service, and leadership activities—and a desire to do all of these things well—are all factors in my current, off-the-charts stress level.

Philosophically, I have long been anti-online education. The face-to-face context gives me an opportunity to model building strong student-teacher relationships and creating a positive learning community. But my opposition to virtual instruction became moot in March 2020. I had to shift my thinking from “No way. Never online” to “I don’t have a choice so how do you do this (teach online) well.” I was willing to learn, trying anything and everything—Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, Padlet, Flipgrid. I recruited my friends to let me practice. I wrote out a detailed lesson plan—what I would say, what I would click on, how I would use breakouts. I was more prepared for those first few classes online than I had been since I was a teacher candidate in 1994! I sought to learn from those who I knew had online teaching experience and whose orientations towards teaching I respected.

Glaser. As a new teacher educator with only a handful of university teaching experiences, I met the prospect of teaching online with anticipation. During my PhD program, I relished opportunities to expand my teacher educator “skill set” in terms of format (e.g., asynchronous online) and student populations (preservice and inservice teachers). Synchronous online teaching seemed like another novel competency I could add to my repertoire. I dove into researching teaching technologies and reflected on how these fit into the epistemological framework of the teacher educator I wanted to be: social justice- and growth-oriented, dialogic, and reflective. Unlike most of my co-authors, I had several months to conceptualize how this might work.

A summer and fall of synchronous online teaching haven't altered my excitement around this new format, even if its affordances in terms of collaboration do not fully transfer to face-to-face or asynchronous environments. Interactive, technology-based focus lessons can be incorporated to account for students' varied processing speeds, and typically reticent students have multiple modes of expression: verbally, through text, using emojis. I have learned in tandem with my students how this format works for them—and where it falls short.

I have come to appreciate synchronous online teaching while also noting its drawbacks. I feel less in tune with my students and their affects than I would in a face-to-face environment because we have fewer moments where we occupy the same space. Conversations with students occur when they show up early, or remain after, an online session rather than when they are unpacking their backpacks. Early on, I decided mandating camera usage opposed my philosophy around equity; consequently, I do not receive the nonverbal feedback I relied on in face-to-face teaching. While I believe synchronous online teaching can be useful where circumstances require it, I know now it would be most consistent with my teaching philosophy in a hybrid learning environment.

Helmsing. As a metaphorical thinker and teacher, I describe my philosophy of teaching as a type of magic. Over the past several months, the effects of the pandemic have crept into my magician's chamber and thrown into disarray every potion and spell I've had at my disposal for my ten years as a teacher educator. As the pandemic wears on, I often think of the scene from the 2002 film *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, when King Théoden says to Gandalf the magician “you have no power here!” after Gandalf's mind control spell was rendered ineffective. The magic of the classroom encounters my students and I have in person is dulled through

disenchantment when we cannot improvise them together face-to-face, when feelings, hunches, and discoveries that emerge in a course meeting remain scripted and delivered on Zoom.

A second reason I feel I have lost my magic is in the absence of the everyday acts of teaching that would grab us during an in-person meeting. My philosophy centers on making the course an engaged space to *enact* the role of the teacher. We enact how to respond to spontaneous student thinking through questioning, guiding, and wondering aloud. We practice such enactments in my synchronous Zoom meetings, which is often what my classes now feel like: business meetings I host instead of magic shows I perform.

Jointly. As illustrated by the content and sequence of our self-narratives above, the lessons of the continuum of teacher educators' philosophies in this time appear to follow a path from concern (Zenkov), to resignation (Parker), to anticipation (Glaser), to frustration (Helmsing). These are not the only stages of this trajectory, but mapping the evolution of teacher educators' philosophies might help us grow toward a healthy engagement with—and even manipulation of—these tools more quickly.

External Factors

Myriad external factors impacted our transition to online teaching. These ranged from university support for online teaching, to our own access to professional development, to personal situations constraining our efforts. Across our four markedly different sets of experiences coming into this online teacher education world, we observed a sequence that moves from Helmsing, to Parker, to Zenkov, and concludes with Glaser.

Helmsing. In late March, when my classes pivoted to synchronous online sessions, I lamented how we had just gotten to know each other well, maturing out of the honeymoon period from the first half of our semester into a critically reflexive understanding of our work and

each other. In April, a novel feeling to the experience emerged as meeting online for class in sweatpants, coffee mug in hand, and witnessing a student's dog jump into their lap helped us bond. My students and I approached the context with gusto, combing through online resources we raced to locate and share in hopes they would "show us the way" to making online teaching work for us.

This enthusiasm waned by early May. My students and I salvaged what remained of the semester, which felt frustrating as I usually welcome external challenges and breaking convention. In ten years of teaching teachers, I have never taught the same course the same way twice. However, this experience of going back to the drawing board to rethink my courses did not feel invigorating as course experimentation normally does. My redesign was done hastily, bypassing how the central task of learning to teach includes coming together in person to develop tools and dispositions needed to reflect about one's teaching together in collaboration.

Parker. From an institutional perspective, I felt supported in having the tools to teach my courses. By chance, I completed an online training course at the university just prior to the pandemic, but I had not enrolled in this professional development option with an eye toward moving my courses online. Supportive colleagues who were willing to share and troubleshoot my nascent digital pedagogies were also a key factor in my transition, and I attended two virtual sessions about online teaching offered by another colleague. These opened my eyes to possibilities and shaped how I approached online teaching.

Time—and not enough of it due to other responsibilities emerging during the pandemic—was a significant external factor impacting my transition to online teaching. I now recognize the absurdity of the suggestion from others to "just put it [a course or class session] online." The amount of time required to learn a new format to plan each instructional day was exhausting. But

rethinking my instruction to consider the pedagogies our future teachers would be using online and face-to-face—particularly when I had zero background in teaching online for PK-6 learners—added a layer of intensified labor.

While the level of fatigue encountered in order to sustain this conversion is one of the challenges of my experience, our elementary education teacher candidates have been engaged, resilient, and prepared. They have not just been supportive of me as I’ve navigated this new terrain; they have also helped analyze the bumps in my pedagogical road. Their orientation to this shift has been the most important factor in the quality of my experience, and their “glass half-full” stance has given me even greater hope for the future of the teaching profession.

Zenkov. The resources provided to make the conversion to online instruction have often come in a flood—with little organization or vetting and no way to determine their value. We have been offered access to tools by our university, colleagues, and professional associations, but what we needed was time to understand these and determine their effectiveness. When you think metacognitively about your pedagogy, as teacher educators must—we are *always* simultaneously enacting strategies and modeling them for our students’ potential application—the new online teaching tool isn’t “the thing.” “The thing” is the skill-building process with which any tool enables you to engage students and the skill-building processes with which that tool enables them to engage their own, future students.

Thus, being provided with a firehose stream of technology applications to consider has been more of an impediment than a support in the wholesale conversion of my professional practice. Time is the primary resource we have needed, in order to remind ourselves of our pedagogical purposes—course by course, class by class—and to examine these tools. But time is also the thing that’s in the shortest supply, as every task—especially planning for instruction—

now takes so much longer to accomplish. My most immediate colleagues, whose pedagogical skills and instincts I trust, are the best resource I have.

Glaser. Given the time I had to prepare for synchronous online teaching, I felt well-supported in making sense of what it might look like. The course I was teaching was one I had previously co-taught face-to-face. While resources and learning activities varied due to the conversion to an online instructional mode, the learning outcomes remained the same. I also had a collaboration partner—Audra Parker, a co-author of this article and an elementary education full professor who had taught the course for years and was finishing up her first round of synchronous online instruction.

We established a planning routine for the course, meeting at least weekly to co-develop each session's slides and asynchronous work and explore the possibilities afforded by this new model. My excitement about this teaching format had me scouring the internet for ideas to make this not only “work,” but become something extraordinary. Several videos posted by another colleague were helpful in conceptualizing how different my synchronous class sessions would be from both face-to-face and asynchronous teaching. In the midst of this preparation, my senior colleague invited me to join this group to discuss how we could make sense of online teaching from the pedagogical perspectives of teacher educators. These forms of “just-in-time” mentoring and moral support proved indispensable in my transition to teaching online and from preservice to inservice teacher educator.

Jointly. While we note similar factors challenging us as teachers and teacher educators in this sudden switch to online instruction, it is the range of supports we've identified that are most instructive. Helmsing reminds us how our work is ultimately about the visions of teaching we share with future teachers, and Parker answers Helmsing's worries about these perspectives with

the example of her students. But how do we reform our teaching to pinpoint and stay focused on these exemplars? Perhaps it is, as Zenkov shares, in the form of new networks and collegial interactions. Or maybe, as Glaser describes, it's via more intensive modes of mentoring and collaboration.

Teacher Education in the Time of COVID-19

Across our nine months of meeting and reflecting—evidenced in the earlier sections of this paper—we have grappled with what it means to be a teacher educator during the mandatory metamorphosis to online learning. Our final reflections seem to flow best from Parker, to Helmsing, to Glaser, and then Zenkov.

Parker. I believe my online teaching experience from the past nine months expanded my teaching strategy repertoire as I've developed an effective online philosophical approach to teaching about teaching. At the heart of this is a “flipped classroom” method, where we rely on students reading prior to class and then making meaning of the readings in class. To account for the reduced class meeting time (from three hours to two, to minimize “Zoom fatigue”), I built in pre-class activities as asynchronous work using tools such as Nearpod to create interactive, multi-modal mini-lessons. Then our synchronous class block became about community-building and break-out room activities to make sense of the asynchronous work.

These structures have engaged *every* student in ways that may not have happened face-to-face. I used student responses as discussion points in group meetings, enhancing student accountability. Yet, I don't feel like I changed my philosophical orientation to teaching, or to teaching about teaching. Rather, I've found new tools to enact my philosophy, and in doing so, I've learned that some aspects of learning to teach are *better* served with online modes.

Helmsing. I keep thinking about the new pedagogical knowledge teacher candidates need in these uncertain times of teaching. This restlessness extends to how teaching as a profession may change during the pandemic in ways our field is not yet ready to address. If a well-informed understanding of what makes a good teacher is based on understanding the occupational demands teachers face, how can we prepare teacher candidates for demands that neither schools nor our field have established or studied?

In June and July of 2020, I asked colleagues across social media how their teacher preparation programs were adapting during the pandemic. Every colleague responded that, like I, they were waiting to find out what their programs and partner schools planned to do. I felt frustration that some broad, workable solution had not been offered by our profession. I have since made peace with not having a clear sense of the future of teacher education because we know education, and teacher education in particular, is messy work and always adapting to new contexts. There is no definitive magic spell I can use to prepare a perfect teacher. My frustration can be channeled into creating new opportunities to practice and enact the magic of teaching.

Glaser. Synchronous online teaching in a global pandemic is a unique endeavor. The stress teachers regularly experience has been amplified by the cognitive load of making sense of uncharted territory. As teacher educators, we are attempting to make our pedagogies transferable to synchronous online settings, with few models from which to draw. Figuring out how to translate what we do and know to an online setting is already exhausting; adding it as another layer of my new teacher educator experience makes it especially so.

