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A Qualitative Phenomenological Study Of Public School Teachers' Experiences While Teaching During A Pandemic

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**A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL
TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WHILE TEACHING DURING A PANDEMIC**

By

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EXPERIENCES WHILE TEACHING DURING A PANDEMIC

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Three research questions guided this study: (1) How do K-12 public school teachers describe their lived experiences while teaching during a pandemic?, (2) How do K-12 public school teachers describe their perceptions of stressors related to teaching during a pandemic?, and (3) How do K-12 public school teachers describe their experience as learners while adapting to teaching during a pandemic? Constructivism and social constructivism were applied as the conceptual and theoretical framework.

Semi structured interviews were used to gather data. After coding and analysis, themes emerged which included the importance of support, classroom challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessity of perseverance. The findings of this study focused on the lived experience of K-12 public school teachers and indicated that stressors such as issues with technology, lack of direction from school officials, and parental support contributed to their stress levels. Additionally, teachers gained comfort from learning from and with their colleagues.

Keywords: Asynchronous Online Teaching, Burnout, Depersonalization, Emotional Exhaustion, Synchronous Online Teaching

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In March 2020, the teaching profession changed around the nation due to the spread of COVID-19 (Oducado et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021; Scott, 2020). First identified in December of 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic was caused by a transmittable virus identified as SARS-CoV-2 (World Health Organization, 2021). As this virus began to spread across the country, school communities across the nation closed their physical doors to students, began to employ different modes of academic instruction, and did not reopen for face-to-face instruction until the 2020-2021 school year (Pressley, 2021; Pressley et al., 2021; Scott, 2020). This decision to close schools to in-person teaching and move to an emergency remote learning format forced teachers to make quick changes to their teaching repertoire as mandates were ordered by state governors and leadership at the various State Departments of Education (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021; Scott, 2020). Hodges et al. (2020) defined emergency remote learning as the “shift of instructional delivery to an alternative delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (p. 47). Jakubowski and Sitko-Dominik (2021) wrote that this shift to remote learning was quick, however, Marshall et al. (2020) found that even if there was a slow transition to remote learning, difficulties and stress could occur for classroom teachers.

Teachers needed to be nimble and resilient as they shifted to new modes of delivery of instruction for their students (Chen et al., 2020; Mogonea & Mogonea, 2021; Ojo et al., 2021; Pellerone, 2021; Scott, 2020). Districts directed teachers to use different teaching approaches, such as teaching online synchronously or teaching online asynchronously. Synchronous online teaching was the delivery of instruction by providing real-time lessons using a digital platform or in person (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Ojo et al., 2021). In asynchronous online teaching, teachers delivered the instruction to their students with the use of virtual handouts, audio and video clips,

pre-recorded lessons, or other virtual educational materials and platforms that students accessed on their own time (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Heath & Shine, 2021; Ojo et al., 2021).

Asynchronous online teaching removed dates and times for live face-to-face instruction, which alleviated conflicts of time and issues with technology (Heath & Shine, 2021). Due to these new delivery methods, teachers from kindergarten to grade 12 were given the task to incorporate technology in the curriculum (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Heath & Shine, 2021). Learning to teach using technology created many new challenges for teachers due to lack of knowledge, experience, and support using this new virtual form of instructional delivery (Klapproth et al., 2020).

These new methods of delivery of instruction intensified levels of teacher stress (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021). Pressley et al. (2021) highlighted that this increase of stress may have been due to many factors that were out of teachers' control. For example, when schools shifted to emergency remote teaching, teachers were still held accountable to teach their students the curriculum but found there was a lack of student engagement and accountability, which was one of the central aspects in educational practices (Sawchuk, 2020; Yundayani et al., 2021). Due to the quick shift to emergency remote learning, teachers lacked the ability to adequately create opportunities to engage students within a synchronous and cohesive, peer-to-peer atmosphere using technology (Tay et al., 2021). In addition, teachers received minimal support from administrators on ways to successfully implement emergency remote teaching which caused teachers to feel stressed beyond their control (Marshall et al., 2020). This stress has been shown to have a significant impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of teachers (Abdullah & Ismail, 2019; Harris et al., 2019; Koenen et al., 2017). Teachers' emotional and

psychological competence, work habits, and effectiveness may be impacted if stress is not properly addressed (Ayub et al., 2018).

The reopening of schools for in-person learning was not a simple process for many school districts and staff, including teachers (Gross & Opalaka, 2021). Most public schools in the nation returned to in-person schooling for the 2020-2021 school year and teachers returned to a very different classroom environment (Pressley et al., 2021). As recommended by organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), strict guidance on how to safely reopen schools using safety and mitigation strategies impacted all stakeholders within the school community (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Marshall et al., 2020). Along with the CDC and DOE, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (2021) also provided recommendations to support teachers and students for a safe return to in-person teaching and safe learning. Mitigation strategies such as universal masking, social distancing, additional cleaning disinfecting protocols, and using student and staff quarantine methods to help contain the spread of the virus were now added to support the health and well-being of teachers and students to limit the spread of COVID-19 (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021; Bottiani et al., 2019). The overabundance of suggestions for safe return in-person learning practices caused additional barriers for teachers as they prepared for face-to-face teaching (Marshall et al., 2020).

Teachers were already experiencing stressors and symptoms of fatigue prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Billingsley and Bettini (2019) found that the demands of the teaching profession, lack of support, and insufficient resources contributed to teacher stress and eventually resulted in teacher burnout. The World Health Organization (2019) classified burnout as a workplace phenomenon and has deemed this condition stems from constant stress that was

characterized by exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced self-efficacy. As noted by Russell et al. (2020) and Ladd and Sorenson (2019), teacher burnout was associated with overwhelming job demands and increased workloads. Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has escalated burnout by increasing workloads and changing the learning dynamic for teachers across the nation (Gacoin & Watts, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has added to the complexity of teaching profession by amplifying teacher workload expectations (Gacoin & Watts 2021). The impact of stress on teachers was important to study because prolonged exposure to stress for teachers led to mental and physical health issues, burnout, and other negative consequences for teachers and their students, such as lower student academic achievement and the departure of educators from the profession (Marek et al., 2021; Mariotti, 2015; Sutchter et al., 2019).

Statement of the Problem

The educational system was one of the most important developments of modern society and historically has faced periods of discontent and crises (Alves et al., 2020; Ayub et al., 2018). The problem was that the COVID-19 national health pandemic has created additional concerns of how stress has impacted the education profession by targeting teachers' physical and emotional welfare which influenced how students received and retained academic instruction (Nuri & Tezer, 2018; Oducado et al., 2020). As of March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted how teachers and schools functioned, how teachers delivered instruction, and how staff interacted with students (Oducado et al., 2020). Teaching already existed as a stressful profession, but the COVID-19 pandemic has exasperated and shifted the paradigm of teaching which created additional stressors for teachers (Alves et al., 2020; di Fronso et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). These additional stressors included constant awareness of increased health and safety protocols as well as learning new methods of delivery of instruction (Hurley, 2021; Phillips,

2021). This continued exposure to stress during the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted teachers' mental health, well-being, and their ability to teach (Alves et al., 2020; Ayub et al., 2018; Hurley, 2021; Phillips, 2021).

While many jobs and professions create daily stressful situations for their employees, thriving and surviving in the field of education has been challenging for at least a decade. Hurley (2021) stated that teaching was among the most stressful professions today, reporting that 90% of teachers have reported being stressed. Larrivee (2012) defined stress as a response to physical, mental, and emotional demands. While stress is a part of everyday life, teachers have a higher risk of exposure to stress due to many demands within the profession (Braun et al., 2019; Hanson, 2013). Braun et al. (2019) highlighted teachers' stressful work demands as the constant adjustments of their workload, a lack of social and administrative support, conflicts with colleagues, and misbehavior from their students. Even though teaching was stressful before the COVID-19 pandemic, the manifestation of constant exposure of stress escalated the feelings of burnout among teachers (Coyle et al., 2020; Oducado et al., 2020). Braun et al. (2019) found that 10-35% of teachers were experiencing burnout due to constant exposure to stress during their day.

Causes of and the effects that burnout had on teachers during the pandemic are important to review and understand to avoid a national teacher shortage due to individuals departing from the profession (Hurley, 2021; Pressley, 2021). Maslach et al. (2001) studied burnout in detail with regards to variables such as job satisfaction, job stress with relation to workload, conflict, and role ambiguity (Coyle et al., 2020; Jensen & Solheim, 2019). Maslach et al. (2001) found that teachers experienced burnout due to mismatches of their perceptions and understanding of the job with the real organizational duties and factors such as workload, control, community,

fairness, and values. Maslach et al. (2001) found that “situational and organizational factors played a bigger role in burnout than individual factors, such as demographics like gender and marital status” (p. 418). Pressley (2021) suggested that teacher burnout was intensified due to the constant exposure to situational and organizational factors such as full workloads.

Emotional exhaustion was being compounded due to changes in demands and teaching expectations while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pressley, 2021). Maslach et al. (2001) also concluded that burnout not only was caused by teachers doing too much but also experiencing exhaustion and developing cynicism about their job. Exhaustion was one of the most “obvious manifestation of burnout” (Maas et al., 2020, p. 443). School districts recognized that the management of working through the pandemic and having an increase in workload was leading to teacher exhaustion and burnout (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Phillips, 2021).

Maslach et al. (2001) also concluded that burnout was caused by teachers doing too much and becoming exhausted and cynical about their job. Exhaustion is one of the most “obvious manifestation of burnout” (Maas et al., 2020, p. 443). School districts are worried about their teachers; the management of working through the pandemic and having an increase in workload may contribute to teachers being exhausted and may lead to burnout (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021; Phillips, 2021).

There was no shortage of challenges that were creating stressful teaching situations for those providing services during the pandemic (Hurley, 2021; Pressley, 2021). Dynamic classroom environments, lack of training to support remote learning, and disengaged students all posed challenges for teachers. The failure to address stress caused by uncontrollable conditions and burnout in the workplace may change teachers’ attitudes resulting in negative effects on the educational system and the ability for teachers to provide quality education for students (Hurley,

2021; Kaur & Kumar, 2019; Pressley, 2021; Sutchter et al., 2019). While teachers have continuously experienced many challenges with colleagues, parents, students, and administration, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified these experiences (Fiorilli et al., 2016; Klapproth et al., 2020). Bland (2021) not only described how the COVID-19 pandemic intensified teachers' workload which led to burnout but also how additional workloads were a rising concern for teachers. Bland (2021) found that teacher workloads doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic with steep learning curves being necessary to learn new methods of delivery of instruction.

Teacher stress and burnout increased due to the rapid changing demands necessary to provide consistent educational needs to students during the instability of a pandemic (Marek et al., 2021; Oducado et al., 2020; Phillips, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic brought swift challenges to school systems including school closures and moving to emergency remote learning (Hodges et al., 2020; Scott, 2020). During the third trimester of the 2019-2020 school year, schools closed their doors to face-to-face instruction and school districts had no choice but to begin developing new plans for teachers to continue to deliver instruction virtually with most teaching and learning was done from home (Klapproth et al., 2020; Marek et al., 2021; Scott, 2020). Remote learning, hybrid learning, and sometimes 100% virtual instruction were identified as teaching approaches implemented by the vast number of school districts nationwide (Pressley, 2021). Marek et al. (2021) found that most teachers across the nation felt that the switch to virtual teaching created additional stress, anxiety, and higher workloads. New remote teaching plans were implemented by school districts and included situations which made teachers the first point of contact for parents regarding online learning (Ferguson et al., 2012; Pressley, 2021). These new teaching conditions caused stress, burnout, and high levels of anxiety for the teacher

(Ferguson et al., 2012; Pressley, 2021). It could be inferred that prolonged levels of stress and anxiety could eventually lead to teacher burnout. Klapproth et al. (2020) pinpointed that these stressors were caused by the lack of time to adequately prepare using the new technology to deliver high quality instruction. Goetz (2020) explained that remote learning has also caused stress for teachers due to the inability to build relationships with their students and lack of advice and support from their school leaders.

The delivery of instruction was also affected by the COVID-19 pandemic which escalated the challenges teachers faced due to the delivery of instruction (Leech et al., 2020). Schools moved from traditional teaching practices to implementing alternative methods for teachers to deliver the instruction through virtual means (Pressley et al., 2021). School districts pushed teachers to utilize technology, which created another level of stress for them (Pressley et al., 2021). Recognizing the importance of how the COVID-19 pandemic drastically influenced the delivery of instruction for teachers was an important lens for this study. Such impact led to higher levels of stress for teachers which may have led to the development of burnout when the stress was sustained for long periods of time (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021). Being aware of factors that created stress and potential burnout has guided school districts to support teachers and their ability to teach at high levels of engagement with their students (Pressley et al., 2021).

Statement of Purpose of the Study

The teaching profession was stressful prior to the pandemic; however, teachers have expressed experiencing additional and escalated stress levels due to lack of resources, support for online teaching, and time to prepare virtual lessons for their students due to the adjustment of teaching during a pandemic which has fostered the need to provide interventions for teachers to mitigate burnout (Klapproth et al., 2020). Districts required their teachers to utilize technology

and implement remote delivery of instruction, which added to their already full workloads and intensified levels of stress and burnout (Ferguson et al., 2012; Phillips, 2021; Pressley et al., 2021). As the COVID-19 pandemic continued and most schools returned to in person learning for the 2020-2021 school year, teachers were faced with different challenges, such as new health and safety classroom protocols as well as using remote learning for students who had COVID-19 exposure or infection which prevented them from being in classrooms (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021; Pressley et al., 2021).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study examined stress and burnout factors of K-12 public school teachers through their perceptions and experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since teachers have expressed elevated levels of stress and feelings of burnout while teaching during the pandemic it was important to discuss and focus on their needs to prevent further damage to their mental health and possible exit from the profession (Pressley et al., 2021). Stress and burnout may have ramifications on teachers when they are not addressed or supported, and may include poor health conditions, depression, anxiety, negative emotions, and lack of motivation to teach (Bottiani et al., 2019; Eblie Trudel et al., 2021; Hurley, 2021; Pressley et al., 2021).

Research Questions and Design

Research questions helped focus the purpose statement and framed the design of the study to include the main ideas of what the researcher was trying to answer (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This study not only looked to understand the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers who have taught during the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2019-2020

school year to the present, but also how the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to their feelings of stress and burnout. A phenomenological study which focused on the lived experiences of participants sought to understand the essence, or structure, of the meaning of the experience, through the lives of participants who experienced the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Neubauer et al., 2019). This qualitative phenomenological study focused on three research questions:

RQ1: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their lived experiences while teaching during a pandemic?

RQ2: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their perceptions of stressors related to teaching during a pandemic?

RQ3: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their experience as learners while adapting to teaching during a pandemic?

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework of a study is the roadmap of theories that are related to the issues within the research topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). These theories were used to explain and understand the phenomena of study, provided a challenge to existing knowledge, and gave the push to extend the knowledge of the topic (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Anfara and Mertz (2015) explained that theoretical frameworks were “any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and/or psychological processes, at a variety of levels that can be applied to understand the phenomena” (p. 15). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) stated that theoretical and conceptual frameworks are often interchangeable. Theories provide the purpose to help explain the meaning of nature and challenges of a phenomenon in the world (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). With alignment to theoretical frameworks, conceptual frameworks were the meaning

making of research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). For this qualitative phenomenological study, social constructivism was utilized as the theoretical and conceptual framework to explore and explain the phenomena of teaching through the pandemic. It was also used to illuminate the stress and burnout public school teachers endured while working through an unprecedented time in the history of education. Krahenbuhl (2016) stated, “constructivism was undoubtedly one of the most influential philosophies in education in the twenty-first century” (p. 97). When used as part of the conceptual framework for qualitative studies, constructivism (or constructivist theory) helped researchers understand how participants interrupted their experiences, how they constructed their world, and what their experiences meant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Social constructivism, identified by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, focused on the idea that learning was collaborative and cognitive development progressed during socialization (Ozer, 2004). Vygotsky (1978) identified three different viewpoints that outlined his understanding of learning and development. The first viewpoint was centered on the idea that development was independent of learning. Vygotsky (1978) wrote, “learning was considered a purely external process that was not actively involved in development” (p. 79). Learning trailed behind development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky’s (1978) second position of learning and development found that learning was blended with development, occurring at the same point of time. Vygotsky’s (1978) third viewpoint of learning and development was that these elements were mutually exclusive and have essential commonalities.

There were other viewpoints of constructivism that were important to consider when implementing a study of this nature. Holmes (2019) stated that constructivism focused on the learner, who was active in the learning process and knowledge needed to be “assimilated by and incorporated into a learners’ existing mental patterns” (p. 8) for learning to happen. To

understand constructivism in the field of education, teachers were the learners and took an active approach to learning. Well known constructivist and learning theories and studies by Bruner (1960), Piaget (1957) and Vygotsky (1978) were also aligned to this research study (Holmes, 2019). Piaget (1957) found that cognitive development and learning happened through stimulus and response, while Bruner (1960) believed in spiral and discovery learning. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development focused on the varied levels of development for the learner which increased by collaboration and guidance with capable peers. These three theorists believed that knowledge was constructed socially using language (Holmes, 2019).

The theoretical and conceptual framework of constructivism aligned with this study because the core tenet of this theory was that learning was an active process. It is important to note that in the field of education, learning and teaching are used in conjunction. The constructivist learning theory was different in that it focused on learning, not teaching (Baeten et al., 2013). Many public school teachers faced challenges as they had never used, understood, or been trained to deliver instruction using online platforms prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020). This challenge forced teachers to shift gears as they needed to learn how to instruct students using new platforms and learn to adjust to ways to deliver instruction (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020; Scott, 2020). This framework supported this study as teachers were required to be active learners, developing their skills related to teaching remotely while using virtual resources.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

In any type of research, assumptions are beliefs or ideas to be considered true and were typically reflected in how the researcher performed the study and drew conclusions on what had been observed (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Assumptions in qualitative studies outlined

statements that reflected the researchers' beliefs of the topic and what has been drawn from the conclusions of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). These assumptions regarding the study may be based on premises that end up being true or may be unwarranted (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). For this study, it was assumed that K-12 public school teachers were experiencing many stressors due to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Since this study used semi structured interviews to gather the data of perceptions, attitudes, and emotions on a specific topic, it was assumed that participants would be willing participants and stay on topic when discussing their experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) stated that qualitative interviews are in-depth and provide the opportunity to "capture perceptions, attitudes, and emotions... of the participants" (p. 155). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) explained that the success of a semi structured interview depends on the interactions of both the participant and interviewer and the ability to ask and answer good questions. During the semi structured interview, it was also assumed that participants in the study would be open, active participants, honest and truthful, and willing to share their lived experiences teaching during a pandemic.

Limitations to qualitative studies represented outside conditions that restrict or contained the scope of the study and the outcomes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This study posed some limitations that may also potentially weaken the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). One limitation was aligned to the study site. Although K-12 public school teachers around the nation experienced teaching through a pandemic, participants for this study were recruited from one school district in the northeastern region of the United States. Using criterion-based sampling, nine participants were selected for this study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) explained that in phenomenology, criterion sampling worked when all participants have experienced the same

phenomenon. While Creswell's (2013) recommendations about sample sizes varied, a phenomenological study could be between three and 325 participants. This study focused on nine teachers teaching during the pandemic; the focus of interviewing only classroom teachers was a limitation due to limiting to a small subset of a school workforce. Another limitation that impacted this study was my current role in a neighboring school in a different town as I believe my supervisory position may limit participants' cooperation and honest reflections of their experiences. It could be inferred that fear of retaliation, judgment, or breach of confidentiality might have limited the information provided by participants. To provide reassurance of privacy, all participants were informed and reminded that information gathered during this study was held secure, and participants' identities and any identifying information was protected by the use of pseudonyms.

The scope of a research study outlines the depth that the research was explored to answer the research questions and to provide parameters in relation to the timeline and to the population studied (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Participants in this study were recruited from one public school district and only included teachers from the proposed study site. Other school staff, support staff, specialists, or administrators were excluded from the study. This study focused only on the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers who taught during the 2019-2020 school year to the present.

Rationale and Significance

There has been a shift in the traditional structure of teaching due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and it created stress and burnout among teachers in an already fragile workforce (Pressley et al., 2021; Richards et al., 2018). Teachers expressed feelings of frustration, anxiety, and stress as they moved to the daunting tasks of learning virtual learning platforms (Phillips,

2021; Pressley, 2021). The last three school years were anything but traditional, switching back and forth from traditional brick and mortar learning to learning from home (Wrase, 2020). Teachers have adjusted their methods of instruction to meet the expectations and the needs of teaching during COVID-19, and facing many barriers along the way, therefore, increasing teachers' levels of stress and feeling of burnout (Klapproth et al., 2020). School districts applied the recommendations from state and federal agencies, as well as the American Academy of Pediatrics to draft and implement new classroom environments protocols and expectations due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Phillips, 2021; Pressley, 2021).

It is important to listen to teachers who have experienced the phenomenon of teaching through the COVID-19 pandemic to help develop teacher agency (Vu, 2020). The term teacher agency has been studied for a while, but most recently has become an important topic in educational research (Vu, 2020). Roger and Wetzel (2013) defined teacher agency as “purposeful and reflecting on his/her world” (p. 63). Ahearn (2001), and Lantolf and Thorne (2018) believed that teacher agency is complex and multifaceted because there is a continuous evolution of changes in life, which influences a person's intentions and goals. Listening to teachers gives them a platform to share their knowledge as well as an avenue for others to glean from the interests and experiences of each other (Dewey, 1966). Dewey (1966) also concluded that when there is active participation in their own learning, self-reliance is developed, which helps make critical and concrete life decisions. Schulte et al. (2020) outlined a community of learners as it relates to the ideas of the co-construction questions, ideas and pedagogical goals, powered sharing, and collaborative relationships among stakeholders. Also, Schulte et al. (2020) highlighted these relationships should have mutual respect and caring, and emotional connections.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers expressed the challenge of not being able to meet their own needs or the needs of their students (Bland, 2021). Switching to remote teaching to deliver instruction, use of technology without support or training and still being held accountable, even with lower student engagement have all increased stress and burnout for teachers (Marek et al., 2021; Rabaglietti et al., 2021). Eblie Trudel et al. (2021) stated that teachers who are exposed to heightened levels stress and burnout over time may suffer negative effects personally and professionally. When a teacher's stress and burnout continue and is not addressed, negative effects for the teacher may include a decrease in their health and well-being, and a lowered drive to deliver high quality instruction and may even lead the teacher to leave the profession (Ayub et al., 2018; Klusmann et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). Heightened stress and burnout may also lead to lower student achievement (Klusmann et al., 2016). In conclusion, when teacher stress is addressed and supported, students benefit (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021).

The significance of this study is potentially impactful for many stakeholders within the school community; however, this study focuses solely on public school teachers. Due to the timeliness of this topic, this study was essential to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic may have impacted teachers' lived experiences related to stress and burnout. At the time of this study, there had been few research studies that focused on teacher experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic (Marek et al., 2021). Also, Marek et al. (2021) found that the actual experiences of teachers during the transitions from traditional to remote learning, as well as teaching throughout the pandemic have received little attention. For public school teachers, this study provided the opportunity to share their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pressley et al. (2021) wrote that teachers entered the classroom with new

expectations, both instructional and for safety, and this study provided a voice to teachers to share those experiences.

Definitions of Key Terms

Asynchronous Teaching – Asynchronous teaching is delivered virtually where students access their lesson, online at their convenience (Mundel, 2021). Asynchronous lessons can be delivered by virtual handouts, audio and video clips, pre-recorded lessons, or other virtual educational materials and platforms, which students access on their own time (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Heath & Shine, 2021; Ojo et al., 2021).

Burnout – Burnout is the psychological feeling of prolonged response to exhaustion and stress on the job (Baugh et al., 2020). Caruso (2019) highlights Maslach's (1982) refinement and definition of burnout to include emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Burnout Syndrome – Burnout Syndrome originates when teachers feel an imbalance of available resources, especially when the resources are seen as unsustainable (Fiorilli et al., 2016).

Depersonalization – Depersonalization is the interpersonal development of a negative and uncaring attitude towards others (Shackleton et al., 2019).

Emotional Competence - Emotional competence is the person's ability to regulate their emotions (Fiorilli et al., 2016).