When I reflect on what I anticipated from my initial experiences as a new teacher educator, I could never have imagined that it would come to be—that *I* would come to be—in a world so fraught with uncertainty. From a theoretical standpoint, I can identify who I want to be

as a teacher educator; I have seen different aspects of that modeled for me by my co-authors. In practice, however, I am still in the early stages of my metamorphosis from teacher-to-teacher educator. Research demonstrates this transition is not as simple as applying effective pedagogies from K-12 contexts to higher education (Boyd & Harris, 2010).

When the pandemic wanes, many classes will return in person. As a new teacher educator, it's difficult to identify what I would plan to do *differently* as a result of this experience. Rather, in true Freirean fashion, I look at teaching during this pandemic as a means to become a teacher-student alongside my student-teachers. I hope to emerge with not just a new set of skills, but a new framework for imagining what's possible in teacher education.

Zenkov. As veteran teachers and teacher educators, we think we can solve any teaching problem. We've faced so many teaching scenarios over the years that few really intimidate us. Not that we're cocky: in fact, the wealth of experience actually makes us a bit more humble. While we are rising to the challenge of building classroom communities in online courses—maybe the most difficult pedagogical task—we know it's neither enough nor the same to do so virtually. Students can't *see*—and are thus less likely to appreciate—the sentiments behind my own and their peers' statements, queries, and instructional methods and interactions.

There is a distance in this virtual mode: we're protected by the shells of our computer screens, and we can't ask as much of each other as we can when we share a space. The level of intensification—physical, intellectual, moral—is constant and impossible to measure (Apple, 2012, 2013). Physical in the sense that we expend so much energy trying to read each other through these cameras and monitors. Intellectual in the sense that we—teacher educators—must simultaneously consider not just how our lessons might be delivered in face-to-face modes, virtually, and how they might translate into our students' physical and remote instructional

modes. And moral in the sense that we all—teachers and teacher educators—feel the obligation to ensure we are serving our future teachers and their future students well.

(Very Tentative) Conclusions

In the self-narratives above, we have offered a range of perspectives on our field, our pedagogies, and our identities. These include Parker’s simultaneously practical and philosophical reflection, Helmsing’s words of warning and reminders to remember the magic of our practice, Glaser’s hopeful notes about dialogic metamorphosis and the future of our field, and Zenkov’s observations about the often invisible intensification of our work. As our portraits illustrate, we now engage in not only substantially more work than our schedules previously required, but, as teacher educators, we are doing something akin to quadruple “time.”

We are not just teaching content, as all instructors and teachers do, and we are not merely considering how to share that content via online methods, as teachers in every context must. Now we are involved in new metacognitive exercises, imparting the theory, planning, and procedures of our pedagogies via virtual modes, modeling the conversion of traditional pedagogical methods to online approaches, while serving as exemplars of both face-to-face and virtual instruction. The nature of our exponential increase in labor is equal parts physical, temporal, emotional, and existential.

While we are experiencing a dramatic increase in our workloads, we are conscious of how we as teacher educators, the preservice teachers in our programs, and the classroom teacher mentors on whom we rely are struggling. While this is an unhealthy scenario, it’s also a consciousness-raising affair. We speculate that any eventual transition back to “normal” teaching and learning will include long overdue conversations about what is absolutely necessary in our

teaching and learning lives and what might constitute “governor”-like structures that will limit future increases in our professional workloads.

We are concerned about how events of the last ten months will compound education policy shifts and changes in public perception of teachers from the last two decades. Such changes have profound implications for the very nature of teaching, our teacher education field, and our roles as teacher educators. It’s hard to see silver linings within a pandemic, but we are already reimagining what teacher education might (and should) become. For example, through our collaborations and conversations, we have re-envisioned professional mentoring through a strengths-based, rather than a hierarchical, lens. Field experiences have been supplemented with video observations that serve as anchors for class discussions and offer additional perspectives on the work of teaching and learning. We have even considered what aspects of teaching and teacher education might be best enacted through virtual means. In other words, rather than clinging to the magic of teaching that was, we’re preparing to conjure up some of the magic of teaching that will be.

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Cultivating Community in Virtual Professional Development: A Familiar Goal / A New Frontier

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Abstract

During spring and summer 2020, the COVID-19 lockdown upended professional development schemes across the globe. Professional development for PK-16 teachers at one college-sponsored program abruptly shifted its forum from college campus to meeting in a virtual setting online. Over time, this annual teacher conference had developed a professional learning community that attracted remarkable keynote speakers yet cultivated a setting in which attendees felt valued during exchanges of ideas. In this study, researchers analyzed participants' reflections on their virtual experiences of shared engagement vis-a-vis the warm face-to-face professional gatherings from the past. Findings in this study offer a road map to organizers of professional development programs for teachers. Teachers expressed value for hearing insights from experts related to improved pedagogy, while also spending time in reflection with fellow classroom professionals and learning from the experiences of other teachers.

Keywords: professional development, teacher training, professional learning community

Face-to-face conferences have served as a flagship of professional development (PD) for years, offering opportunities for educators to meet, listen to keynote speakers and other professionals, and discuss shared topics with other educators. Upon the arrival of the coronavirus, plans to offer these conferences were upended, and *pivot* became the buzzword as conference organizers examined options for in-person conferences. As online platforms such as

Zoom, Google Classroom, and Canvas quickly became a part of everyday vocabulary for educators, conference organizers began to consider how these platforms might be utilized as a means to offer PD. This initiated exploration of a new frontier; virtual conferences.

The Margaret Sue Copenhaver Institute for Teaching and Learning (MSCI), a yearly conference planned for June 2020, chose to move its 2020 conference theme and speakers to 2021 and shift to a virtual format for 2020. With two months to plan and organize, the institute directors and steering committee designed and led a three-day conference focused on the goal of providing participants with an experience of shared engagement within a professional learning community, but in a virtual format. As a conference known to inspire a sense of community among participants, meeting that familiar goal would be a challenge.

MSCI Background

MSCI has provided PD for K-16 educators for two decades. Directed by education faculty at Roanoke College and advised by a steering committee of K-12 teachers and administrators and university faculty, the summer conference has become a source of professional growth for approximately 150 participants annually. The authors of this manuscript have played key roles as co-directors of the institute and a longstanding member of the steering committee. MSCI's two central purposes have informed its design: 1) providing educators with cutting-edge relevant educational theory, and 2) offering opportunities for educators to consider effective ways to translate theory into classroom practice. Following these touchstones, the institute has historically implemented a three day conference model. On opening day, participants are introduced to educational theory relevant to the selected annual theme during keynote addresses and discussion sessions with keynote speakers. On the second day, small-group breakout sessions are offered, presented by educators who model examples of classroom

practices that implement the theory. On the final day, time is provided for participants to process learning and begin to construct their own classroom plans. The institute closes with an inspirational speaker and luncheon, intended to celebrate its participants and their ongoing commitment to students.

In an in-person format, offered by MSCI from 2000 to 2019, the conference limited its annual enrollment and structured the three-day program to include ample time for collegial, free-flowing conversations, encouraging a sense of community. The result was a collaborative experience that has been described by participants as: “a place to meet academic needs ... (as well as) a time to sit and talk, share and laugh together,” and “a professional development opportunity that provides restoration, revitalization and renewal,” consistent with data reported by Murrill et al. (2013, p. 44).

MSCI 2020 Online

When MSCI 2020 planners made the decision to move the event to a virtual platform, an early planning priority was to secure technological help. Although MSCI directors had begun to use basic Zoom tools to facilitate college courses, their experience was limited. A meeting with Roanoke College’s Instructional Technology (I.T.) staff provided assurance of two essential supports: 1) Zoom’s webinar format could be purchased, allowing up to 500 participants to attend the event, and 2) the I.T. Department invited MSCI to employ one of its graduating instructional technology assistants to help run the Zoom webinar behind the scenes during the event. With the knowledge that capable hands would assist with these aspects of the conference, MSCI directors and committee moved forward in determining the institute’s schedule and identifying presenters.

MSCI 2020 Online loosely retained the conference model implemented in previous institutes, while making modifications to better align with an online format. One-hour keynote sessions were scheduled to open Monday and Tuesday mornings, featuring previous MSCI speakers who had been noted as “favorites” from past years. The theme for the two days, *Celebrating Teaching and Learning in K-16 Classrooms*, was broad enough to serve the interests and needs of a wide range of educators. Following the keynote sessions, each day continued with thirty-minute sessions presented by speakers from across the state who were recommended by the steering committee. Wednesday’s focus, *Celebrating Preservice and Beginning Teachers*, provided support for graduating preservice teachers and those in their early careers. The day opened with an hour-long panel discussion, followed by four thirty-minute sessions during which graduating preservice teachers shared educational research presentations. The institute closed on Wednesday at noon.

Other features of MSCI 2020 Online included a moderated question and answer period during the closing ten minutes of each session. Institute steering committee members and directors served as moderators, providing introductions and organizing questions from the Zoom Chat feature. Morning welcomes, announcements, and speaker introductions were shared ten minutes prior to the daily opening sessions in order to allow ample time for the keynote to present. No time elapsed between sessions except for a thirty-minute break which took place from 11:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. on Monday and Tuesday, during which a rolling slide show was displayed for viewers. Each day concluded with a song selection shared by students from K-12 schools to provide an inspirational feature as closure.

Similarities shared by the in-person and online formats of the conference included well-received keynote speakers, relevant topics, and like sessions provided by educators who shared

authentic instructional examples from classroom practice. Participants also had opportunities to ask questions, although there was less time provided to respond to keynote speakers than would have been available during in-person discussion sessions. One key distinction between MSCI 2020 Online and previous face-to-face MSCI conferences was that all sessions were held back-to-back on the same Zoom Webinar link, and no sessions ran concurrently. Another difference was the number of participants. The online conference had 475 individuals register, which far exceeded any previous MSCI offering. Perhaps the greatest difference, however, was limited opportunity for participants to interact with colleagues over the course of the online institute. A sense of community was an aspect of MSCI's in-person events which were consistently experienced and valued by many participants. Thus, this missing element in MSCI's online iteration reflects a divergence that warrants further consideration.

Benefits and Challenges to Virtual Professional Development

Because school settings had to pivot with immediacy from in-person instruction to virtual or hybrid classes, there is limited research literature that spells out a recipe for conducting virtual professional development (PD). The relevant literature regarding online PD at the time was most plentiful from authors of educational articles, blogs, and other online sources.

For professional conference planners from a variety of fields, the immediate response to the online delivery pivot was abrupt and jarring. Across the U.S., national and regional meetings had to be cancelled or adjusted to an online format. For K-12 educators and learners, the classroom lockout was also sudden, strange, and pervasive (Hill 2020; Kraft, Simon, & Lyon, 2020; Martin, 2020; Rivero, 2020) and the readiness of students to learn from home proved challenging for all involved. School districts provided digital devices, at-home internet connectivity (Hill, p. 1; Martin, para. 10-11; Rivero, p. 24-25), and delivered hard copies of the

materials that learners required to participate in classes online (Rivero). Teachers ramped up their instructional expertise over the months, from feeling autonomous and isolated without the district's guidance (Rivero) to manipulating the technology to yield sophisticated lessons for the learners at home. Teachers and districts also stepped-in to ameliorate family trauma and insecurity exacerbated by the lockdown, providing increased individual counseling and launching meal distribution programs and other social services where needed to support the efforts of their learners at home (Hill, 2020, p. 1-2).