Emotional Exhaustion – Emotional exhaustion develops as emotional energies become drained (Shackleton et al., 2019). When spent energy increases, emotional exhaustion is manifested (Jensen & Solheim, 2019).

Occupational Stress – Occupational stress comes from factors in the workplace such as differences in perceptions, the increase of daunting situations, and dealing with individual stress (Kaur & Kumar, 2019).

Synchronous Teaching – Synchronous teaching is delivered when students and teachers are learning and teaching face to face. Teaching is done “in-class” (Marshall & Kostka, 2020, p. 4).

Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has created lasting effects on the lives of everyone all over the world, including teachers (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021). Teachers reentered their classrooms with many expectations that forced them to adapt to new ways on how they were previously delivering curriculum (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021; NESTA, 2020; Pressley et al., 2021). Prior to teaching through the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were already stressed due to workload, lack of support and now COVID-19 has intensified their levels of stress and burnout (Ferguson et al., 2012; Phillips, 2021; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Having to learn how to teach using new platforms to deliver instruction, and inexperience with technology have been the focus of this stress and burnout (Klapproth et al., 2020; Phillips, 2021). Extended exposure to these stressors over time have direct impacts on teachers (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021; Leech et al., 2020). Teachers who are exposed to stress over time may suffer poor health conditions and a negative sense of well-being, which may lead to a poor quality of education for their students (Harmsen et al., 2018; Leech et al., 2020).

Leech et al. (2020) highlighted that there have been decades of research on challenges that teachers have experienced, including lack of support, negative student behaviors, and disagreements with administrators. However, since the start of the pandemic, there has been little focus on teachers’ actual experiences as they shifted to remote learning (Marek et al.,

2021). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore and understand those lived experiences and perceptions of K-12 public school teachers as it related to stress and burnout while teaching through the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher stress and burnout is relevant, and if not addressed, directly and negatively impacts a teacher's ability to deliver high-quality instruction, along with the development of poor health conditions and well-being (Ayub et al., 2018; Klusmann et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019). Stress and burnout over time could potentially influence a teacher to leave the profession (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021).

In Chapter 2, relevant literature is reviewed to identify themes related to teaching through a pandemic. The review of the literature identifies key themes to include stress and burnout and identifies current research that identifies how public school teachers experienced teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chapter 3, the methodology of the study is introduced along with the site information, the participants, how and what data was collected and analyzed, and the selection process of participants. Chapter 3 also outlines limitations, ethical issues such as credibility, trustworthiness, transferability, and dependability. Chapter 4 shares the data collected, and Chapter 5 presents conclusions and next steps for further research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers often enter the teaching profession because they not only enjoy the intrinsic aspects of working with and being an inspiration to young learners but also for the love of the subject area (Bergmark et al., 2018; Moss, 2020; Whiteford et al., 2021). Bergmark et al. (2018) found that teachers' reasons for entering the profession were tied to altruistic feelings of personal values and the desire to make a difference. Whiteford et al. (2021) discovered that individuals pursued the field of education because of the significant contributions that could be made to the field, the potential for job security, and that they were positively influenced by past teachers to pursue this line of work. Moss (2020) explained that people were motivated to become educators due to the ability to make a difference through teaching children. Teacher-student relationships are an important factor in school environments, where both student and teacher benefit from their interactions and relationships with each other (Agydkum, 2009; Cazden, 2001). Krane et al. (2017) highlighted this connection as a relationship that builds respect and trust between both teacher and student. Trusting connections made with students and colleagues may offer teachers a feeling of satisfaction and may lead to lower susceptibility to stress and burnout (Toropova et al., 2020).

When teaching for public K-12 teachers shifted from in person to a remote teaching model during the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020, personal connections with students and colleagues were threatened. Jokić Zorkić et al. (2021) described how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional schooling, impacted the building or trusting relationships with students, and challenged expectations such as technical requirements, pedagogical readiness, and academic content for both students and teachers. The COVID-19 pandemic placed significant challenges on teachers including lack of connection with students, trouble with online

instruction, anticipated loss of learning for students, and adapting to new ways of interacting with students (Baker et al., 2021; Drugas, 2020; Uzun et al., 2021). Though teachers experienced stress in the classroom prior to the pandemic, the pandemic has accelerated stress, anxiety, and increased symptoms of tension, exhaustion, and depression (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).

Teaching is already one of the most stressful professions of the 21st century as those teaching endure pressures from a variety of sources, such as job performance, timeliness of teaching expectations, and communication with families in and out of the classroom (Smith & Smalley, 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic, which started impacting schools in March of 2020, created a shift from in-person teaching to a remote teaching model, then back to in-person teaching and put teachers at the forefront of these abrupt changes which produced new challenges and stressors for teachers (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020). These shifts have created a ripple effect of elevated stress for teachers (Besser et al., 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Additional challenges, such as lack of connection with students, trouble with online and distance instruction, anticipated loss of learning for students, and adapting to new ways of interacting with students all increased stressors for teachers, which may contribute to high levels of burnout (Baker et al., 2021; Drugas, 2020; Hargreaves, 2021; Uzun et al., 2021)

Teachers returned to their classrooms from remote instruction to a very different environment which raised anxieties and stress from new teaching demands and safety protocols (Pressley, 2021; Pressley et al., 2021; Zhou & Yao, 2020). Teachers with existing full workloads were faced with additional instructional and job expectations, which also impacted classroom climate and culture (Pressley et al., 2021). Stressors caused by the COVID-19 pandemic have had repercussions for teachers (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021). Increasing levels of stress are

leading to teacher burnout and jeopardizing teachers' physiological, safety, belonging, and self-actualization needs (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Embse et al., 2019).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has shifted the educational paradigm of learning, teaching has been altered, and stress and burnout have increased (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). According to Caruso (2019), teacher stress is an issue facing schools nationwide. This literature review presents the overall themes that highlight the essence of this study. The literature highlights the lived experiences of teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic such as remote instruction, safety mitigation strategies taken, return to in-person learning, along with an exploration of stress and burnout.

The Concept of Teacher Stress

Stress is a problem among teachers, as research shows that close to 30% of teachers are reporting they are experiencing elevated levels of stress, which is more compared to other professions (von der Embse & Mankin, 2020; Wettstein et al., 2021). Teaching is a stressful profession that requires coping with challenges both in and out of the classroom but also trying to successfully function with unavoidable stress (Wang et al., 2020). The Cleveland Clinic (2021) explained that stress is the body's reaction to changes and may impact physical, emotional, and intellectual responses.

Yaribeygi et al. (2017) reported that while stress is a normal response that allows the body to adjust to challenges or stressors, signs of stress are not easily recognizable. Scott (2020) identified signs of stress as falling into categories of psychological, emotional, physical, and behavioral. Psychological signs include difficulty to conceive, a sense of worry, and a feeling of

anxiety. Emotional signs of stress include being angry or frustrated. Physical signs include changes in weight and high blood pressure. Behavioral signs include the lack of self-care or drug dependence (Amirkhan et al., 2018; Salvagioni et al., 2017; Seibt & Kreuzfeld, 2021; Tertemiz & Tüylüoğlu, 2020). Gustems-Carnicer et al. (2019) wrote that it is imperative to recognize and address the factors that are having effects of stress to avoid long term problems in both the teachers' professional and personal life.

Factors that Contribute to Teacher Stress

Braun et al. (2029) stated that there are many unknowns and uncertainties in education that may heighten teachers' feelings of stress. However, Braun et al. (2019) identified external forces that cause teacher stress. External factors having to do with working conditions, such as workload, time pressures, as well as lack of resources and training have an influence on teacher stress (Carton & Fruchant, 2014). Masmoudi et al. (2016) found that risk factors of stress among primary and high school teachers included a heavy workload and poor working conditions had strong connections to emotional exhaustion, a component of burnout (Maas et al., 2021; Sandmeier et al., 2017). Richards et al. (2018) found that role conflict and role stress with teachers and other stakeholders also contributed as an external factor as it relates to teacher stress. Additionally, managing challenging student behaviors are among the reasons stress increases among teachers (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Iancu et al., 2017).

Working Conditions: Workload, Time Pressures, and Lack of Resources

Teachers' workload and assignments as well as the ability to balance, manage, and complete increasing amounts of responsibilities with limited resources was identified as a stressor for teachers (Klapproth et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2020; Schäfer et al., 2020) Russell et al. (2020) found that educators in the United States often juggle job demands, creating employee

stress due to extraneous multi-tasking. Ayub et al. (2018) explained that it was possible for teachers to experience stress because of heightened expectations that require a lot of willpower and energy. Educators are responsible for a multitude of high demands that might exasperate stress (Ferguson et al., 2012; Pressley et al., 2021). According to Veldman et al. (2016), job demands refer to the components of the job that require physical and or psychological factors such as cognitive or emotional effort. For example, teachers work under the demands of meeting rigorous state standards, often under the microscope of public scrutiny (Crosswell & Buetel, 2017). More recently these demands also include, demonstrating and instilling global competence, proficiency in digital literacy and blended learning, and fostering critical thinking through various modes of instruction and communication are some of the required expectations of educators (Karakoyun & Lindberg, 2020; Oudeweetering & Voogt, 2018; Sinagatullin, 2019).

Teachers may experience higher levels of stress due to work-related time pressures (Maas et al., 2021). Szollos (2009) defined time pressure as a perception that there was a lack of time available to complete the need for the identified workload. This added stress may impact the health of teachers to include emotional exhaustion, a leading component of burnout, as well as reduced quality of education and student achievement (Klusmann et al., 2016; Maas et al., 2021).

Stress is significantly impacted by the absence of job resources for teachers (Russell et al., 2020). Job resources refers to aspects of teaching that are physical, psychological, social, or organizational to reduce job demands (Veldman et al., 2016). Veldman et al. (2016) outlined that job resources are also related to personal resources such as the teachers' self-efficacy, self-esteem, and optimism, stating that teachers "are more confident and prouder of the work they do, find meaning in it and stay engaged" (p. 914). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model

(2006) outlines that high teaching demands and lack of resources are a major cause of stress for teachers (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Veldman et al., 2016).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts neither had a framework that outlined how to teach remotely nor the resources or the pathway on how to train teachers on this new virtual platform (Hammerstein et al., 2021). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a 2017 analysis of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data identified that most teachers were not prepared to teach online. Teachers had to develop lessons for virtual instruction on the fly as “emergency remote teaching” provided a swift shift to how teachers instructed (Hodges et al., 2020; Scott, 2020). The Economic Policy Institute (2020) cited that there was a lack of support, including an absence of professional development on how to use computers and integrate them into instruction, leaving teachers ill-equipped. Quezada et al. (2020) found that stress was elevated due to a lack of experience with technology including the use of the internet, social media, or video-conferencing tools depending on the level of a teacher. Lack of knowledge, training, and resources for support with technology was a potential stressor and could lead to burnout for the teacher (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Role Conflict and Role Stress

Teachers are generally ready to teach, but most are unprepared to deal with role conflict among their colleagues and leaders (Mellor et al., 2020). According to Mellor et al. (2020) role conflict is a “time when two roles collide and expectations for these roles make it difficult to navigate” (p. 316). Role conflict, aligned closely to Richards (2015) role theory, provides the foundational support for behavior expectations within a position, which are predictable in nature and are in common agreement among all involved stakeholders (Mellor et al., 2020). Richards et al. (2018) highlight that these expectations are often negotiated between the teacher and key

stakeholders who may be within the school. When there is a high level of agreement with teachers and key stakeholders, stress is usually reduced due the consensus of the role expectation and performance (Richards et al., 2018). When disagreements arise among key stakeholders regarding expectations, it becomes cumbersome and creates tension, causing stress (Santoro, 2019). Role stress in teaching occurs when there is role ambiguity and conflict (Richards et al., 2018). According to Richards et al. (2018) role ambiguity occurs when performance expectations are incomplete and does not accurately identify behavior and the teacher lacks the knowledge of how they will be evaluated.

Role conflict and role stress are timely constructs because the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on teachers, and their expectations in the classroom (McKim & Sorenson, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted teaching and altered teaching expectations for classroom teachers due to closing traditional brick and mortar teaching (McKim & Sorenson, 2020). With little time to prepare and little support for the switch to online remote teaching, teachers were faced with one of the biggest disruptions in education in a generation (Daniel, 2020; McKim & Sorenson, 2020). Teachers were identified as essential employees, even though the traditional face to face model of teaching changed and teachers had to prioritize responsibilities (Kantamneni, 2020; McKim & Sorenson, 2020). Some teachers experience intrarole conflict which is “caused when teachers cannot manage varying expectations as they relate to their teaching role” (Richards et al., 2018, p. 770), whereas others experience interrole conflict. Interrole conflict occurs when stress is related to teachers having a challenge to monitor concurrent performances of multiple roles with the profession (Richards et al., 2018). Braun et al. (2019) highlighted teachers’ stressful work demands as the constant adjustments of their workload. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted how teachers and schools functioned, shifting the

teacher's role in the classroom, the methods of instructional delivery, and how staff interacted with students (Oducado et al., 2020).

Managing Difficult Student Behaviors

Problems with classroom management and student behaviors may cause teacher stress and fatigue (Veldman et al., 2016). Problematic student behaviors to include disrespectful comments, inability to respond to redirections, and blatant disrespect towards teachers and staff may lead to stressful situations in the educational arena (Sezer, 2018; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2017) claimed that student behaviors were serious stressors among teachers and the exertion of expelling high effort to manage behaviors may increase levels of anxiety. Challenging behaviors and the ability to control these misbehaviors may have caused additional stress for teachers by exerting high effort and being on alert all the time (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Teacher stress has been positively associated with students' problematic behaviors (Benita et al., 2019; Sezer, 2018). Teachers have reported addressing and spending more time correcting negative behaviors than instructing and delivering the curriculum (Sezer, 2018). Poor communication between student and teacher, lack of positive classroom culture, and teachers' ability to cope with these stresses were also identified as factors that are increasing stress and burnout (Sezer, 2018). Sezer (2018) found that teachers who were in stressful classroom environments mainly caused by problematic behaviors lacked a positive atmosphere and this was deemed a major determinant of having stress. Sezer (2018) also found that teachers who exhibited these conditions did not interact with students, spend time with students outside the scheduled school day, or establish a relationship with students due to high levels of stress and burnout. In addition, Huk et al. (2019) explained that high school teachers in New York and New

Jersey who had interactions with students who were continuously disrespectful were creating high levels of stress, which is leading to burnout.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created widespread disruptions to classroom teaching experiences for teachers, especially in classroom management (Espino-Díaz et al., 2020; Herman et al., 2021). According to Herman et al. (2021), stressors aligned to classroom management issues included student behavior, attendance, and student engagement. Shifting to online teaching and learning left many teachers unprepared, with little knowledge and skills to teach and virtually manage students' disruptive behaviors and increase and promote active attendance and student engagement (Herman et al., 2021). Teachers report that they have severely underestimated the complexity of online teaching and how to prepare to get their students to willingly engage in classroom instruction (Kaden, 2020). Additionally, Kaden (2020) highlighted these shifts and inexperience with classroom management techniques, which are a direct result of the pandemic, have only amplified teacher stress.

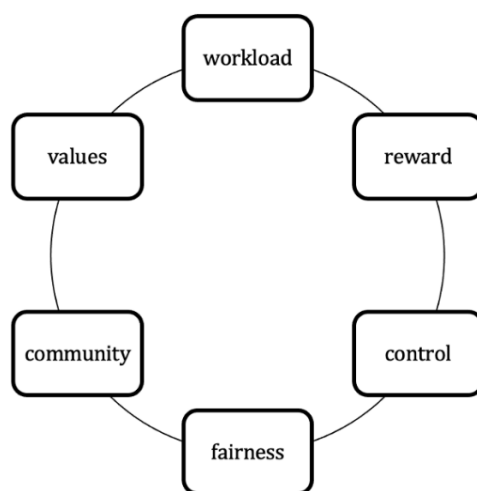
The Concept of Teacher Burnout

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that develops due to an extended response to chronic stress (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Psychologist Herbert Freudenberger (1974) is considered the founding father of the concept of burnout (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017). Freudenberger's (1974) study of burnout was a result of his observations of signs of exhaustion and fatigue of staff who worked in crisis institutions (Caruso, 2019, Fontes, 2020). Fontes (2020) further clarified that Freudenberger had coined the term burnout from his own experiences of being overworked in a state of depression, as well as agitation from work. Freudenberger (1974) described burnout as "becoming exhausted by making excessive demands on energy, strength or resources in the workplace" (p. 159). Freudenberger (1974)

found and outlined personality traits that predispose the condition of burnout. Freudenberger (1974) stated that workers who are dedicated and committed are the individuals that are experiencing burnout (Heinemann & Heinemann, 2017).

Social psychologist Christina Maslach (1982) offered her own research about burnout. Maslach et al. (2001) described burnout as the feeling of emotional exhaustion, which guides in actions of the individual to emotionally and cognitively distance from the work, which may be caused by work overload (Maslach et al., 2001). Maslach (1982) stated that the feeling of emotional exhaustion may create an attitude of depletion in that workers cannot continue to give of themselves at a psychological level. Maslach and Leiter (1997) emphasized six domains of organizational life that ultimately determined whether an individual would be engaged or burnt out by their work. Maslach and Leiter (1997) labeled these six domains as workload, reward, control, fairness, community, and value. Figure 1 illustrates Maslach's six domains of organizational life that impacted a person's burnout level.

Figure 1: Maslach's Six Domains of Organizational Life



Workload

Increased workload may contribute to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). Chronic exhaustion may occur when there is not enough time and support to recover from fully demanding work (Maslach et al., 2001). Though the relationship of workload and exhaustion is not as simple as defined, Maslach and Leiter (1997) focused on the demands of relationships of service providers, highlighting the “erosion of the distinction between personal and work lives” (p. 476). Maslach and Leiter (1997) found that emotional work is tiresome when people are displaying emotions that match their own feelings. Whether a teacher convincingly exhibited contrived feelings of tasks and expectations or expresses and feels other emotions related to work, Maslach and Leiter (1997) found this idea had emotional impacts on the worker and stress and burnout develop. Additionally, Maslach and Leiter (1997) share knowledge of burnout with the constructs having to do with role conflict, stating that the greater the role conflict, the stronger chance of exhaustion.

Control

Maslach and Leiter (1997) found that burnout research looked at control from varied points of view, however elaborated on the fact that role conflict contributes to exhaustion as individuals cannot control their work, while the organization or other authorities have conflicting demands or “incongruent values” (p. 477). Baugh et al. (2020) explained that feelings of control often depended on the relationships one had with their team and employment structure and were threatened when there was rigidity in practices or lack of flexibility. Leiter (1992) studied autonomy and the connection with control in the workplace. It was found by Lee and Ashforth (1993) that “low autonomy left staff members with less latitude to structure their work role in a manner consistent with their values” (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 477).

Reward

Rewards have implications for burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The term reward was used to describe both monetary compensation as well as intangibles like recognition, prestige, rewards, work flexibility, growth opportunities, and support for personal endeavors (Baugh et al., 2020). Maslach and Leiter (1997) explored and shared studies conducted by Blix et al. (1994), Chappell and Novak (1992), Glicken (1983), Maslanka (1996), Seifert et al. (1991) and Whitaker (1995), that examined the correlation of reward and burnout and found that “insufficient rewards, whether financial, institutional or social, increase staff members’ vulnerability to burnout” (p. 478). Schaufelis’ (1996) research regarding equity theory found that excessive rewarding may also lead to burnout. Leiter and Maslach (1999) expressed:

From this perspective, staff members who perceive themselves as contributing less than their similarly rewarded colleagues experience the strain associated with inequity. Attempts to reestablish equity in regard to reward may contribute to incongruity in other areas of work life. (p. 478)

Community

Having a sense of community was not only an important consideration in the reduction of workplace burnout but also was crucial for individual engagement as high tension work environments might threaten one’s feeling of belongingness ultimately leading to stress (Baugh et al., 2020). Maslach and Leiter (1997) focused their research on burnout and community as the focus of support from coworkers, family, and supervisors. More broadly, Maslach and Leiter (1997) expanded their research to focus on community as an organization and studying how personal interactions among workers in the organization have an impact on work and

relationships. The research by Maslach and Leiter (1997) found that “lively, attentive, responsive community is incompatible with burnout” (p. 480).

Fairness

The essence of the research conducted by Maslach and Leiter (1997) about fairness focuses on trust among individuals developed mutually within the organization. Research by White (1987) considered fairness as a dimension of leadership, highlighting that when stress occurs, staff look for leadership for optimism, fairness, and expectations when problem-solving. Fairness has similar characteristics to community and with reward. Maslach and Leiter (1997) found that fairness is a strong quality of a community, especially with the procurement of rewards and recognition. Fairness in decision-making is assessed by staff in terms of fairness of procedures and the relationships of the decision-maker. Fairness has rarely been a focus on burnout, however, Leiter and Harvie (1997) concluded that “members’ perception of supervisors as being both fair and supportive contributes to staff members acceptance of major organizational change as well as to reduced susceptibility to burnout” (p. 481).

Values

The last domain of Maslach and Leiter’s (1997) research on organizational life is values. According to Maslach and Leiter (1997), the idea of values has the greatest potential to create workplace stress. “It is the heart of the staff members’ relationships with their work and encompasses the ideals and motivations that originally attracted them to the organization” (Leiter Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 482). Burnout may develop when there is a mismatch between expectations during career development (Jackson et al., 1986). Tensions and stress raised by incongruent values within an organization may lead people to leave the organization to look for other fulfilling opportunities. Maslach and Leiter (1997) wrote, “the distress associated with

value mismatches and the lengths to which people go to reduce the associated tensions are indicative of their central role in the burnout and engagement process” (p. 483).

Emotional Exhaustion, Reduced Personal Accomplishment and Depersonalization

Both Herbert Freudenberger’s (1974) theory of burnout and Christina Maslach’s (1997) six domains of organizational life supported that burnout was a condition of three components: emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and depersonalization. According to Shackleton et al. (2019), teachers report higher levels of stress and burnout compared to other professions in the workforce. Shackleton et al. (2019) elaborated on these components and detailed how each impacted teacher burnout.

Emotional Exhaustion

Teaching is emotionally challenging, which may lead to increased levels of teacher stress and burnout (Donker et al., 2020). Emotional exhaustion, a central concept of burnout, is the feeling of tiredness that develops when teachers become emotionally drained and are linked to experiences that increase the feeling of being overstressed and been a focus on many studies in the field of education (Donker et al., 2020; Eddy et al., 2020; Klusmann et al., 2008). Emotional exhaustion has also been found to be a product of problematic teacher and student relationships, as well as teacher workload (Donker et al., 2020). Cross and Hong (2012), Keller et al. (2014) and Richardson et al. (2014) found that emotional regulation strategies may help to prevent feelings of burnout and emotional exhaustion. However, attitudes towards emotional regulation have not been thoroughly researched (Donker et al., 2020).

Donker et al. (2020) highlights two emotional regulation strategies: cognitive reappraisal and expressive suppression. Donker et al. (2020) defines cognitive reappraisal as “is an emotional regulation strategy that aims to explicitly and cognitively change thought and behavior

before emotion has fully developed” (para 6). Lavy and Eshet (2018) found cognitive reappraisal as one of the most effective emotional regulation strategies and has the best outcomes for teachers. Teachers who utilize a cognitive reappraisal approach to situations have more positive emotions and higher sense of well-being which may help prevent feelings of burnout (Donker et al., 2020).

Lee et al. (2016) focused and defined expression suppression as the regulation of the emotion that has already been experienced. Emotional suppression happens when others are present and is used to avoid conflict (Donker et al., 2020). Jiang et al. (2016) found that emotional suppression had negative outcomes for teachers which only elevated stress and emotional exhaustion. For example, Donker et al. (2020) stated that teachers who suppress anger and exhibit happiness to avoid conflict or discussions with their students, may experience negative outcomes and increased stress symptoms and exhaustion.