In order to prepare teachers for the challenges of this “new normal,” professional development (PD) was essential. Even during normal times, K-12 teachers regularly anticipated PD sessions at the start of a new school year. However, with the COVID lockdown in 2020, the typical PD schemes had to be replaced with virtual options. Professional development in Mobile, Alabama, for example, shifted to self-paced modules for teachers that used online handouts and videos (Martin, 2020, para 6-7).

By the end of the summer, conference planners from a variety of professions noted a number of advantages that the online delivery provided (Ball, 2020; Gillin, 2020; Knafo, 2020; Liimatainen, 2020; National Press Club, 2020; Olena, 2020). For example, without extensive travel to national gatherings, participants in virtual conferences noted reduced costs with increased available time not spent in transit (Ball, 2020, para.13; Liimatainen, 2020, para.8), as well as a smaller carbon footprint (Olena, 2020, para. 4). Some tech companies who shifted their conferences to online settings noted costs that were reduced by as much as 90% from in-person conferences (Gillin, 2020, para. 8).

For conferences of various professions, the virtual meetings offered twin benefits: a bumper crop of participants in numbers larger than organizations had ever seen, paired with a

lack of worrying about the logistics of booking enough rooms or organizing refreshments (Liimatainen, 2020, para. 8). The virtual setting enabled increased participation by individuals who were often unable to master the logistics of traveling to a conference, and it provided previously unavailable access to individuals with caregiving responsibilities, limited funds, or disabilities (Olena, 2020, para. 10). The ability to reach participants globally provides opportunities for connections across the world, further increasing the outreach to a broader audience (Knafo, 2020, para. 19; National Press Club, 2020, para. 13).

When looking beyond the scheduled sessions of the event itself, virtual conference organizers discovered that the virtual gatherings yielded a deeper version of audience engagement with “a longer tail” of viewing conference recorded and on-demand content online for many weeks following the gathering (Gillin, 2020, para.14; National Press Club, 2020, para. 16). Virtual attendees also exchanged ideas with presenters with greater frequency than what typically occurs at an in-person gathering (Gillin, 2020, para. 20). For the future, organizers do not envision an abandonment of face-to-face gatherings, but they do imagine that large conference gatherings will include a more prominent presence of virtual offerings (para. 11).

Organizers from a variety of professions also noted disadvantages of online conferences (Ball, 2020; Knafo, 2020; Liimatainen, 2020; Olena, 2020). While the technology enables attendees to access sessions and ask questions of presenters, Olena (2020) points out that the experience also is “missing the in-person stuff—dinners, drinks, and chance meetings when sharing a cab to or from an airport,” the additional opportunities for exchanging ideas that the technology cannot replicate (para. 8). Many face-to-face conference attendees seek the social interactions offered in an onsite conference (ACM Presidential Task Force on What Conferences Can Do to Replace Face to Face Meetings, 2020).

Informal, unstructured social interactions are one of the main reasons people travel to physical conferences—and one of the areas where people tend to believe virtual meetings are destined to fall short. Common concerns are that there are no obvious opportunities for “hallway connections,” that nobody is “trapped” at the conference and thus seeking people to talk to, and that not restricting access to an exclusive group of registered participants may change the social contract. (para. 30)

Online settings limit the length of interaction, time for one-to-one communication, and relationship-building opportunities (Liimatainen, 2020, para. 9). The online interface also limits the connections that participants might build through facial expressions and other nonverbal cues as the online delivery mutes those interchanges between speaker and audience (Ball, 2020).

In her comments, Professor Anne Frenzel, convener of the CARbon REDuced Conferencing! organization, notes the scarcity of both the data and the analysis to describe the virtual conferencing (Olena, 2020). While preliminary studies indicate no statistical psychological difference that attendees experience in resolving their basic need satisfaction, Frenzel notes that it is too soon to say that virtual gatherings satisfy the same psychological needs that are addressed when meeting face to face. Of three basic psychological needs that conference participants seek to satisfy -- relatedness, competence, and autonomy -- Frenzel notes that relatedness (“feeling connected with other conference attendees”) appears to be under greatest strain with remote gatherings (Olena, para. 31, 32).

The National Press Club (2020) considered factors that affect decisions about three conference formats: face-to-face, virtual, and hybrid. The factors addressed in Table 1 show the conference format(s) that may be most conducive to each factor.

Table 1

Factors identified by the National Press Club (2020)

Factor	Face-to-Face Conference	Virtual Conference	Hybrid Conference
Most Effective Communication	X		
Faster Turnaround		X	
Cost Savings		X	X
Increased Collaboration	X		
Greater Reach			X
Flexibility and Convenience			X
Relaying Complex Info	X		
Reduced Travel Cost		X	X

Shortly after K-12 education moved online in March 2020, the Learning Forward organization established a webinar-based forum through which they sought to build community among educators. In this forum, teachers shared the various lessons they were learning in their new teaching environment, including what guidance and support they needed as professionals. The webinar discussion yielded several epiphanies about online PD for teachers that included the following:

1. an emphasis on experience, with an awareness that important lessons in this new reality come from learning by doing
2. a recognition that the expertise to meet current challenges resides in the community
3. building relationships in order to generate change

4. intentional space is required for communication that is vulnerable and honest
5. professional learning benefits from grace and space in the pursuit of solutions because many current educational challenges are brand new (George, 2020, p. 13-14).

The Need for Cultivating Community Among Educators

The significance of participant interaction within a PD environment has been well established. Without the interchange of ideas that emerge from collegial discussion, the learning that is inspired by professional development may remain “alien, literal, fragmented, [and] non-negotiable” (Wegner, 1998, p. 220). However, “learning from others in your professional learning community allows you to reflect on ways to enhance your teaching and to adjust your practice. The more minds that come together from different backgrounds, the more likely you are to add value and purpose to the field of education” (Serviss, 2020, para. 12).

The cultivation of community has been an essential consideration for the MSCI planning team since the institute’s inception. A 2013 analysis of post-institute surveys explored the perceived significance of the learning community to MSCI’s participating educators. Previous data indicated a strong perception among participants regarding the importance of a collegial learning community within the PD process (Murrill et al., 2017).

At times, the conversations are scheduled at the close of formal addresses. At other times, the conversations occur informally in dorm rooms, coffee shops, the dining hall or other local venues. Wherever they unfold, these professional dialogues focus on teaching and are filtered through the experiences and knowledge of MSCI participants. The sharing is significant because it gives voice to personal processes of transformation and individual stories of student success. (p. 52)

Annual MSCI surveys collected since 2013 have continued to reflect a positive perception of community among participants. Representative statements shared by attending teachers include: “It creates a positive, collaborative community of educators who WANT to share and help one

another. It provides different perspectives that allow you to evaluate what is best for your classroom” (2017 participant), and “the complementary blending of the knowledge of the keynote speakers, the knowledge of fellow educators, the reflection time provided on Tuesday afternoon, and the time to network with fellow educators at Monday’s reception and at the luncheon were all strengths” (2019 participant).

Guiding Questions

Recognizing community as a notable strength of MSCI’s in-person format, the 2020 shift to a virtual professional conference raised fundamental questions for the authors including the guiding question: How might a virtual conference such as MSCI 2020 Online provide participants with an experience of shared engagement within a professional learning community? Additional questions included: Would the absence of in-person events intended for open conversation and limited opportunity for unplanned exchanges among participants detract from the learning experience? Could virtual offerings adequately fill the gap left by these omissions? Conversely, were there features unique to the online platform that effectively contributed to community building? Finally, how might exploration of these questions shape future institute planning? What considerations may be beneficial to others planning virtual PD for educators?

Conference Attendee Survey

At the close of MSCI 2020, participants received an email which provided a link to the online evaluation form. The instrument’s purpose was to measure participants’ perceptions and satisfaction with MSCI 2020. One component of the survey invited participants to share open-ended comments regarding the following: 1) What they found most valuable; 2) aspects of an online conference which were beneficial; 3) aspects of an online conference which were less effective than an in-person setting; 4) recommendations for future in-person conference

offerings; and 5) recommendations for future online offerings. Approximately 151 of MSCI 2020's 475 registrants submitted the forms. The electronic version of the evaluation was available for two weeks after the close of the Institute, and participants were sent a reminder asking for their feedback.

Analysis of participant open-ended comments was accomplished in two stages. Two independent researchers completed this process to establish reliability of the data analysis. Their process began with open coding, which allowed for identification of ideas reflected in the data. Using this methodology, ideas are "clustered around a related theme" (Brown et al., 2002, p. 176). As thematic clusters emerged through open coding, analysis shifted to focused coding, a process used to search for the most frequent or significant themes within the data (Saldaña, 2012). At the conclusion of this stage, each researcher listed the recurrent themes determined by their analyses. Themes which both researchers identified were noted for further consideration.

Tables 2 and 3 reflect each of the open-ended questions for which comments were analyzed and themes mutually recognized by the independent researchers. Order of significance is listed by researcher, demonstrating the degree of recurrence independently determined. Notably, for Questions 1 and 3 there were slight discrepancies in order of significance, but agreement on themes. For Question 2, 4 and 5, there was agreement for both themes and order of significance across the researchers.

Table 2

Participant responses regarding MSCI 2020 Online

Theme	Rankings for Order of Significance	
	Researcher 1	Researcher 2

Q1 – What was most valuable?

Keynote sessions	1	1
Hearing what others are doing in schools	2	2
Learning new strategies for teaching online	2	4
Relevance and timeliness of topics	4	5

Q2 - What aspects of the online conference format were beneficial?

Session recordings and materials posted online	1	1
Convenience of participating from home	2	2
View and interact with tech. based platform	3	3
Flexibility during presentation	4	4

Q3 - What aspects of the online conference format were less effective than an in-person setting?

Opportunity for conversation and networking	1	1
Opportunity to choose session options	2	3
Distractions in setting made focus difficult	3	2

Table 3

Participant recommendations regarding future MSCI offerings

Theme	Rankings for Order of Significance	
	Researcher 1	Researcher 2

Q4 – Recommendations for MSCI in an in-person format.

Provide online access to recordings and materials	1	1
Provide in-person, online or hybrid options	2	2
Ensure a variety of session choices	3	3
Provide question opportunities for all participants	4	4

Q5 – Recommendations for MSCI in a virtual format.

Provide opportunities for interaction	1	1
Revise question and answer opportunities	2	2

Recurrent themes identified through the analysis of survey data provide a starting point to inform the primary guiding question: How might a virtual conference such as MSCI 2020 Online

provide participants with an experience of shared engagement within a professional learning community? To consider this, we discuss the themes identified to have the greatest significance.

Valuable and Beneficial Aspects

Participant responses to Question 1, “What was most valuable?” suggests that participants found significant merit in the keynote addresses. Comments included terms such as “relevant,” “insightful,” “engaging,” and “applicable” in describing the keynote sessions (2020 participant comments). This finding is consistent with evaluation data from prior in-person iterations of MSCI, suggesting that there is value in providing keynote addresses within a conference setting, regardless of its platform.