Depersonalization

Research conducted by Maslach et al. (2001) found that depersonalization has been “conceptualized as the interpersonal dimension of teacher burnout” (Benita et al., 2019, p. 2). Shackleton et al. (2019) defines the phenomenon of depersonalization as an internal construct that refers to a person’s development of negative attitudes towards others. As a dimension of burnout, depersonalization may be assessed using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (Maslach et al., 1996). Teaching is an interpersonal and caring profession and teachers are motivated by forming a healthy relationship with their students (Benita et al., 2019). According to Benita et al. (2019), “depersonalization captures an experience in which teachers disengage from students and develop negative attitudes towards them...which may create adverse consequences for classroom behaviors of both teachers and students” (p. 3). Depersonalization

has adverse consequences on classroom experiences and behaviors (Benita et al., 2019). Teachers who experience depersonalization, may tend to feel less connected with their students and may enjoy teaching less (Benita et al., 2019). Shen et al. (2015) found that teachers who experience depersonalization may negatively impact a student's motivation to learn. Studies conducted by Maslach and Leiter (1997) pointed out that burnout may influence teacher behaviors, which in turn may influence students and their learning.

Reduced Personal Accomplishment

Reduced personal accomplishment, also known as professional inefficacy, is the third dimension of burnout as outlined by Maslach and Leiter (1997). According to Maslach and Leiter (1997), reduced personal accomplishment is described as the reduction of “productivity or capability, low morale, and an inability to cope” (para. 6). The three dimensions of burnout are often explained in sequential stages, where reduced personal accomplishment is the last stage if exhaustion and depersonalization continue (Maslach & Leiter, 1997). The feeling of reduced personal accomplishments may be affected by negative relations with superiors and colleagues (Nwankwo et al., 2013). Additionally, teachers who lack social awareness and self-management of teacher relationships may also have an impact and influence on the feeling of reduced personal accomplishment (Nwankwo et al., 2013). According to a study conducted on female teachers by Nwankwo et al. (2013), personal accomplishment is positively connected with self-efficacy.

Bandura (1977) first introduced the construct of self-efficacy. Bandura (1977) hypothesized that expectations of “personal efficacy determines whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences” (p.191). Nwankwo et al. (2013) outlined that self-efficacy is

the belief “in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of actions required to manage prospective situations” (p. 98). Burnout may occur when teachers have high levels of self-efficacy which may lead to a positive feeling of personal accomplishment (Nwankwo et al., 2013).

Consequences of Teacher Stress and Burnout

While job burnout has been paired with the high-stress professions of medical physicians, nurses, and social workers, it does not discriminate against others in the caregiving professions such as teaching (Arvidsson et al., 2019; Hämmig, 2018; Lin et al., 2021; Summers et al., 2020; Van der Heijden et al., 2019). Kim et al. (2019) explained how stress and burnout are often experienced in professions that required interpersonal interactions, and stress and burnout also were found to be strongly associated with one's emotional stability. Krantz et al. (2021) explained how burnout not only impacted an individual's work capacity but may also limit the ability to sufficiently manage social affairs as it intertwined with both work and personal life. Job stress and burnout is not limited to certain professions but rather dictated by the conditions of an individual's working environment, emotional availability, and impacts both personal and professional areas of one's life (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Teaching is a stressful occupation (Smetackova et al., 2019). Causes of stress and burnout and the effects on teachers during the pandemic are important to review and understand (Hurley, 2021; Pressley, 2021). Continued exposure to stress during the COVID-19 pandemic may impact teachers' mental health, well-being, and ability to teach (Alves et al., 2020; Ayub et al., 2018; Hurley, 2021; Phillips, 2021). Diener and Suh (1997) stated that a teacher's well-being consists of interrelated components: life satisfaction and the concern for positive or negative emotional reactions, which is also known as affect. In addition, prolonged levels of stress and

burnout may have unintended consequences and ramifications for teachers. Teachers who exhibit high-stress symptoms may be more likely to have higher rates of absenteeism, schools may have frequent turnover of new staff, and teachers may have lower quality student-teacher relationships which may impact student learning and lower student achievement (Shackleton et al., 2019). Also, teachers exposed to stressors for extended periods of time may be more likely to experience emotional exhaustion, negative attitudes, and low job satisfaction (Richards et al., 2018; von der Embse & Mankin, 2020). For these reasons, coping strategies are needed to support teachers when stress arises. Gustems-Carnicer et al. (2019) stated that it is important to recognize and address stress due to the long-term effects it will have on teachers' well-being and their professional and personal lives (Jimenez, 2021).

Teacher Absenteeism

Eagle and Glenn (2018) explained that teacher absenteeism was a topic worth studying as it continued to impact teacher vitality. In a 2016 study conducted by the U.S. Department of Education, it was found that one out of four, or more than 27%, of teachers, were out more than 10 days because of unrelated school activities (Caruso, 2019). In a study across schools in Canada, teacher absenteeism drastically increased from 8.9% in 2014 to 11.9% in 2018 (Laurie et al., 2020).

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory focused on a person's behavior, environment, and social relationships with impacts on self-efficacy. Shillingford -Butler et al. (2012) determined that teachers faced many challenges that created stress and anxiety which may result in lower self-efficacy and may lead to burnout. Stress and burnout may impact a teacher's self-worth and well-being and may contribute to why teachers were absent (Hurley, 2021). Teacher absenteeism resulted as a coping mechanism used to handle stressors created by COVID-19,

such as remote learning, but may be prevented either by a psychological or sociological approach (Caruso, 2019; Scott, 2020). Dworkin and Tobe (2014) outlined psychological or sociological approaches explaining that using a psychological approach, the treatment was finding ways to cope with the stressors, while using a sociological approach, coping was not done through individual action but through changing the factors.

Frequent Turnover of New Staff

Stressful situations created burnout which may be linked to attrition of early career teachers (Farmer, 2020; Lambert et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2017; Taylor et al., 2021). Farmer (2020) found that teachers were leaving the profession because they were working in stress causing environments due to unsupportive administrations. Ryan et al. (2017) examined how the relationship between teacher turnover and academic accountability policies based on standardized testing was causing new and veteran teachers to rethink their career decisions. Taylor et al. (2021) showed that interventions based on teaching mindfulness and self-care helped to improve teacher resiliency and possibly reduce attrition.

Teachers Impact on Academic Achievement

For students to learn from their teachers, the teachers need to be a motivational leader for their students (Öqvist & Malmstrom, 2016). Öqvist and Malmstrom (2016) indicated that a teacher's leadership may play a critical role in students' learning, performance, and successful completion of schoolwork. Pitzer and Skinner (2016) found that when teachers were experiencing high levels of stress, there were negative impacts on academic repercussions. Hester et al. (2020) found that the effects of stress and burnout may not only impact teacher well-being but also student and teacher relations and classroom climate. Shen et al. (2015) found that teachers exhibiting high levels of stress resulted in weaker relationships with their students. A

diminished climate in the classroom may affect learning and engagement which in turn may have a negative impact on student performance and hindered students' intrinsic motivation (Shen et al., 2015). Ouellette et al. (2018) found that teacher effectiveness was impacted by the levels of stress and burnout a teacher experienced, and students needed teachers who were highly effective to learn.

Emotional Exhaustion, Negative Attitudes, and Low Job Satisfaction

Teacher exposure to stressful emotional demands may contribute to emotional exhaustion, negative attitudes about the profession, a lower sense of personal accomplishment, and lower job satisfaction (Fiorilli et al., 2016). Negative outcomes were associated with increased levels of emotional exhaustion in the teaching profession (Eddy et al., 2020). Like stress, students who had teachers who were experiencing high levels of exhaustion were not as productive (Klusman et al., 2016). Klusman et al. (2016) found emotional exhaustion among teachers was associated with lower test scores and decreased relationships among their students. Chang (2009) also stated that teachers with high levels of emotional exhaustion lacked coping strategies and as a result, may be ineffective with the delivery of high-quality instruction.

Klechemans and Deketelaere (2016) related emotions and attitudes as a foundational dimension of teaching. Negative attitudes have been found to have a negative impact on teachers' ability to create positive perceptions towards their students (Koenen et al., 2017). Examples of negative attitudes and emotions consisted of feelings of helplessness, anger, and sadness (Becker et al., 2015; Keller et al., 2014; Taxer & Frenzel et al., 2015). Becker et al. (2015) also found that negative attitudes may also impact relationships and interactions with students.

Khachatryan (2021) found that teachers have also experienced significant emotional burnout due to the COVID-19 pandemic teaching response. The emotional stress from increased expectations may directly threaten the livelihood and quality of life of the teaching force (Alves et al., 2019; Arvidsson et al., 2019; Fiorilli et al., 2016, Zhang et al., 2020). When teachers' emotional stability is threatened due to stress and burnout, it may not only impact how they teach but also have an indirect effect on student and school performance (Hurley, 2021; Koenen et al., 2017; Phillips, 2021; Richards et al., 2018).

Teachers are more effective when they are satisfied with their job (Lopes & Oliveira, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Pepe et al. (2017) defined job satisfaction as a positive perception of the job conditions. When teachers were satisfied, they had higher levels of psychological well-being, motivation, enthusiasm, and were more successful in the profession than those who were exhausted and unsatisfied (Arens & Morin, 2016; McInerney et al., 2018). Satisfied teachers were less absent and demonstrated better mental health and coping strategies from stress (Nakata et al., 2013; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014). Lower job satisfaction could result from pressures from society, higher accountability exceptions, or pressure from school leadership (Saeki et al., 2018). Giambona and Porcu (2018) outlined school level factors that they found impacted job satisfaction such as class and school size, teacher autonomy, and a school's socio-economic status. Demographics, such as age, gender, and teaching experiences, also constituted teacher-level factors that may impact job satisfaction (Aytac, 2015).

Teaching During the Pandemic

When the nation was introduced to the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts swiftly closed their doors to in-person learning to help protect students and teachers from the transmission of the disease, which forced teachers to adapt as they offered remote learning

opportunities to their students (Lepp et al., 2021; Lizana et al., 2021; Scott, 2020). Across the nation, teachers were provided guidelines on how to teach during this emergency remote teaching period (Lepp et al., 2021). This shift of the learning and teaching process created a new paradigm for teachers, students, and their parents (Lepp et al., 2021). At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, most schools around the nation began to use an asynchronous online teaching format to deliver instruction (Eblie Trudel et al., 2021; Scott, 2020). Asynchronous online teaching removed timelines and provided flexibility to the students by delivering instruction through virtual handouts, audio, and video clips, pre-recorded lessons, or other virtual educational materials and platforms, while students accessed this content on their own time (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Heath & Shine, 2021; Ojo et al., 2021). When schools reopened in the fall of 2021, a hybrid model of asynchronous and synchronous instruction was established. In combination with flexible remote asynchronous lessons, teachers taught lessons by using online synchronous teaching, which is the delivery of instruction by providing real-time lessons using a digital platform or in person (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Ojo et al., 2021). Due to the shift of the delivery of instruction to students, how students accessed learning, and how teachers responded physically and emotionally, the response to the new teaching methods created increased levels of stress for teachers nationally (Frederick et al., 2020; Grasso et al., 2021; Lizana et al., 2021; Middleton, 2020; Sayer & Braun et al., 2020; Wyse et al., 2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher stress should not be overlooked (Lizana et al., 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the teaching field and like the medical field, certain requirements and recommendations were given to teachers when returning to in-person teaching to help prevent and reduce disease transmission in order help respect the personal safety of workers and others (Barnes & Sax, 2020; Lizana et al., 2021). As recommended by

organizations such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), school districts were provided guidance on how to safely reopen schools with the use of safety and mitigation strategies that would impact all stakeholders within the school community (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Marshall et al., 2020). The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (2021) also provided recommendations to support getting students back in classrooms as well as supporting teaching for in-person learning, by suggesting strategies such as remote learning and teaching, returning to in person teaching, masking in schools, and use of physical and social distancing.

Remote Learning and Teaching

COVID-19 transformed traditional brick-and-mortar teaching and learning and impacted the educational profession in profound ways (Engzell et al., 2021). In March of 2020, face-to-face instruction was suspended across the nation, to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Engzell et al., 2021; Lepp et al., 2021). School closures have been identified as one of the most beneficial interventions used to slow down the spread of the COVID-19 (Zviedrite et al., 2021). School closure had its challenges at the starting stages of the pandemic, such as providing meals for students as well as providing continuous learning and teaching opportunities for students (Zviedrite et al., 2021). Dhawan (2020) stated that the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to shift from an “offline mode to online mode of pedagogy” (para. 5). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students migrated to digital learning and teaching, which is also known as e-learning or remote learning (Dhawan, 2020; Wahyono et al., 2020). Firman and Rahayo (2020) explained that the implementation of e-learning helps students and teachers be in different places while learning, enabling instruction to continue even though it may not be face-to-face.