A second theme relevant to this question focused on opportunities to hear what others are doing in schools. In the MSCI 2020 Online format, this aspect was provided through thirty-minute sessions led by classroom educators, many of whom shared presentations on classroom implementation of innovative pedagogy. In their survey responses, participants used phrases such as “see[ing] what teachers from different schools are doing,” and “listening and watching professionals of varied years of experience,” to describe aspects of MSCI Online of greatest value to them (2020 participant comments).

Survey Question 2, “What aspects of the online conference format were beneficial?” explores the added value that a virtual platform can provide. Numerous participants stated appreciation for online materials, noting benefits such as easy access to resources for classroom use or the opportunity to watch a missed session at a later time or review a session of interest. One participant remarked, “The ability to save materials and go back to the different materials as a refresher after the presenter got done talking and presenting will make it more likely for the practices to be implemented in my teaching and classroom” (2020 participant comments).

Additional themes reflected in Question 2 responses focused on the convenience and flexibility afforded by a virtual format. Several participants mentioned that they would not have been able to attend if the conference had been held in person, listing responsibilities such as child-care as a factor. Others delineated specific benefits that a virtual environment allowed. One wrote, “I was able to immediately look things up on my computer without appearing ‘rude,’ because I wasn’t ‘looking’ at the speaker. I also could get up and check the resources I have here at home to see if it was what the speaker was talking about or not. That was great as I got immediately engaged!” (2020 participant comments).

Participants also valued the opportunity to view and participate within a technology-based platform. Many noted that the experience would be helpful to them in preparing their own online teaching strategies for the school year. Some found it beneficial to view speakers working through technological challenges. A participant stated, “As nerve wracking as it was for presenters, the technological issues that were occasionally observed were also comforting, because we’ve ALL been there” (2020 participant comment). This points out the value of cultivating relatable elements within virtual conferences, suggesting participants’ desire for connection that extends beyond the role of passive viewer.

Less Effective Aspects

Question 3 asked participants to respond to the question, “What aspects of the online conference format were less effective than in an in-person setting?” One of the themes identified in participant responses appeared nearly four times more than any other theme relevant to the question. That is, participants expressed that they missed the opportunity for face-to-face conversation and networking with colleagues. One participant statement represented many,

Unfortunately the conference not being face to face means that we didn’t have those few minute breaks to chat with those around us as we would’ve had about

the presentations. I think being able to do that would mean hearing how others interpret the strategies and reflect on them, and really talking with more people, even a minute or two at a time, is just beneficial in widening the scope of my exposure. (2020 participant comment)

The desire for interaction extended also to opportunities for open discussion with presenters, reflected in comments such as, “Not having face-to-face opportunity to talk and elaborate on certain strategies and insights with the presenters will make it less likely for new insights to be implemented in the classroom” (2020 participant comment). Another participant wrote specifically of the need for participants to revisit learning from the sessions, remarking that this occurs “NOT during the sessions, but in the interactions among the participants - sitting next to each other, in the hall, at lunch, etc.” (2020 participant comment). This aligns with the previously noted concern that, “there are not obvious opportunities for ‘hallway connections’” (ACM Presidential Task Force on What Conferences Can Do to Replace Face to Face Meetings, 2020, p. 30) within a virtual conference setting. Clearly, this aspect of community provided within a physical conference setting is beneficial.

Future Recommendations

The two final questions of the online survey solicited input from participants for the purpose of informing future offerings of MSCI. Due to the pandemic, the MSCI planning team does not currently know whether its 2021 event will be offered in an in-person or virtual format. Given this uncertainty, participants were asked to respond to two separate questions. Question 4 asked for recommendations relevant to offering MSCI in an in-person format, and Question 5 asked for recommendations applicable to a virtual format.

Participant recommendations regarding an in-person conference confirmed the value they found in aspects of MSCI 2020 Online. The recommendation most frequently expressed was the desire for in-person participants to receive online access to session recordings and materials, a feature provided in the virtual format. Specifically, participants proposed that slideshows, session recordings or transcripts, materials and resources be uploaded to the MSCI website. One participant stated that she appreciated “access to videos for the month of July so I could listen to the ones I liked from [the] comfort of [my] own home with snacks by my side” (2020 participant comment). This validates Gillin’s finding that a “longer tail” (2020, para. 14) of engagement with conference learning may be made possible by providing recorded conference sessions online.

Two of the additional themes emerging from this question suggested that future in-person offerings of MSCI should be augmented by parallel virtual opportunities for participation. This reflects the hybrid model described by National Press Club (2020) in which participants may choose from in-person or virtual attendance. Participant descriptions of how this might be implemented varied. One suggested, “Video stream from each conference room where people from home can watch and comment via Zoom and still have answers addressed,” (2020 participant comment). Another wrote, “Virtual presentations would enable MORE people to hear the speakers. If they are recorded, they could be incorporated into a professional development session, to be followed up with face-to-face discussions with the participants” (2020 participant comment). An observation across comments was the need for all participants to grapple with learning through questioning or discussion. While opportunities for these components are naturally afforded to in-person attendees, intentional options should be added for those attending virtually, such as use of Zoom chat or the Q and A feature during sessions.

Some participants suggested a primarily in-person conference with sessions recorded for those who were not able to attend on a specific day. Medical situations, family commitments or school responsibilities may cause participants to miss a particular point in the conference. In general, participants saw value in providing both in-person and virtual offerings. This finding supports Knafo's remarks,

My personal opinion is that virtual conferences are more like an add-on than a replacement to in-person conferences. It's impossible to attend every in-person conference that might be of interest — there [are] just too many of them. Virtual conferences can give attendees the opportunity to participate in a lot more events. (2020, para. 23).

Participant responses to Question 5 offered recommendations for an all-virtual conference. Responses focused primarily on two themes, both relevant to the central emphasis of cultivating shared participant engagement within a professional learning community. The first identified theme garnered more responses than any other theme reflected on the survey. Participants expressed a desire for opportunities for virtual interaction with other participants. This theme is validated by others, such as George's assertion that virtual PD requires "intentional space...for communication that is vulnerable and honest" (George, 2020, p. 13-14). Additionally, Ryan Holmes, a contributor on Forbes.com, polled his approximately two million social media followers, requesting "tips from the frontlines." Among the ideas shared by his followers, the need to be active participants made the top 10 list of tips. Holmes explains,

Virtual conferences need to provide small group settings — workshops, breakout groups, even smaller panel discussions — where participants can truly interact and engage instead of just sitting back and watching. In real life, some of this happens naturally, but when everything is mediated by a screen, these efforts need to be deliberate. (2020, para. 15)

MSCI participants offered a range of suggestions for virtual interaction. Some focused on opportunities for discussion within the context of sessions, such as Zoom breakout rooms. One

suggested providing a virtual site where participants could elect to “sit together” during sessions. A group of four MSCI 2020 Online attendees created their own opportunity for interaction by hosting a socially distanced gathering. A participant explains, “They (the four attendees) watched the presentation and could talk and share ideas from what they learned” (2020 participant comment). Other recommendations advocated for opportunities to extend discussion of learning beyond the time allotted for a session. Ideas included providing discussion boards where participants could share in collective conversations on topics of interest, workshop rooms where participants who taught mutual subject areas or grade levels could exchange ideas or collaboratively plan, and optional discussion rooms for open conversation regarding previously attended sessions. Finally, a number of participants suggested virtual opportunities intentionally designed for social interaction, networking and mingling.

The second theme emerging from Question 5 remarks also emphasized the idea of interaction among participants, suggesting that question and answer offerings should be expanded. Ideas included providing additional opportunities for participants to engage keynote speakers, dedicating sessions to questions, answers and discussion, and documenting questions and responses for later access. At MSCI’s previous in-person conferences, the schedule provided 30-45 minute open discussion sessions with each keynote speaker. Responses to this question clearly demonstrated a need to replicate this type of offering within a virtual context.

Conclusion

In a final reflection, we have learned from MSCI 2020 Online survey data, as well as the collective experience shared in recent articles, blogs and online sources, the ways to cultivate a sense of community within a virtual professional conference. The benefits of collegial interaction in professional contexts are well established, both in research literature and in evaluative

statements offered by two decades of MSCI's in-person participants. Virtual implementation of this essential aspect of learning, however, is still under investigation. The ACM Presidential Task Force on What Conferences Can Do to Replace Face-to-Face Meetings addresses the role of social interactions in online and face to face conferences, stating,

...now that virtual meetings are a fact of life for the moment, there are many creative ideas floating around for how organizers can construct opportunities for unstructured and even serendipitous interaction. Some of these ideas have been tried before in the few virtual conferences the task force is aware of, as well as in some physical conferences that have experimented with additional online forms of social interaction, but the possibilities are relatively unexplored. (ACM, 2020, p. 30)

Virtual platforms represent uncharted territory for many who plan educational PD, whether organizing opportunities for professional learning through in-service training or an educational conference. An essential question is how the events may deliberately cultivate a sense of shared engagement and community within an online platform. Intentional inclusion of opportunities for interaction with speakers, collegial conversation among participants and continuing access to materials provide a positive starting point for exploration of the virtual PD frontier.

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A Comparison of Virginia Preservice Teachers' Efficacy and the Effect of COVID-19

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory study was to gain insight into the effect of COVID-19 on Virginia preservice teachers' efficacy. The current study compared teacher efficacy scores of two different cohorts. Cohort 1 completed the preservice teaching internship in 2017-2018, while Cohort 2 completed the preservice teaching internship during the 2019-2020 school year. Because of the impact of COVID-19, Cohort 2 had a shortened in-person preservice teaching internship due to schools moving to virtual learning. Using the Teacher Efficacy scale and open-response questions, the researchers compared efficacy scores of the two cohorts and gained insight from Cohort 2 on their thoughts moving forward as first-year teachers. The results found a significant difference in total teacher efficacy scores and classroom management efficacy scores between the two cohorts. The preservice teachers in Cohort 2 also shared their perceptions regarding the implementation of classroom management and the lack of practice within the classroom.

Keywords: Preservice Teachers; Teacher Efficacy; Teacher Induction

Every year, teacher preparation programs (TPP) attempt to prepare preservice teachers for roles as classroom teachers. A TPP plays a vital role in developing preservice teachers' efficacy through courses and field experiences (Clark et al., 2013). One significant aspect of a preservice teacher program is the student teaching internship. This experience ranges from three months to a year, depending on the TPP, and provides preservice teachers the opportunity to teach with the support of a cooperating teacher and supervisor. However, in the spring of 2020, Virginia TPPs faced the impact of COVID-19. The results of this included all schools in Virginia moving to a virtual learning format. Thus, many preservice teachers, who had been completing

field placements during the 2019-2020 year, experienced a shorter in-person internship. For this specific study, we sought to understand the impact of COVID-19 on preservice teacher efficacy in the spring of 2020 compared to a previous internship experience cohort (Spring 2018). We also wanted to gain insight on preservice teachers' perceptions of preparedness considering they had less time in the classroom as a preservice teacher.

A well thought out field placement allows preservice teachers to apply skills discussed in class and allows cooperating teachers and supervisors to scaffold the application of those skills. First-hand experiences in a classroom can help preservice teachers open their minds to new beliefs and techniques regarding teaching and learning (Darling-Hammond, 2006; Feiman-Nemser & Buchman, 1987; Shambaugh, 2016). Shambaugh (2016) states that a practicum or field experience is “invaluable to giving students opportunities to implement learning principles and sharing results with one another” (p.81). Along with providing real-life examples of the content discussed in courses, preservice teachers often become more comfortable and develop a higher teaching efficacy from a successful field experience (Flores, 2015; Singh, 2017). Thus, it is important to understand how a shorter, in-person internship teaching experience, due to COVID-19, may affect preservice teachers' efficacy as they prepare to become first-year teachers.

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy is defined as “the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute course of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 233). Several variables play a role in developing a teacher's efficacy. Within the school environment, the school principal and the school community's emphasis on academics may predict personal teaching efficacy. Schools that

contain teachers with high, attainable goals and have a serious learning environment tend to have teachers with higher teacher efficacy (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). To create an environment that promotes teacher efficacy, schools should provide teachers with strategies and feedback for their teaching as well as opportunities to work with other teachers in the building (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). Creating an environment that supports high teacher efficacy is important because teacher efficacy is strongly correlated to teacher burnout and teacher commitment to the profession (Pas et al., 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Other influences on teacher efficacy include graduate degrees (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993), the time of the school year (Anderson et al., 1988), and previous teaching experiences (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Higher teacher efficacy may provide positive impact on students. For example, teachers with high teaching efficacy tend to make positive academic achievement predictions, especially with inattentive students in elementary and middle school (Tournaki & Podell, 2005).

Teachers with higher efficacy have also been more successful at raising student abilities, specifically in upper elementary mathematics (Midgley et al., 1989) and at the beginning of the year for elementary students (Anderson et al., 1988). A similar study found teachers with high teacher efficacy focus on maximizing literacy and math instruction (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Zee and Koomen (2016) found several other positive results of high teacher efficacy across studies. For example, teachers with high efficacy are more likely to develop supportive learning environments for students, especially for inclusive settings with students with special needs. They are also more effective with difficult students and students who receive special education services within the classroom as compared to teachers with lower teacher efficacy (Brownell & Pajares, 1999). Because of the impact of teacher efficacy on student outcomes, it is important to

learn more about the development of teacher efficacy in preservice teachers as they go through the process of preparing to teach in future classrooms.

Preservice Teacher Efficacy

Within TPPs, preservice teachers begin to develop skills that will help them be more successful in their future classrooms and thus build their teacher efficacy. While learning the art of teaching, it is important for preservice teachers to get the opportunity to apply these skills in field experiences with hopes of building teacher efficacy. Previous literature found positive results regarding the effects of field experiences on preservice teachers' efficacy specifically in the domain of reading (Haverback & Parault, 2008; Rogers-Haverback & Mee, 2015). Rogers-Haverback and Mee (2015), for example, focused on a group of preservice teachers who completed a tutoring field experience, and these preservice teachers demonstrated an increase of teacher efficacy throughout the field experience.

When looking specifically at preservice teaching and teacher efficacy, previous studies have found several different factors that play a key role in a preservice teacher's efficacy (Hoy & Spero, 2005; Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008; Moulding et al., 2014). The preservice teaching experience is often a time that preservice teachers build their teacher efficacy especially if the preservice teacher has a supportive supervisor during the preservice teaching internship (Hoy & Spero, 2005; Moulding et al., 2014). Other aspects that support building teacher efficacy include teaching opportunities and observations of an experienced teacher (Brown et al., 2015). When looking at the length of a preservice teacher's internship, previous studies have not indicated that time spent in an internship influences one's teaching efficacy (Chambers & Hardy, 2005; Ronfeldt & Reininger, 2012).

The Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to determine if a shortened in-person preservice teaching experience due to the COVID-19 pandemic would impact Virginia preservice teachers' efficacy compared to a previous year's group of preservice teachers. Based on the previous teacher efficacy literature, we expected the preservice teachers with a full preservice teaching internship (Cohort 1) to have a higher overall efficacy and higher efficacy subscores compared to the preservice teachers with a shortened preservice teaching internship due to COVID-19 (Cohort 2).

Method

This exploratory study focused on the impact of a shortened preservice teaching internship on preservice teachers' efficacy. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Cohort 2 experienced six fewer weeks of in-person teaching during the internship compared to Cohort 1. During a typical internship, the final six weeks would allow for preservice teachers to have autonomy within the classroom and act as the lead teacher. During the final six weeks, preservice teachers would be responsible for all aspects of teaching including classroom management, lesson plans, instruction, and assessment. All Cohort 2 teachers moved to the virtual setting; however, it was up to the cooperating teachers to decide how much the preservice teacher got involved with the day-to-day teaching and responsibilities. Five elementary preservice teachers in Cohort 2 had opportunities to continue working with their classes by teaching lessons in a virtual setting. The other 15 preservice teachers in Cohort 2 had cooperating teachers who either moved to an asynchronous teaching model or did not allow the preservice teacher to take the lead during the last six weeks of the internship.

To determine the impact of the shortened in-person preservice teaching internship, the study compared teacher efficacy data from two different cohorts of preservice teachers (2017-

2018 & 2019-2020). Specifically, the researchers used The Teacher Efficacy Scale long version (TES; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and short answer responses to learn more about the impact of a shorter preservice teaching internship due to COVID-19.

Participants

All participants came from a Master's of Arts in Teaching Program in Virginia that prepares students for initial teacher licensure. The Institutional Review Board of the university housing the teaching program approved the research, and the researchers followed the American Psychological Association's ethical guidelines. We used convenient sampling with all members of the two cohorts by sending an electronic survey through email after the completion of their preservice teaching internship. Cohort 1 (2017-2018; $N = 20$) included 14 elementary and 6 secondary, English preservice teachers. Cohort 2 (2019-2020; $N = 22$) included 17 elementary and 5 secondary, English preservice teachers. Participants were predominantly female and White, as is the TPP itself.

Survey

The survey included demographic information, the TES, and open-ended questions. The TES includes three subscales: *Efficacy in Student Engagement*, *Efficacy in Instructional Strategies*, and *Efficacy in Classroom Management*. Possible responses for items ranged from 1 (*Nothing*) to 9 (*A Great Deal*). Following standard practice for this instrument, the results report mean ratings for the full scale and subscales to facilitate interpretation of scores. The TES long-form has an alpha value of .94, while the subscale of engagement has an alpha value of .87, the subscale of instruction has an alpha value of .91, and the subscale of classroom management has a subscale of .90, respectively (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Along with the survey data, individuals in Cohort 2 responded to three open-ended questions. The purpose of the questions was to gain more information about the impact of their shortened preservice teaching internship. These questions included:

- 1) With schools moving online because of COVID, how prepared do you feel having a shorter preservice teaching internship?
- 2) What worries you as you enter your first year of teaching?
- 3) What are you looking forward to during your first year of teaching?

When coding the qualitative data from the survey given to Cohort 2, we used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In order to increase reliability, both researchers read through the responses and there was 100% agreement for the qualitative codes.

Results

Through descriptive statistics and an independent *t*-test we compared the total teacher efficacy score and efficacy subscores for the two cohorts to determine if a shortened preservice teaching internship due to COVID-19 impacted preservice teachers' efficacy.

Overall Teacher Efficacy

The results found a significant difference between Cohort 1 ($M = 7.22$, $SD = .58$) and Cohort 2 ($M = 6.52$, $SD = .77$; See Appendix A) for overall teacher efficacy $t(40) = 2.52$, $p = .000$ (See Appendix B). These results indicated the shortened preservice teaching internship due to COVID-19 may have played a role in Cohort 2's overall teacher efficacy at the end of the preservice teaching internship. When asked to describe how prepared to teach they were, a majority of Cohort 2 (14) shared beliefs of not being as prepared as they would have liked. For example, one preservice teacher shared, "It (COVID) cut my learning experience short which is frustrating because I feel less prepared for the next year and less desired to be hired because of

my lack of experience in the classroom.” A second, who was able to teach virtually, shared that even though she continued to gain teaching experience, moving to online instruction played a role in their perception of their teaching ability. “Since moving online, I lost confidence and do not feel capable of teaching. It just was not the same as being in front of students.” Another preservice teacher shared similar thoughts of not feeling fully prepared to have her own classroom next year, but hopes to receive support within her school to make up for it.

I would have liked to have had more time in the classroom to have gotten more feedback on my teaching and have more time with my students. I feel like I am going to be at a slight disadvantage going into next year, but I hope I have support from my school to help with the transition.

The Cohort 2 preservice teachers who reportedly believed they were prepared shared that they had a cooperating teacher who supported them throughout the preservice teaching internship process and allowed them to get involved early in their preservice and virtually during the teaching internship. Thus, the preservice teachers believed they had a good foundation to build upon. For example, one preservice teacher shared, “My cooperating teacher was extremely knowledgeable on how to effectively deliver instruction and always had great feedback to help me develop. She was also good at managing behaviors and led me to be more confident in my classroom management ability.” A second preservice teacher also noted having a strong foundation that she believed would help her in the future, “I had a very positive preservice teaching internship. I did however wish I had longer to implement the changes I wished to do with both instruction and management. However, I feel like a firm foundation was established.”

Classroom Management Efficacy

The survey results found a significant difference between Cohort 1 ($M = 7.60, SD = .77$) and Cohort 2 ($M = 6.28, SD = .83$; See Table 1) for the subscale of classroom management teacher efficacy $t(40) = 4.26, p = .000$ (See Table 2). The results suggest that the shorter

preservice teaching internship due to COVID-19 impacted preservice teachers' classroom management efficacy compared to Cohort 1 who completed a full semester of preservice teaching.

Short answer responses from individuals in Cohort 2 also suggested lower classroom management efficacy due to the limited time to practice classroom management. Of the 22 Cohort 2 participants, 20 Cohort 2 preservice teachers mentioned being worried about classroom management as a future teacher. Of the 20 preservice teachers worried about classroom management, 9 preservice teachers just listed classroom management as their number one concern entering next year. However, the other 11 shared more specific concerns regarding classroom management. Comments included expressions of being nervous dealing with specific behavior problems, setting up effective rules and routines, and general classroom management. For example, one preservice teacher shared, "I am worried about being able to set up all expectations, model them, and create a firm behavior management strategy to use within the classroom." She went on to share, "I don't feel like I got enough practice addressing difficult behaviors or establishing classroom rules." A second preservice teacher shared similar beliefs, "I feel underprepared in classroom management and I wish I had more time to practice discipline and enforcing rules, routines, and procedures for students." A third preservice teacher shared that lack of practice in front of students and missing out on feedback added to her worries about the upcoming year. She commented, "I was already nervous about classroom management because everyone says it's an issue for first-year teachers. I really wish I had more time to practice and get feedback from my cooperating teacher."

Instruction Efficacy

The survey results found no significant difference between Cohort 1 ($M = 6.99$, $SD = .68$) and Cohort 2 ($M = 7.01$, $SD = .88$; See Table 1) for the subscore of instructional teacher efficacy $t(40) = -.14$, $p = .893$ (See Table 2). Even though there was no significant difference between the two cohorts, it is interesting to note Cohort 2 had a slightly higher instructional efficacy mean compared to Cohort 1 at the end of the preservice teaching internship, even with less time in the classroom.