Remote learning created many obstacles and challenges that elevated teacher stress (Handayani et al., 2020). Quezada et al. (2020) found that teachers were more stressed if they perceived teaching through technology as problematic. Drossel et al. (2020) found that an average of 33% of teachers felt they were well prepared to teach remotely. In that same survey, Drossel et al. (2020) also revealed that 34% of teachers felt that teaching remotely was a burden. Similarly, Ayub et al. (2018) explained that teachers may experience stress because of heightened expectations that require a lot of willpower and energy. The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (2006) outlines that high teaching demands and lack of resources are a major cause of stress for teachers (Bakker & Demerouti et al., 2017; Ghaffar, 2020; Veldman et al., 2016). According to Bakker and Demerouti et al. (2017), the JD-R model was first introduced in 2006 to help provide details of the causes of burnout. The JD-R model (2006) found that job demands, job resources and personal resources were high indicators of employee ability to function at work (Ghaffar, 2020). Teachers heightened levels of stress when teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic were caused by a lack of time to prepare technology-based lessons, lack of resources and support about training and effective use of the technology to support learning and teaching (Klapproth et al., 2020). Lieberman (2020) found that remote learning was a positive tool that could help maintain instruction during school closures of in person teaching. However, Lieberman (2020) also outlined that there were gaps in how students and teachers access the resources needed to learn and teach, creating a lack of preparedness to offer online instruction, which is leaving students and teachers ill-equipped to learn and teach online. Teachers had to adjust their methods of instruction to meet the needs of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and faced many barriers along the way, therefore, increasing teachers' levels of stress and feeling of burnout (Klapproth et al., 2020).

Return to In-Person Teaching

Gross and Opalaka (2021) stated that the reopening of school to in-person teaching, and learning was not a simple process for schools and teachers. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) (2020) wrote that the decisions for school closures happened quickly, however the reopening of schools was complex and complicated and was based on advice from health experts. Prior to the reopening of school buildings for in person teaching and learning, Hoffman et al. (2021) wrote that if policymakers and community stakeholders wanted to reopen schools, during the pandemic, there would need to be the development of COVID-19 mitigation and containment strategies for schools. Though there was not a lot known about how to return safely in the initial phase of reopening of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, previous pandemics, such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SAR) in 2003, H1N1 in 2009, and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) in 2012 provided some mitigation strategies to follow, such as vaccinations and closing schools to in person learning in order for safe return to the classrooms (Gojovic et al., 2009; Hoffman et al., 2021). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2021), along with the U.S. Department of Education (2021) and the Academy of American Pediatrics (AAP) (2021) provided guidance on mitigation strategies for a safe return. Mitigation strategies such as universal masking, social distancing, and using student and staff quarantine methods to help contain the virus were implemented to support the health and well-being of teachers and students and to limit the spread of COVID-19 (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021).

The U.S. Department of Education (2021) developed two volumes of COVID-19 handbooks both titled, ED COVID-19 Handbook, Roadmap to Reporting Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs. Each volume of the handbook elaborated on key features of how to safely

return to schools. Volume two of the handbook focused on three core areas: creating safe and healthy learning environments, addressing lost instructional time, and supporting educator and staff stability and well-being (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The goal of these handbooks was to provide prevention strategies to safely reopen schools and maximize in person instruction to support social, emotional, and academic needs, address loss of instructional time, and provide guidance on high-quality internet devices and instruction for teachers and students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

To guide a successful reopening of schools for in-person learning, schools needed health measures to mitigate the spread and transmission of COVID-19 (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend the following strategies to prevent the spread of the virus in schools: promoting vaccination, indoor masking, physical distancing (also known as social distancing), screening to identify COVID-19 cases and outbreaks, proper ventilation, handwashing, staying home when sick, contact tracing with isolation and quarantine, and cleaning and disinfection (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). While teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategies that contributed to teacher stress include masking in schools and physical/social distancing in the classroom (Schwartz et al., 2021). Mickells et al. (2021) wrote that masking and social distancing has proven to reduce the spread of COVID-19, however, masking, and social distancing may have also increased teacher stress due to politicization of the mandates in schools (Fischer et al., 2021).

Masking in Schools

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) outlined that wearing a mask that fits correctly and is worn consistently, especially in communities with high COVID-19

transmission levels, helped reduce the risk and the spread of COVID-19. According to the top public health experts at the Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention and with guidance supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the recommendation at the time was that universal masking was advised for children of all ages over 2 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Mickells et al., 2021). In April of 2021, the U.S. Department of Education provided guidance and the rationale for universal education through the first of two volumes of the ED COVID-19 Handbook, Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting all Students' Needs (2021). The handbook asserted that when teachers and students wear masks correctly and constantly, it provided protection from the spread and transmission of COVID-19 (Department of Education, 2021). Guidance was also provided for staff who could not wear masks, providing alternatives such as the use of a face shield (Department of Education, 2021).

When the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021), and school districts recommended the use of masks, there were compliance issues and some schools rejected or ignored the recommendation entirely (Audrain et al., 2022). This inconsistent follow through of expectations created disputes with the authority of federal agencies, halting some of the consistency of masking in schools and filing of many lawsuits (Audrain et al., 2022; Mello & Studdert, 2021). These inconsistencies and/or lack of direction may have contributed to teachers' stress and anxiety (Krans, 2021). In addition, an anti-mask culture also emerged in some areas fueled by parents and lawmakers that believed that mandating for students to wear masks was ineffective, inconvenient, and violated civil liberties (Taylor & Asmundson, 2021). Alexander (2021) explained that masks had become very polarized, leaving teachers' voices out of the conversation. Teachers were being confronted by families who were against the decision for enforcing masking mandates and were being vocal in schools and school boards meetings

(Alexander, 2021). This polarization of mask-wearing in schools may have caused teachers to worry for themselves and their students and may have created an escalation of stress (Krans, 2021).

Physical/Social Distancing

Another mitigation strategy outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) to help reduce the spread and transmission of COVID-19 was the use of physical or social distancing. Social distancing is the act of maintaining a certain degree of space between persons, such as teacher to student, student to student, and teacher to teacher, which helps prevent and slow the spread of COVID-19 (Qian & Jiang, 2020). Because COVID-19 is spread by droplets, Qian and Jiang (2020) write that social distancing is the most effective way of reducing the spread of the virus. In the U.S. Department of Education's document titled ED COVID-19 Handbook, Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting all Students' Needs (2021), there are recommendations that students, teachers, and visitors maintained at least three feet of distance, to the best extent possible, and those who were unvaccinated against COVID-19 maintain at least six feet of distance from others. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2021) highlighted more recent studies from classrooms around the nation to show that when students and teachers were utilizing physical/social distancing, there was a lower chance of spread and transmission of COVID-19.

Public schools are social environments, usually dense in population, with more than 50 million students across the United States (Uscher-Pines et al., 2020). The recommendation of a socially distanced classroom environment provides an extra layer of mitigation by providing additional space within the classroom and around the school to help reduce the spread and transmission of COVID-19 (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). To promote

social distancing, Uscher-Pines et al. (2020) highlight strategies such as staggering of recess times across the school, rearranging students' desks so that all students are facing one direction, eating in classrooms, limiting visitors to schools, and restricting movement in hallways and bathroom usage as strategies to help reduce the spread of the virus. Limiting the number of students in a classroom and limiting the movement from class to class was also used as a mitigation strategy; this is known as a cohort or a homeroom stay approach (Uscher-Pines et al., 2020). Using cohorts, or a homeroom stay approach, students stay in their same group throughout the day, with minimal integration with other cohorts (Uscher-Pines et al., 2020).

This model of using cohorts created teachers teaching half of their students in person, and teaching the others remotely, is known as a hybrid model of instruction (Ghaffar, 2020). Teaching students in person and online increased teachers' workloads, which may have contributed to higher levels of stress compared to those teaching in person or teaching fully remotely (Ghaffar, 2020).

Teachers were on the front line when it came to implementing the health and safety recommendations from the World Health Organization and the American Academy of Pediatrics in their classrooms (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021). Along with dealing with traditional teaching expectations such as classroom management and instructing curriculum, teachers were challenged with maintaining social distancing in the classroom (Park & Clemson, 2020). Lizana et al. (2021) stated that teacher stress increased when teachers were dealing with challenges of student misbehavior for those students who are not following the guidance and recommendations from the Center for Disease Control and the Department of Education.

Conceptual Framework

For this qualitative phenomenological study, the phenomenon of learning new methods of teaching through the COVID-19 pandemic is supported by the construct of constructivism. Constructivism is the idea that learning is an active process, and not a “passive reception of teaching” (Kurt, 2021, para. 2). Constructivism is constructed based on life experiences and focuses on the learner and how new knowledge is acquired, which sometimes occurs through collaboration (Holmes, 2019; Kurt, 2021; McLeod, 2019; Woolfolk, 1993). Holmes (2019) stated that the learner needs to be an active participant in the learning process which allows for new knowledge to be “assimilated by and incorporated into a learners’ existing mental patterns” (p 8). Holmes (2019) also referenced work by Mayer (2003) which presented that “basic premise of constructivism is that meaningful learning occurs when the learner strives to make sense of the presented material by selecting relevant incoming information and organizing it into a coherent structure and integrating it with other organized knowledge” (p. 9). Also, new learning happens when the learner reflects and develops new ideas based on their “existing ideas and the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves” (Eastwell, 2002, p. 83).

Constructivism provides a framework for this study as it relates to teachers’ experiences, and the new learning that needed to take place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Krahenbuhl (2016) stated, “constructivism is undoubtedly one of the most influential philosophies in education in the twenty-first century” (p. 97). When schools closed in-person learning in March of 2020, many public school teachers faced challenges as they were not prepared to deliver instruction remotely prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020; Klapproth et al., 2020). This shift in the learning environment required teachers to adjust,

collaborate with each other and learn how to make this new method work for students, parents, and themselves (Klapproth et al., 2020)

This study will utilize constructivism, but more specifically, social constructivism as the theoretical framework. Social constructivism is the understanding that knowledge is social, and experience based, as well as, constructed by the learner in a learning community where all aspects of the learner are connected, and the learning environment is inclusive and equitable (Kapur, 2018). Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky is known as the founding father of social constructivism resulting from his beliefs that social interaction is an important part of the learning process (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) research and theories involving social constructivism include developments such as the zone of proximal development and cooperative learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009; Vygotsky, 1962).

Vygotsky's (1962) social constructivism theory involves the zone of proximal development, or ZPD, which references the process of the growth and new knowledge guided by collaboration and guidance with capable peers (Green & Gredler, 2002; Powell & Kalina, 2009). ZPD, as outlined by Vygotsky (1962) is explained as the zone where learning takes place when the learner is helped by another when new learning is occurring. This framework supported this study as teachers needed to be active learners, developing their skills as it related to teaching remotely while using virtual resources. When schools closed their doors to in person teaching, teachers had to shift their teaching methods and had to learn alongside their peers on new ways to deliver instruction remotely during the pandemic, making them active learners (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020; Scott, 2020). Powell and Kalina (2009) wrote that learning is easiest within the zone when others are helping and providing guidance with the learning process. Many public school teachers faced challenges as they had never used,

understood, or been trained to deliver instruction using online platforms prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020). Besser et al. (2020) found teachers already had accumulated stress before the pandemic, but their stress increased due to the need to adapt to new learning to provide virtual instruction.

Alongside Vygotsky's (1962) zone of proximal development, scaffolding is identified as another layer of the social constructivist construct. Scaffolding supports ZPD and it is considered an "assisted learning process," whereas the learner is supported to get to the next zone of understanding, aided by others, such as peers or other adults (Powell & Kalina, 2009). Teaching is collaborative and a social profession (Hargreaves, 2021). For new learning to occur, learners must interact with each other (Powell & Kalina, 2009). During the shift from traditional instruction to remote teaching expectations, the Economic Policy Institute (2020) cited that there was a lack of professional development on how to use computers and integrate them into instruction, leaving teachers ill-equipped. However, Hargreaves (2021) outlined that new learning could be drawn from social and moral support from other teachers within the school building. Likewise, remote teaching extended opportunities for teachers to receive guidance on teaching remotely, learning about technology, and engaging in interactions from educators globally (Hargreaves, 2021). Hargreaves (2021) states that one way teachers were supported during the COVID-19 pandemic was the use of online networking to glean new ideas and resources to teach remotely or online.