Though there was no significant difference between the two cohorts and on average Cohort 2 had a high instructional efficacy, six preservice teachers from Cohort 2 did identify in the open-ended questions concerns regarding instruction as they enter their first year of teaching. When it came to instructional concerns, the preservice teachers mentioned the lack of opportunities to practice teaching and the limited feedback received on their teaching. The limited practice has influenced some Cohort 2 teachers to question their ability to be good teachers.

I feel like I know all the content, strategies, and techniques that first-year teachers need to be aware of and understand. However, I question how well I will be able to implement the knowledge I hold since I feel I did not get enough time to practice them in the classroom. In other words, I know what I am supposed to do, and what good quality teachers are supposed to do, but I know putting them to practice is a whole other challenge.

Other Cohort 2 preservice teachers shared similar thoughts of wanting more practice without the support of the cooperating teacher. “I wish I had more time teaching full time or with the cooperating teacher not in the room. That would have helped me feel more prepared for my own classroom.” Another Cohort 2 preservice teacher shared, “I just needed more time in front of students and learning how to properly prepare for each individual class.”

When it came to the possibility of teaching online in the future, Cohort 2 had mixed thoughts about virtual teaching and six members of Cohort 2 shared concerns about online teaching. One preservice teacher shared, “I am nervous about the possibility of teaching online because my cooperating teachers did not give me that opportunity.” Other Cohort 2 teachers, who did not get virtual experiences shared similar nerves heading into their first year, which happened to be during the COVID-19 pandemic. Five teachers in Cohort 2 believed they were more prepared if schools go virtual again in the future due to their cooperating teacher allowing them to finish their preservice teaching virtually. As a preservice teacher shared, “I had less amount of time to practice skills which require being in the actual classroom. However, I feel more confident in implementing content through technology and virtual learning.” A second preservice teacher who was able to continue working with her students when school went virtual, which gave her confidence to provide instruction in any format to students. She responded, “I was lucky to have a cooperating teacher that has encouraged me to participate in the remainder of the academic year. I have written lessons, graded assignments, and maintained contact with students, which will help me next year.”

Engagement Efficacy

The results found no significant difference between Cohort 1 ($M = 7.18$, $SD = .63$) and Cohort 2 ($M = 6.58$, $SD = .87$; See Table 1) for the subscore of engagement teacher efficacy $t(40) = 1.79$, $p = .063$ (See Table 2). When it came to engagement, Cohort 2 focused on their future classrooms rather than their preservice teaching internships. All 22 Cohort 2 participants shared that they hoped to establish relationships with students and to use relationships to engage students in the learning process. As one preservice teacher shared, “I can’t wait to build relationships with my students and make a positive difference in the lives of my students.

Hopefully see them learn and grow as a result of my teaching.” A second preservice teacher shared similar hopes about her future classroom. “I can wait to get to know my students, being able to show them that I care about them and want to help them, teaching fun and engaging lessons, and seeing the ‘lightbulb ’moment with my students.” A third preservice teacher hoped to bring her own love of reading into the classroom to spark student interests. “I am excited to build relationships with my students and to help them develop a love a learning and foster their sense of self and interests. I have always loved reading, so I can't wait to see my students develop literacy and a passion for reading books based on their interests.”

Discussion

The findings from this study are relevant to the current state of K-12 education and TPPs in Virginia due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers who completed their preservice teaching internship during spring 2020 entered the classroom as first-year teachers in the fall with less teaching experience than previous years. New teachers also entered the 2020-2021 school year with more unknowns compared to previous years. Schools and districts must understand that the new teachers may have lower teacher efficacy as they enter the classroom compared to previous first-year teachers because of the limited preservice teaching internships. Thus, districts and schools must prioritize providing support and formative feedback to develop new teacher efficacy throughout their first year.

In regard to the difference between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2, the results indicated a significant difference in total teacher efficacy and classroom management efficacy. However, there was no significant difference in instruction and engagement efficacy between Cohort 1 and Cohort 2 preservice teachers. This may be due to previous experiences of teaching mini-lessons throughout the preservice teaching program, previous positive interactions with students, or

Cohort 2 not fully comprehending all that goes into instruction and engagement due to the lack of experience.

The results of this study may guide TPPs in Virginia as these programs look to develop future preservice teachers' classroom experiences. TPPs may need to consider alternative approaches to place preservice teachers into classrooms as schools shift educational approaches due to COVID-19, which might include more virtual experiences. TPPs will also need to consider how they can support preservice teacher efficacy if future preservice teacher internships are shorter in length or limited. This might include addressing specific skills such as virtual learning, providing preservice teachers more opportunities to practice classroom management skills in courses, or investing in virtual observation experiences for preservice teachers.

The results are also important for schools as preservice teachers' efficacy is likely to drop throughout the first year of teaching (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Though Cohort 2 finished the internship with moderate to high teacher efficacy, their overall teacher efficacy was lower than Cohort 1 after the preservice teaching internship. Thus, schools should be aware that Cohort 2 teachers may see an even lower dip in teacher efficacy compared to first-year teachers in previous years. Schools and districts should use the results from this study to engage new teachers during the first year through teacher induction programs and with PD sessions. As new teachers enter the classroom and lower teacher efficacy in classroom management, schools must keep in mind that classroom management is often a skill that needs support throughout the first year (Baker, 2005; Oliver & Reschly, 2007; Pressley et al., 2020). There is potential for Cohort 2 to see a further dip in classroom management teacher efficacy as the school year begins. This is important to note as classroom management impacts instruction and student achievement within the classroom (Gage et al., 2018; Korpershoek et al., 2016). Schools and districts should provide

extra support to new teachers throughout the first year, especially with classroom management. Support may include feedback from mentors and PD opportunities that connect with classroom instruction and management. Districts might consider focusing on only classroom management, throughout the year to encourage teacher learning from PD and build teacher efficacy in that specific domain (Desimone, 2011). Mentors and administrators should also conduct formative observations and provide feedback before conducting a formal observation. Lastly, schools may build time for new teachers to observe mentors or instructional coaches teach to gain more strategies for a successful classroom (Brown et al., 2015). By providing support to new teachers, schools may increase the efficacy of the new teachers who did not have as much classroom experience due to COVID-19.

Limitations of our study include the small number of participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings to other samples. In the future, we will look to recruit additional participants from future cohorts, which may help strengthen and generalize the findings from this study. A second limitation was due to all participants completing their preservice teaching placements in an urban school district. Future studies should include a wide array of preservice teaching environments (urban, suburban, rural) to help with the generalizability of the findings. Outside variables and experiences may have also influenced the preservice teachers' efficacy. These variables may have included previous experiences in the classroom or different cooperating teachers and schools. Lastly, the impact of COVID-19 is an ongoing process, and researchers should continue to track preservice teachers' and new teachers' efficacy as TPPs and school districts will have to work through alternative teaching environments while the world looks to control COVID-19.

Appendix A

Descriptive Statistics

	Cohort	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Total Teacher Efficacy	Cohort 1	20	7.22	.58
	Cohort 2	22	6.52	.77
Total TE CM	Cohort 1	20	7.60	.77
	Cohort 2	22	6.28	.83
Total TE Instruction	Cohort 1	20	6.99	.68
	Cohort 2	22	7.01	.88
Total TE Engagement	Cohort 1	20	7.18	.63
	Cohort 2	22	6.58	.87

Appendix B

Independent t-test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	S i g . t	df	Sig. (2- taile d)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper	
Total Teacher Efficacy	Equal variances assumed	3.668	.063	2.52	40	.000	.51	.22	.05	.96
	Equal variances not assumed			2.54	36.98	.002	.51	.22	.07	.94
Total TE CM	Equal variances assumed	.124	.726	4.26	40	.000	1.10	.26	.57	1.62
	Equal variances not assumed			4.28	35.63	.000	1.10	.26	.58	1.62
Total TE Instruction	Equal variances assumed	2.217	.145	-.14	40	.893	-.04	.26	-.56	.49
	Equal variances not assumed			-.14	36.99	.889	-.04	.25	-.54	.47

Total TE	Equal	3.50	.	1.	40	.063	.46	.26	-.06	.97
Engagem	variances	8	0	79						
ent	assumed		7							
			8							
	Equal			1.	36.	.061	.46	.24	-.04	.95
	variances			87	50					
	not				2					
	assumed									

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Reimagining Teacher Education for Family Engagement: A Response to the 2020 Health and Socio-historical Context

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Abstract

Family engagement is critical to student achievement, and the essential importance of family-school partnerships has become even more evident during the current sociohistorical context inclusive of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement. As such, it is imperative that pre-service teachers (PSTs) are equipped to build effective relationships in a virtual environment with families from diverse backgrounds, experiences, and histories. In this paper, we highlight our role as teacher educators in ensuring that PSTs know how to forge authentic partnerships with families, and how to continue developing these necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities even during these challenging times of social distancing, often in a virtual environment or setting. We discuss this in the context of how we shifted a critically reflective, process-oriented, relationship-focused face-to-face (F2F) family engagement course that uses experiential learning, to a fully online course during the COVID-19 pandemic. Recommendations for teacher educators are discussed.

Key words: teacher education, family engagement, school-family partnerships

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the essential aspects of our public education system, including how schools engage with families. In communities across Virginia, the connections between home and school have been lifelines for many families during the pandemic, particularly as families navigate online learning and plan to meet their needs related to food insecurity, unstable housing, barriers to Internet technology, and inadequate

accommodation for students with disabilities (Natanson, Balingit & Stein, 2020). Family engagement, or how families and schools build reciprocal, strengths-based partnerships (Halgunseth, 2009) has always been important in education, but the current Coronavirus crisis coupled with the continued fight for racial justice has illuminated just how essential family engagement is for students, families, and teachers.

Family engagement is relationship-based and partnership oriented (Halgunseth, 2009), and it is associated with positive child outcomes (McWayne, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Teacher preparation for family engagement is associated with increased teacher confidence in and knowledge of working with diverse families (Evans, 2013). According to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), education preparation programs should teach concepts on families related to: the role of families in early child development, culturally-responsive instruction, communication with families, and engaging students at home and in school (8 Va. Admin. Code § 20-543-90, 2020). The current socio-historical context focused on issues of racial justice reinforces the importance of family engagement and calls for reimagining how we prepare pre-service early childhood educators for family engagement.

During this historic time of heightened racial tension, pre-service teachers (PSTs) must learn intentional family engagement with Black families. Black families equip young Black children to thrive in the face of daily race-related stressors specific to the pandemic and the urgent threat of police brutality, all occurring within on-going structural racism among systems important to children's development. It imperative that PSTs understand the nature of racial socialization, a term that connotes "a broad class of parental behaviors that transmit attitudes, values, and information regarding their racial group memberships and intergroup relations to children" (Hughes & Chen, 1997, p. 202). Student understanding of this process and essential

elements of Black parenting (e.g., monitoring child emotional safety, regulating physical environments, modeling ways to challenge racism, etc.) (Doucet, Banerjee & Parade, 2018; Hughes & Chen, 1997; Neblett et al., 2009) contribute to how Black families conceptualize family engagement. Black parents' own racialized histories in and out of schools, shape family-school relationships (Calabrese Barton et al., 2004; Hughes et al., 2009). Moreover, research indicates that racism vis-à-vis microaggressions, implicit bias, and access to social capital continues to permeate family engagement experiences for Black families (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Posey-Maddox, 2017).