Remote learning continued and teachers collaborated with colleagues and learned new ways to be creative with the new form for delivery of instruction (Ahmadi & Ilmiani, 2020). While learning in groups, the learner self internalizes the new learning to help master the tasks and which happens at their own rate (Green & Gredler, 2002; Powell & Kalina,

2009). Vygotsky (1962) outlined that internalization of knowledge occurs best when there is social interaction. Additionally, Vygotsky was a proponent that social interactions and cultural influences were also key effects to the process of learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Vygotsky (1962) was a strong believer in learners not only working with the classroom teacher but also learning and working alongside other students. During the COVID-19 pandemic, classroom teachers needed to acquire new methods of instruction and had to learn alongside their students to try to teach and learn strategies needed for remote learning, such as working independently, self-direction and self-determination (Hargreaves, 2021). Highlighting social constructivism, Arora and Srinivasan (2020) conducted a study focusing on the impact of learning for teachers using new alternatives to academic instruction and virtual classes.

Constructivism, and more specifically social constructivism aligned with this study because teachers needed to become active learners to develop new knowledge on how to teach the curriculum remotely (Arora & Srinivasan, 2020). Teachers faced challenges due to being ill prepared or having a lack of understanding on how to deliver instruction remotely (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020). These challenges forced teachers to learn how to instruct students using new platforms and learn to adjust to ways to deliver instruction alongside their colleagues and their students (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Hargreaves, 2021; Herold, 2020; Scott, 2020).

Summary

Entering the classroom after school closures, due to the global pandemic, has introduced classroom teachers to new experiences and requirements that have both positive and negative impacts (Kaur & Kumar, 2019; Pressley, 2021). Safety protocols, new priorities for virtual learning strategies, and changing expectations became the new normal for teachers (Pressley,

2021). These changes contributed to teachers' heightened stress levels, and this has become a concern (Hurley, 2021; Kaur & Kumar, 2019). Over time, consistent exposure to this stress may lead to burnout which may impact students and the quality of education they receive (Hurley, 2021; Kaur & Kumar, 2019; Klusmann et al., 2016). Additionally, Skaalvik & Skaalvik (2018) found that continued stress may lead to burnout which directly impacts a teacher's well-being.

Even before the pandemic, teachers may have experienced intense, emotional interactions every day (Fiorilli et al., 2016). The global pandemic has introduced teachers and students to new alternative learning platforms, which has caused stress among some teachers, especially those who are not comfortable with technology (Drossel et al., 2019; Wiggins, 2020). Pressley et al. (2021) found that districts forced teachers into these new expectations such as learning how to utilize technology to deliver instruction and enduring an increase of workload due to teaching students in and out of the school building simultaneously. Teachers may have felt unsupported during this time (Klapproth et al., 2020; Maas et al., 2021) This feeling may have contributed to increased stress and burnout and may have impacted teachers' well-being (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

This literature review sought to understand what factors may increase stress and burnout for schoolteachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Highlighted throughout the literature, stress, and burnout are caused by many things that impact teachers daily, such as work overload, lack of time to prepare, and shifting roles and expectations. Teachers have been working through a global pandemic and stress and anxiety may have increased (Klapproth et al., 2020; Pressley, 2020; Pressley et al., 2020). Teachers' health may have been impacted resulting in severe consequences for themselves as well as their students (Maas et al., 2021; Smetackova, 2019). Pressley et al. (2021) wrote that it is important to continue to explore and research the

impact of the stress and burnout, caused by the pandemic and the impact it may have on the teaching and the education profession.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) deemed the COVID-19 virus a global pandemic which has caused a disruption to the education profession and has affected more than 1.6 billion learners all over the world (Fauzi et al., 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Since the start of the pandemic, educators have worked and shifted their teaching through the pandemic (Ahmadi & Ilmiani, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). Teachers have continued to be flexible while being asked to adjust their teaching pedagogy, philosophies, and expectations to match the growing need to adapt during this unprecedented time (Bond, 2020; Contreras, 2020; Scott, 2020). Dhawan (2020) explained that these shifts included the introduction to online and digital learning for all grade spans as well as many protocols outlined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Teachers have felt the ripple effect of the pandemic and have increased their levels of stress (Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Pressley, 2021). Many of these changing factors, such as how to deliver instruction to their students and new health and safety protocols, have been reviewed and studied (Coyle et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020). It has been found that growing rates of stress and burnout in today's classrooms may have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic (Coyle et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020). This study used a qualitative phenomenological research approach to seek to understand the lived experiences, related to stress and burnout, of public schools' teachers who were teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This chapter describes the sample population, method of data collection, analysis, limitations, ethical considerations, and elements of trustworthiness of the study. Though the pandemic has been felt across the nation (Bond, 2020), this study only focused on lived experiences from public school teachers in one school district in Northern New England. Using

a phenomenological study allowed the researcher to dive into their lived experiences, listen to the challenges and successes of these public school teachers to understand their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) highlighted that the purpose of a phenomenological study is an investigation intended to find and understand lived experiences that help identify the meaning of human experiences. Phenomenology is not a roadmap to the development of theory, however a way to develop an insight to help educate the world and sustain a connection (Smith & Larkin, 2009). For this research, the phenomenon identified is K-12 public school teachers' experience teaching throughout the COVID-19 pandemic that first impacted schools beginning in March of 2020.

Research Questions

There has been a recent interest in phenomenological studies that are creating more in-depth knowledge of educational sciences (Çimen et al., 2020). This study sought to understand the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research questions for this study were designed through the lens of the qualitative phenomenological method, which aligns with the purpose and problem. Through phenomenological interviews, I wanted to identify the phenomenon's essence and understand the lived experiences of teachers while working through the pandemic. The research questions that guided this study included:

RQ1: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their lived experiences while teaching during a pandemic?

RQ2: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their perceptions of stressors related to teaching during a pandemic?

RQ3: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their experience as learners while adapting to teaching during a pandemic?

Site Information and Demographics

This research study took place in one school district in Northern New England. The study site has more than 2,200 students in grades prekindergarten to grade 12. The school district employs approximately 400 staff, including teachers, instructional aids, administrators, and other classroom supports such as guidance counselors and librarians (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). There were potentially 185 participants that could take part in this study. Students and staff at the study site shifted their learning trajectory to remote modality on March 13, 2020, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, teachers attempted to communicate with families, distribute iPads and paper learning packets to help maintain some learning opportunities for students. Schools were not physically closed, and teachers were allowed into the buildings if needed. Families and students had access to teachers through a variety of platforms to include Google classroom so that learning could continue.

Potential participants of this study had a variety of years of experience in education within the study site. The participants were K-12 teachers who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nine participants responded to the recruitment email and were contacted to schedule an interview to participate in this study.

Sampling Method

According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), the first step of collecting data from interviews is knowing whom to interview. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) share that to select the right respondents, researchers need to select participants on what they can contribute and share about the understanding of the phenomenon. Interview participants should have direct experience with the phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

For this study, criterion-based sampling was used to select participants who have all experienced teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) identify that criterion-based sampling in phenomenological studies works well when “all the individuals in the study represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon” (p. 148). Potential participants selected for this study were K-12 teachers within the outlined school district who taught on or after March of 2020. This included K-12 teachers who taught during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years. This timeline was crucial to understand lived experiences of teaching during the pandemic as most schools stopped face to face instruction and moved into remote teaching and learning in March of 2020.

Before recruiting participants, I sent an email to the district superintendent to obtain approval to conduct this research, so that district policies and confidentiality requirements were agreed upon. Once approved by district leadership, I obtained a list from the district human resources coordinator of all K-12 teachers and their email addresses in the study site who were employed from the 2019-2020 school year to the present. To dismiss bias and objectivity and to maintain a sense of confidentiality and separation from my current position, I used my University of New England email address to send out recruitment emails. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from the University of New England

(Appendix D), I imported all provided email addresses into an email and prepared the recruitment email to send (Appendix A). The recruitment email included the rationale and purpose of the study as well as a Participant Information Sheet about the study so that the potential participants in the study have the information they need to make an informed decision to participate (Appendix B). Participants provided their verbal consent which was collected and recorded at the start of the interview.

The recruitment window was open for a two-week time frame, with an additional two-week window if there was a lack of interested participants. As soon as participants responded to the recruitment email, I reached out using my University of New England email, to schedule the phenomenological interview. There are many views on how many participants should be used in qualitative phenomenological research, but Creswell (2013) recommends sample sizes for a phenomenological study be between three and 325 participants. For the purpose of this study, nine participants responded to the recruitment email and were contacted to schedule an interview to participate in this study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Interviews were conducted and recorded in a private setting so the participant could answer the interview questions without others being able to hear. Participants were interviewed over an online video conferencing tool known as Zoom and were expected to be 45-60 minutes in duration. Zoom is a video-based communication application that allows for virtual face-to-face meetings and conferences, webinars, live chatting, and real-time communication (Antonelli, 2020). Zoom allows for all sorts of communications, including interviews from anywhere and at any time, thus closing a geographic distance problem (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Once the participants responded to the recruitment email, along with an agreed upon interview time,

participants received an email with a Zoom invitation that provided a session ID along with a password. Participants did not need to be Zoom subscribers to use the program (Antonelli, 2020).

At the commencement of the recorded interview, the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) was reviewed, and verbal consent was established, and participants were reminded that at any time, they can stop the interview, with the understanding that their responses would not be used for this research and files would be destroyed. During the interview, participants were asked to turn on the camera so that I could observe and make field notes of the participant's facial and body movements. However, participants could waive the right to be seen through the camera, thereby maintaining their confidentiality by turning off their camera. Using field notes, according to Merriam and Tisdell (2016) helps track thoughts, musings, speculations, and hunches to help prepare for data analysis. Using the recording feature in Zoom, interviews were recorded and downloaded to a password-protected folder on a flash drive. Once the recorded interviews were downloaded, the zip files contained an auto transcription, verbatim of what each participant said during the interview. Transcriptions of the interview were sent to each participant for review for accuracy and adjustments. Participants had seven days to verify transcriptions. Once videos were transcribed, all video recordings were destroyed after transcriptions had been completed and verified for accuracy by the participants. The researcher utilized a master list of participants with identifiable information during the recruitment process, this included the name of the participant and their email. The identifiable information on the master list was destroyed after transcription has been completed and verified by the participants. All data was stored on a separate portable flash drive that only the researcher had access to and was password protected. The flash drive was stored in a locked cabinet for the duration of the

study and then destroyed after a minimum of three years. In addition, all identifiers, included participant names, participants location, school, district, and any other identifying information was deidentified using pseudonyms.

During the interview, I utilized a semi structured approach to understand the phenomenon and experiences of each respondent. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) highlighted semi structured interviews as being open-ended and questions allow for flexibility and use topics for exploration, as well as more and less structured interview questions. An interview protocol was created, including nine interview questions that align with the research questions and align to the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study (Appendix C). Potential probing questions were included in the interview protocol to help guide the participants towards elaborating on key elements of their experiences while teaching during the pandemic so that the true essence of the phenomenon can be understood.

Data Analysis

After each interview was conducted, I used the transcription option located within the Zoom application. Once the recorded interview was downloaded, the zip files contained an auto transcription, verbatim of what each participant said during the interview. Transcripts of the interview were sent to each of the participants for review. Participants had seven days to verify the accuracy of the transcript. If there was no communication from the participant, the transcript was considered approved. Once the transcripts were verified for accuracy, all video recordings were destroyed. The transcripts were stored in a password-protected file within an external flash drive and used for analysis.

After each interview was conducted, transcribed, and verified, I started the coding process. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) stated that the coding process is used to help make

sense of the data, create segment chunks, and examine the data for overlapping themes. I used this coding method of chunking to combine each segment of the interviews to find commonalities in the responses provided by the participants.

Once the collective theme-based coding was complete, the themes were sent to each participant for member checking through an email using the blind copy feature, to protect privacy of all participants. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explains that member checking is a process to ensure internal validity. The process of member checking is used to gather feedback on emerging findings from the participants' interviews and ask whether the interpretation is true and rules out possibilities of misinterpreting the meanings of responses from the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants were given one week to check, adjust, and validate the outlined coded themes. If there were adjustments and/or additional information that needed to be added or deleted, participants were asked to include these changes in an email using the respond to sender. If there was no communication from the participants during the week given to provide adjustments, the transcript was considered as accurate. The theme-based coding was used to present the findings in a narrative format in Chapter 4, which is one of the primary forms for reporting data in a qualitative study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) identified that a narrative discussion in qualitative research is a way in which the researcher summarizes in detail findings from the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 provides a vignette of each participant's lived experiences as expressed during the interviewing process.