The extrajudicial police murders of Black people-- and we want to say the names of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Jacob Blake -- who represent too many of the deaths during the quarantine, drew national attention to the chronic race-related stressors that Black children and their families face across educational and social systems. Given this socio-historical context coupled with these policy requirements, it is imperative that PSTs, who across the nation continue to be predominantly White and monolingual English-speaking (Partee, 2014) garner the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to engage families from diverse backgrounds (Kidd, Sánchez & Thorp, 2008; Author, 2017). With this demographic composition in mind, teacher education and district efforts to diversify the teaching workforce are noteworthy. “Grow Your Own” programs and human resource efforts to match the demographic makeup of student populations enable contributions from dynamic and skilled teachers who might have been kept out of the education field (Lutton, 2019; Partee, 2014). However, education stakeholders must go further than parity in diversification of the teacher workforce and must also focus on retaining racially and ethnic diverse teachers by ensuring that workplaces are emotionally safe. Racialized school exchanges and power-laden relationships compound underlying teaching stress and push

many Black female teachers out of the classroom (Hancock, Showunmi & Lewis, 2020; Mosely, 2018). The limited research in this area underscores that greater focus on the professional experiences and persistence of Black female teachers is needed in teacher education. The field does very little to acknowledge these realities - let alone prepare them to thrive related to facing racialized employment conditions that are all too prevalent in schools. As such, it is necessary now, more than ever, that we ensure that all our PSTs are prepared to engage families from varied backgrounds by building sustained, respectful, culturally sensitive, reciprocal relationships with families and their colleagues.

In this paper, we highlight our role as teacher educators at the most racially and ethnically diverse predominantly White institution (PWI) in the state of Virginia, in ensuring that PSTs know how to build authentic partnerships with families from diverse backgrounds, and how to sharpen necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities even during these challenging times of social distancing. We discuss this in the context of how we shifted a critically reflective, process-oriented, relationship-focused face-to-face (F2F) family engagement course that uses experiential learning, to a fully online course during the COVID-19 pandemic. We focus on the importance of building relationships—between students and instructors, among students, and among the course instructors. We also discuss our positionality as instructors within our community of practice and how each of us are uniquely situated during the current socio-historical context of the COVID-19 public health crisis *and* the Black Lives Matter movement for racial justice, and how this shaped the course and our teaching.

Importance of Family Engagement (in the Current Socio-historical Context)

With school buildings closed, families and teachers scrambled to continue children's learning, while also meeting families' basic needs during this time of crisis. This immediately

illuminated the importance of connections between schools and families. Research indicates a number of developmental benefits for children, especially for children living in poverty and/or who have limited English-language proficiency that are associated with family engagement (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Lin, 2003; McWayne et al., 2004).

The pandemic and the socio-historic context has brought attention to how communities of color are faced with food insecurity, health related problems with high-density housing, and opportunity gaps (Sethi, Johnson-Staub & Robbins, 2020), and some of these types of traumatic experiences can have profound impact on family engagement. In districts and schools where family-school partnerships already existed, the adjustment to supporting students and families during the pandemic was effective. Similarly, teachers with strong, trusting relationships with families will be better equipped to discuss issues of racial injustice in response to extrajudicial killings and heightened racial tensions (Cole & Verwayne, 2018). Research demonstrates that education preparation programs can guide PSTs in cultivating teacher identity and beliefs that recognize needs, strengths, and agency particularly with families of racially minoritized students (Kidd, Sánchez & Thorp, 2008). Teacher identity relates to teachers' sense of expertise, relatability, and power dynamics with parents. Teacher beliefs reflect expectations, past experiences with families, and education philosophy (Izadinia, 2014). For example, prioritized teacher education work is needed to confront stereotypical beliefs about Black fathers and their role in education. The range of Black men's experiences with family engagement is largely unknown because current literature focuses solely on single Black fathers in urban cities (Grantham & Ford, 2003; Posey-Maddox, 2016). Implicit and explicit racism shape many interactions between Black men and school staff. Assumptions about their criminality, disinterest, and problematic relationships with their child's mother caused participants to be wary

of incessant questions from school staff (Posey-Maddox, 2016). More nuanced teacher research and coursework to dispel cliched views of Black fathers will expand PSTs 'views of Black masculinity and a fathers 'role in schooling their children.

For these many reasons, education preparation programs have a vital role in preparing teacher candidates for responsive family engagement. In this paper, we work to provide other teacher educators with insight into how to build essential knowledge, skills, and abilities for partnering with families from diverse backgrounds, even in these pandemic times as well as in the context of our continued work towards racial justice.

Background on the Family Engagement Course Content and Delivery

Engaging Families of Diverse Young Learners is a required course in our inclusive early childhood education undergraduate and graduate licensure programs. In this course, PSTs develop knowledge, skills, and abilities for building culturally appropriate relationships and engagement with families from diverse backgrounds in relation to socioeconomic status, language, immigration status, disability, race, ethnicity, and family structure. This is especially important given that our ECE pre-service teacher education program, while increasingly racially and ethnically diverse is still predominantly comprised of White female students. Because building family-teacher relationships is a primary emphasis of this course the course focuses on understanding and developing cultural humility (see Vesely, Brown & Mehta, 2017), and understanding and examining implicit biases. These areas of foci support PSTs in deepening their understanding of how their own values, beliefs, experiences, and life stories shape their interactions with others, especially those situated differently than the PST in society. For the major course assignment, which includes visiting with a family that is marginalized differently

from the PST's family (see Vesely et al. 2017), PSTs are encouraged to reflect on their positionality in society related to intersectional identities (e.g., gender, race, class, ability, etc.).

In written format, similar to a qualitative research memo, once PSTs select a family to work with, they critically reflect on the assumptions they hold regarding the family's experiences as well as how they believe society may view the family. They subsequently plan for the visit by detailing questions they have about the child and the family. Upon receiving feedback from the instructor regarding the depth of their critical reflection, PSTs schedule their interview with the primary caregiver and observation visit with the entire family. Following the visit, the PST writes a second critical reflection (Memo 2) that incorporates their original assumptions with what they learned about the family during the visit. The PSTs also consider how this experience and what they learned will shape their choices regarding family engagement in their classroom. Previous research on this course assignment indicates that through this home visit project, PSTs developed cultural humility by: 1) exploring their implicit biases, which were reflected in PSTs' assumptions and emotions regarding working with a family from a diverse marginalized background (different from the PST); and 2) by building their compassion and empathy through spending time with the family to learn more about their experiences. For more details regarding this assignment and its connections with student learning see Author (2017).

At least two sections of this course, across undergraduate and graduate levels are taught by full-time faculty and adjunct faculty each semester. Vesely is a full-time tenured faculty member and serves as the course lead for the family engagement course. In this role, Vesely provides adjunct instructors and other full-time faculty members who are teaching the course with support regarding building the syllabus and generally developing and organizing course content. In addition, as course lead, Vesely, serves as a mentor professor for any doctoral

students who may be participating in a higher education teaching internship in the family engagement course. Historically, over the last decade, meetings between course instructors and the course lead for this course, occurred once or twice during the semester, and all sections of this course were taught in face to face or hybrid formats. When the COVID-19 pandemic began there were a number of changes made to the course to adapt to the new landscape of social distancing. These adaptations were in relation to course delivery and assignments, as well as building a structure for regular connection among the course lead and course instructors.

Course Adaptations Due to COVID

In March 2020, the university moved to a fully remote teaching and online space due to the pandemic. Within the first week of F2F coursework ceasing, the Spring 2020 course instructors, inclusive of Mehta, connected with the course lead, Vesely, to adjust course assignments and course delivery. Spring 2020 instructors opted for synchronous class meetings so they could implement their already prepared lectures and in-class activities with limited adaptation to the remote teaching space. This ensured that instructors were able to maintain regular connectivity with students especially in uncertain times.

A primary area of discussion focused on adapting the home visit project, which is the major course assignment. These initial adjustments informed permanent adjustments to this assignment later for the fully online course developed in summer 2020. PSTs were at different points in the project, with about half of students already having completed a face-to-face visit and about half who had not yet visited with families. The course instructors and Vesely met to develop written communication to students regarding course delivery for the rest of the semester, assignments, and most importantly, how PSTs would conduct their home visits. This communication included clear directives to *not* conduct these home visits in person. Instructors

encouraged students to use videoconference tools for both the interview and observation, and provided them with additional interview questions to ask, including: *“If I had been able to visit you during a family event, what event would that have been? What would I have observed in terms of the activity, sibling relationships, parent-child relationships, etc.? Why is this type of event important to you?”*

Shifting from F2F to remote teaching to fully online course delivery. With three sections of the course scheduled for the summer, we began to develop a fully online version of the course for the summer. Vesely, as course lead, and Mehta, Gundling, and Arora, who were scheduled to teach in summer 2020 began to meet weekly to develop the course modules. The three sections of the course were scheduled to run for different lengths of time during the summer, with the shortest being seven weeks and the longest being 10 weeks. One of the sections was all graduate students and the other two sections were a mix of undergraduate and graduate students. Vesely, Mehta, Gundling, and Arora met weekly to build online asynchronous and synchronous versions of the course. As the course lead and full-time faculty member, Vesely organized these discussions and led the building of each of the six course modules. This work occurred between May and July 2020. These weekly meetings, which began in May, initially consisted of syllabi development; in June and July meetings focused on course module development and delivery, as well as discussing emergent course issues and questions related to the modules, as well as course assignments, and in August we discussed fall syllabi and continued course development.

Vesely previously developed and taught a fully online course in another program within the university, after taking a basic course focused on online teaching offered at the University. In addition, Vesely co-developed the family engagement course nearly a decade ago, and has

been the main instructor of this course over the last nine years. Vesely is of White European American descent, and is upper middle class. She is the mother of three children (ages 3,7,10), who were participating in online elementary school and preschool during the pandemic. Mehta, Gundling, and Arora came to the course with a range of experience in terms of teaching the course and teaching in hybrid or online formats, as well as diverse positionality in the world. Mehta, an Indian American woman who migrated to the US when she was 11, taught this family engagement course F2F in two previous semesters, and also had online teaching experience. During Spring 2020, she sought professional training from the university Center for Teaching and Learning to develop and teach courses online. Gundling, a male of White European descent who has over 40 years of experience as an ECE practitioner had never taught online or at this university and had never taught this course focused on family engagement. Arora, an Indian American woman born and raised in the United States, had experience teaching a fully online course focused on a different area of ECE, had taught the family engagement course previously in person, yet not in an online format. Additionally, Arora has 28 years of experience teaching early childhood special education in a public school setting. Sansbury, an American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Holmes Doctoral Scholar and Black female ECE doctoral student, joined the team as a teaching intern in fall 2020. In fall 2020 Vesely (with Sansbury as a teaching intern) and Mehta taught asynchronous sections of the course, given competing family (Vesely's children in fully online education due to the pandemic) and non-academic employment (Mehta is an adjunct instructor with other paid employment outside of the University) demands. Gundling taught the course fully online synchronously due to the demands of his non-University employment. During the fall 2020 semester Vesely, Mehta, Sansbury, and

Gundling met for one hour each week via Zoom to check-in about assignments, course content, and communications with students.

The COVID-19 pandemic was the catalyst for changes related to course delivery, as well as increased connection among course instructors; however, the BLM movement informed important content development in the course. In particular, instructors added content focused on racial identity development and socialization as well as anti-racism more generally. Instructors focused on continuing to support PSTs in understanding personal identity and intersectionality, but specifically focused on familial racial socialization among racially marginalized families. This denotes a “specific type of socialization utilized by families of color in response to the challenges associated with the sociohistorical landscape, the persistence of racism, and living in a racialized society that has historically not valued their existence” (James, Coard, Fine, & Rudy, 2018, p. 420). Understanding this process is essential for PST as they consider the protective influences of affirming messages and race-related parenting practices particularly in Black families during this critical juncture (Caughy, O'Campo, Randolph, & Nickerson, 2002). Guided, deliberate conversations about race and the larger system of systemic racism prove critical as PSTs look to bolster family-school relationships, aptitudes, and skills. James et. al. (2018) emphasize that racial socialization occurs in all families with varying degrees of urgency and explicit talk of race. Deliberate guided conversations about race and the larger system of systemic racism prove critical as PSTs look to bolster family-school relationships, aptitudes, and skills. Throughout the fall semester, weekly meetings served as a community of practice for instructors, and a structure for continuing to adapt the course in terms of delivery *and* content. These meetings provided a designated time and space for instructors to be supported in engaging students as they navigated the demands of the course amidst the uncertainty of the socio-

historical context. In particular, instructors discussed our own racial identity and the teacher educator role in raising consciousness among students. As students grappled with course material regarding implicit bias, race, racism, anti-racism, privilege, and oppression, and were confronted by material that challenged or validated students' experiences and long-held beliefs, it was necessary that instructors scaffolded students' learning in these spaces. As such, during weekly meetings instructors checked in with and supported each other through advice and feedback regarding student communication. This connection across instructors modeled for students how to create communities of practice, trusted relationships, and collaboration with critical colleagues.

Adaptations to build relationships within the course. Building relationships is fundamental to the work that early childhood educators do, whether it is with children, co-teaching colleagues, administrators, and of course, families. Early on in the course, instructors note to students that as early childhood educators, they are in the business of relationships. Given this focus on building relationships, instructors work to support students to begin to understand the phenomena (implicit bias, ethnocentrism, stereotypes) that interrupt our ability to build authentic relationships with individuals from different backgrounds. Consequently, instructors ensure students have the opportunity to learn from one another and practice building authentic relationships, by participating in small group activities.

Pre-pandemic in the face-to-face version of the course PSTs spent a portion of every class working in small groups whether it was to complete a case study, conduct a critical reflection activity, or develop family engagement strategies. These groupings were sometimes student-led and sometimes faculty-led. Instructors wanted to ensure a similar experience for students in the online asynchronous and synchronous versions of the course. It was also very important to

ensure that students were working with students whose life experiences and stories were different from one another. To create these groups such that students would have the opportunity to learn from peers' diverse stories, each instructor emailed their students one week before the course began seeking background information (see Appendix A). Instructors then used this information to both ensure diversity across and within experiences in the small groups. While a goal was to ensure diversity of experiences in the group, instructors also did not want to tokenize students related to any aspect of their identity. For example, if there were two students of Latin American descent in a group, instructors would try to ensure their families were from different countries of origin, or different family structure, or socioeconomic status backgrounds.

During each of the six course modules students had small group activities to complete. For the asynchronous course sections, the instructors provided guidance regarding different roles of group members including group leader, technology officer, communications officer, and editor(s). These roles rotated each module. Students met via videoconference to accomplish their group work, and then sent their group work, which was critically reflective in nature, to the instructor via google documents. Using google documents enabled an on-going dialogue between the group and the instructor. For some activities, groups posted their work in the larger class discussion board for large group discussions. In the synchronous section, this small group work was accomplished during the class meeting time.

Adapting major course assignment. The Home Visit Project required the greatest adaptation of any assignments in the course to ensure its effectiveness even during a time of social distancing. Instructors created an additional module in the course focused on the Home Visit Project to provide students with resources including scripts for reaching out to families, more assignment details, and role plays. The main adjustment to this assignment was that PSTs

conduct all parts of the visit virtually via Zoom or WebEx (both tools are available to students at our university). With home visits being virtual, PSTs needed to ease discomfort using the technology tools and build rapport through a screen. As such, small groups were encouraged to meet for their small group activities via videoconference. These meetings assisted them with scheduling and hosting future virtual connections. In addition, instructors scheduled mandatory meetings with small groups throughout the semester to discuss various assignments. In these meetings, instructors modeled how to build rapport through a screen by encouraging each participant to turn on their video, and checking in with each student as they entered the group meeting (as one would when someone enters a brick and mortar classroom).

Beyond ensuring students were comfortable using video conference technology, some instructors also demonstrated how to conduct a home visit interview via videoconference. Dr. Lilian Katz notes the importance of congruency (Vanderven, 2000) in working with pre- and in-service early childhood educators such that teacher educators model expected strategies for supporting children and their families in developmentally appropriate ways. As an example, during a virtual class meeting, Gundling asked a student who is from Korea to participate in a role play of a virtual home visit. During the role play, Gundling used strategies and skills that students were expected to use during their virtual home visit with the families. During the role play experience, the other students were prompted to write their observations of the interaction. Following the role play, the students discussed their observations in small groups and identified strategies and skills for learning about the family, and how this connected to what is required for this core assignment for the course. Arora encouraged her students to strengthen positive relationships with families through careful crafting of questions, prior to conducting virtual home visits. To this end, she provided students with a family questionnaire that was adapted from

Tabors (2008), which included questions focused on garnering a better understanding of dynamics and priorities for families from a variety of cultural backgrounds.

For the video observation, instructors emphasized the importance of the observation component of the Home Visit Project to have the opportunity to observe interactions among the various family members in their everyday life. We provided examples from PSTs home visits in previous semesters of the: 1) kinds of family events or activities that PSTs observed 2) ways that some of these activities, like a family dinner or birthday celebration, would work well for a virtual visit and 3) how other activities might be more challenging (e.g., attending a religious service, sporting events). For the observation of a family event component of the Home Visit Project, instructors encouraged students to ask families to place their phones or laptop devices in spaces where the students could virtually see (and hear) all family members within a specific room in the home. During these observations some PSTs had difficulty hearing conversations between family members. Instructors encouraged these students to ask families questions post-video observations to gain any information missed during the interview. Moreover, instructors (Vesely and Mehta) who had also taught the course face to face assessed PSTs' learning using the virtual home visit compared to those PSTs in previous semesters who conducted face to face home visits. It seems in both formats, PSTs were able to critically examine their assumptions and unconscious biases. However, in the virtual format, PSTs had limited ability to truly observe the lived experiences and environment of families even with an observation portion of the visit. It was difficult for them to fully experience the culture and develop deeper understanding of the customs of their chosen home visit families on an iPhone or a laptop screen. The opportunity to physically be in families' homes and observe families in their homes and in their communities provided even greater space for PSTs to gain critical consciousness of their own biases.

Recommendations for Pre-Service Teacher Educators

Despite many pandemic constraints, shifting things in the course has expanded opportunities for learning among PSTs and instructors engaged in the course. Recommendations for teacher educators include giving PSTs ample individual and group meeting times so they can begin to unpack their biases and co-construct knowledge of working with diverse families. During such meeting times, teacher educators should consistently model practices (e.g., strategies) to scaffold PSTs' learning of how to promote stronger bonds with diverse families. This modeling exemplifies how instructors interact with and build relationships with PSTs in their course. Such modeling also directly hones student skills in navigating conversations with families through role play exchanges among students and parent/family guest speakers from varied backgrounds. Through manifold opportunities to observe relationship building, PSTs will observe how to foster reciprocal relationships with diverse families. During the course, the home visit component serves as tool to cultivate PSTs' skills, beliefs, planning, and aptitudes toward collaboration particularly with racially and ethnically diverse families. This paper contributes to emergent scholarship that positions work with families as critical to teacher education (Jackson & Sedehi, 1998; Keilty & Kosaraju, 2018; Kidd, Sánchez & Thorp, 2008; Lin & Bates, 2010; Peralta-Nash, 2003; Vesely et al., 2017).

Having ongoing dialogue about PSTs' positionality and intersectional identities during individual activities and group workshops guides PSTs in unpacking a) who they are, b) what topics they are comfortable or uncomfortable with, and c) how they make meaning of personal, peer, teacher, and societal perspectives on diverse families. Having a sense of *how* others, inclusive of teacher educators, talk and think about diverse families within the current climate will allow them to expand their knowledge of diverse families and to view this course as process-

rather than outcome-oriented. They, similarly, will recognize the significance of required introspection and engagement in ongoing dialogue with diverse families. In particular with Black families at this juncture, such critical reflection enriches family engagement as a powerful means to build bridges with Black families.

Finally, work in this course also highlights the importance of instructors working together to create a community of practice. Through regular meetings, instructors can contribute to each other's professional development. This connection is especially salient for teacher educators who aim to develop more course curriculum focused on issues of race, racism, anti-racism, and racial identity development to support children, families, and school personnel- particularly in promotion of racial justice within and outside of our schools. In these communities of practice, instructors can coach each other and model confronting yet essential practices that they expect PSTs to implement beyond the course. Such courageous, intentional teacher education spaces provide opportunities for critical reflection and empowerment.

Limitations

Despite the positive developments in this course in terms of content, delivery, and instructor connections, there were limitations to teaching a family engagement course in this fully online environment that must be noted. First, face to face synchronous interactions (with instructors, peers, and families) in the course were limited to videoconference. Given the importance of in-person face to face interactions for building relationships, PSTs in the all virtual environment did not benefit from practicing developing relationships with families in person in families' homes. However, PSTs did gain proficiency in using videoconference tools which may enhance their abilities to build relationships with families beyond the use of email and telephone, and to supplement in person visits. Second, PSTs were unable to conduct the observation portion

of the home visit in person, which limited their understanding of families' lived experiences.

Without physically being in families' homes and communities, PSTs abilities to visualize families' daily routines and experiences were limited. This may have limited the depth of PSTs critical reflection on their implicit biases and deeper understanding of the family's culture, and this reflection is especially important for PSTs as they prepare for a profession where they are expected to work with diverse families of young children.

Appendix A

This is the email we sent students to assist in our group formation:

I have an easy request for you. Our class is going to have a fair number of group activities related to studying issues facing families today. Please know that many online learners who have come before you have noted how much they liked working in groups and learning from their groups. As I'm preparing to assign students to groups, I'd like to ensure richness of learning by making the groups as diverse as possible. Would you help me **by sending me an email** to tell me anything about you that you think might be unique from others in the class? Examples of the type of information I'm looking for are:

1. Your major
2. Your preferred name & pronouns
3. If you spent (all or part of) your childhood in another country
4. If your family was wealthy, low-income or poor, or middle-class
5. If you speak (or spoke) a language other than English in your home growing up
6. If you or someone in your family is adopted
7. What your family structure was growing up (single parent, two parent household, etc.)
8. Or anything else that you think would enable you to bring a unique perspective to the study of families
9. Please let me know if you are okay with me sharing your GMU email address within our course for the purposes of forming small groups.

Please respond with whatever you'd like to share about yourself as soon as possible.

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