Limitations, Delimitations, Ethical Issues

Limitations to a study are characteristics that impact the research or influence the interpretation of the findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Limitations provide a critical examination of the study, application to practice, and an appraisal of the impacts of the findings.

Delimitations are characteristics that clarify and define the conceptual understandings of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Delimitations refer to the overall choices about the broader design of the study, by providing the reader with how the scope of the study was narrowed down. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) suggest the researcher state all decisions, both exclusionary and inclusionary that were considered and why. Consideration of ethical issues is essential as researchers are bound by morals that minimize potential harm for the participants of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Ethical issues can be found in all aspects of the research process, such as data collection, analysis and interpretation, and the dissemination of findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Researchers are obligated to protect the rights and safety and minimize potential harm for all participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). The researcher needs to identify any issues and take steps to address them before the study begins as well as monitor throughout. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state that informed consent is central to ethics and research. First, participants of this research were provided with a Participant Information Sheet that addressed confidentiality for the study, and provided that they could withdraw from the study at any time with no recriminations (Appendix B). Their participation was strictly voluntary (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Consent entitles the participant to judge for themselves the autonomy of the study and understand the risks that are potential within the study to continue with the scientific process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Limitations

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state that limitations also can expose the conditions that may weaken the study. In qualitative research and phenomenological interviews, there are limitations. According to Anderson (2010), some of these limitations happen with the researcher

and their own personal skills and idiosyncrasies, which sometimes are influenced by their own personal bias. Also, the researcher's presence during data gathering potentially posed a limitation as participants may not answer honestly due to researchers' position (Anderson, 2010). Limitations were evident for this phenomenological study of teachers' experiences while teaching during the pandemic.

The use of criterion-based sampling was limiting to the study as there was only a focus on one specific demographic, those public-school teachers who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the study site employs over 400 employees, this study focuses only on the public-school teachers in this site. The sample size for the study was based on recommendations from Creswell (2013), and I only selected eight to ten participants for this sample. This lends to the sample size and its limitations.

For this research study, I considered all methods of research but felt that a qualitative phenomenological study would best provide a way to give teachers a chance to talk and relay their experiences. Teachers are on the front lines and are constantly being exposed to new expectations and directions for their students and families (Scott, 2020). Stress and burnout can be measured through quantitative measures, but through a phenomenological study, the findings provided can share and depict the true essence of the lived experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the overall design of the study and provide details of the characteristics that define and clarify boundaries of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). For this study, I chose to focus on public school teachers because of their daily exposure with students and the phenomenon of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Other members of

the school community were considered because of their working during the COVID-19 pandemic, but teachers were on the front line all day, every day and were constantly on the clock working irregular hours to work with students and their families (Lepp et al., 2021). This study focused on the phenomenon of teaching during the pandemic, but also looked at stress and burnout in relation to the phenomenon.

Ethical Issues

The National Research Act was signed into law in 1974 which created a commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavior Research. The Belmont Report (1976) summarizes the basic ethical principles that the commission outlined. Three principles were outlined in this report having to do with research involving human subjects and include respect for persons, beneficence, and justice.

Respect for Persons

Each potential participant received a Participant Information Sheet prior to agreeing to participate in this study (Appendix B). The Participant Information Sheet outlined information about the study so that participants were able to make informed decisions to participate in the study. At the start of the interview, participants were provided adequate notice and assurance that their participation was voluntary and would not place the participant at undue risk. Participants could end the interview at any time without fear of ramifications or judgment. If a participant decided to end the interview, the recording and all accompanying information would be destroyed.

Beneficence

Two goals of beneficence are to do no harm and to maximize benefits and minimize possible harms (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979). This study provided an avenue

for teachers to share their lived experiences while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was designed to have minimal harmful risks. Although there is minimal risk in this study, there is a slight risk of a breach of confidentiality. Though teachers were exposing their experiences, the risk of negative feelings and emotional stress could be elevated during reflection. These feelings and added emotional stress may impact the participants responses, and or continuation of their participation in this study. I considered the probability and magnitude of harm/discomfort anticipated because of participating in this study. The emotional stress that may be acquired by participants was not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

Justice

Justice as related to ethical concerns and laid out in the Belmont report state that justice is the “sense of fairness in the distribution or what is deserved” (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979, p. 6). Benefits and burdens should be equal and distributed to each person according to their need, effort, societal contribution, and merit (Office for Human Research Protections, 1979). This study focused on K-12 classroom teachers who all experienced teaching through the pandemic. All K-12 teachers in the study site received the recruitment email asking for participants, which outlines the purpose of the study as well as consent. Each teacher had the same opportunity and the same probing interview questions asked to share their experiences. Each participant was provided with two weeks to reply to the recruitment email. Also, all participants were given equal time to review and accept the accuracy of their transcribed interview and the emergent themes that were developed during the coding process.

Researcher Bias

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) wrote that before conducting a study, the researcher explores their own experiences which helps point out viewpoints, assumptions, and prejudices. This is known as *bracketing*. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), bracketing is a key element of a phenomenological study. To help in focusing on the essence of the lived experiences of K-12 teachers and get a fresh perspective, I used bracketing to help set aside my biases and to not influence or sway the participants' answers during the interview.

I am currently a school administrator for a school district in Northern New England. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have worked with teachers, families, students, and central office staff with how to proceed and adjust teaching plans to support students. The study site is not the location of my current employment, so I did not exclude any potential participant as there is no relationship with teachers from that district. Though I have experienced working through the pandemic, I did not let my own experiences influence and impact my interactions with potential participants before, during and after the research study.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain trustworthiness as the importance to reassure the reader that the study is necessary and has significance and value. This study outlined the need to research and study teachers' lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic to guide and support teachers if and when teachers are exposed to another educational shifting paradigm. Readers of this study will be offered the opportunity to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lived experiences of teachers and their potential stress and burnout.

Credibility

Credibility is used in research to help the researcher check to ensure that the participants' responses and perceptions align with the researcher's analysis (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Using member checks, also known as respondent validation, helps the researcher secure internal credibility (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Maxwell (2013) stated that this is the most impartial way to rule out any misinterpretation of how the participants responded to the questions. Also, member checks lend themselves to checking the researcher's bias and ensuring they do not influence the participants' responses. The participants of this study received the identified coded themes via email that were developed from the responses of the transcribed interviews. Participants had a two-week window to review and verify the analysis of the data collected to validate the accuracy. If the participants did not respond to the member check email, I assumed the participants accepted the themes provided as accurate.

Transferability

Transferability is used to help readers to determine if a study is relevant or will be able to be conducted in other settings or communities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) also note that transferability is how well the reader finds that the research will fit in other contexts (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). To help with creating a shared experience with the reader, the researcher used detailed and thick descriptions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described this form of explanation as “enough description to contextualize the study such that readers can determine the extent to which their citations match the research context, and, hence, whether funds can be transferred” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 259).

This study can be transferred to a variety of contexts and communities. The world is suffering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Chriscaden, 2020). The United Nations

(2021) reported that this crisis is like no other. COVID-19 has attacked all demographics and populations and has not just impacted educators. As a nation, we have lived experiences that have occurred throughout the pandemic. Chriscaden (2020) wrote that the pandemic is impacting all areas of life, including public health, food security, and employment.

Dependability

Dependability, also known as internal validity and reliability, refers to the ability to check the processes and procedures utilized in the study and examine the ability for the study to be “applied to other situations and replicated” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 177). This study used semi structured interviews, which followed an interview protocol in order for each interview to be done in the same method for each participant (Appendix C). The interview protocol allowed for future replication of the study. Also, for validity and reliability purposes, interviews were recorded, transcribed, and checked by each of the participants.

Confirmability

Confirmability has been widely used and adopted in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Confirmability is outlined by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) as the “relation of the findings are produced by research and not by bias and subjectivity by the researcher” (p. 177). Confirmability occurred through the use of an audit trail known as field notes that could serve “and offer to the reader the opportunity to assess the findings of this study” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 177). I maintained field notes during each interview, to include examining reactions to the questions as well as notes on participants’ non-verbal habits. Also, transcripts from each of the interviews were verified by each participant to prove authenticity and for additional feedback and comments, as needed.

Member checking was used to check for researcher bias and subjectivity. Though the researcher used bracketing to separate biases, participants were given time to review the accuracy of their responses from their interviews. This process, known as member checks, helped collect and document feedback and interpretations from the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study sought to examine and understand the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers, with relation to stress and burnout, who have been teaching during the pandemic. A phenomenological study is used to find the basic underlying structure of an experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study used semi structured interviews to explore those experiences that K-12 public school teachers are going through. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) identify that a phenomenological interview is a “primary avenue to collect data to help the reader understand the essence or structure of the lived experience” (p. 26). Pressley (2021) outlines that teaching during a pandemic has elevated stress in education. Teachers had to adjust their teaching, and stress and burnout have ensued and have created an imbalance of resilience among the teaching profession (Pressley, 2021; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021; Scott, 2020).

Potential participants for this study came from a single school district and followed the recommendations by Creswell (2013) regarding sample size. It is recommended, though sample sizes vary, a phenomenological study should identify samples from three to four participants to 325 (Creswell, 2013). All K-12 teachers at one site in Northern New England received the recruitment email and informational document outlining the purpose of the study. This study focused on nine participants.

Data collection was conducted by interviewing K-12 public school teachers who experienced teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, which began impacting schools in March of 2020. Once participants were selected, they were contacted for an interview using my University of New England email address. Interviews were conducted virtually through Zoom, recorded, and transcribed, and stored in a password-protected folder housed in an external flash drive. Participants were provided ample reminders that their participation was voluntary, and they were able to terminate the interview at any time. Participants were given a timeline for adjustments and checking of accuracy. This is known as member checking. I coded each transcript and reported findings in a narrative format in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March of 2020, the teaching profession shifted from its traditional brick and mortar teaching structure due to the spread of a virus known as SAR-CoV-2 or COVID-19 (Oducado et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021; Scott, 2020). Teachers were introduced to new ways to deliver instruction, including asynchronous and synchronous online teaching (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Heath & Shine, 2021). These new methods to deliver instruction intensified levels of teacher stress (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021). Alves et al. (2020), di Fronso et al. (2020), and Liu et al. (2021) identified that teaching was already a stressful profession, and that COVID-19 has shifted the paradigm of teaching, creating additional stressors for teachers. Hurley (2021) stated that teaching is among the most stressful professions today, reporting that 90% of teachers have reported being stressed.

This study sought to understand factors related to stress and burnout that K-12 public school teachers experienced while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic using semi structured interviews to collect this data. Nine participants were interviewed using an interview protocol (Appendix B), and names and any identifying information were replaced with pseudonyms. The following questions were used to focus on the phenomenon of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic:

RQ1: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their lived experiences while teaching during a pandemic?

RQ2: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their perceptions of stressors related to teaching during a pandemic?

RQ3: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their experience as learners while adapting to teaching during a pandemic?

Coding began after each semi structured interview was conducted, transcribed, and verified by each participant. As defined by Creswell and Guetterman (2019), the coding process is used to make sense of the data, create segment chunks, and examine the data for overlapping themes. This chapter shares those emergent themes and uses evidence from the semi structured interviews to help narrate the lived experiences of the participants within the study.

This chapter is broken into three parts. First, there is a summary of this study, which briefly outlines the purpose, research question, and a review of the methodology. The next section provides an introduction of each of the nine participants, giving demographic information to help the reader understand backgrounds, experiences, and years of service in education. Following the introductions of the participants is an analysis of the answers from the participants from the semi structured interviews. The last section highlights the emergent themes that were identified during the coding process about teachers and their lived experiences while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. These themes include the importance of support, classroom challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessity of perseverance.

Analysis Method

Prior to inviting participants to partake in this study, permission to conduct the study at the school site was granted from the superintendent of schools. After the permission was secured by district leadership, the human resource department provided me with the email addresses of all 185 classroom teachers at the study site. Using my University of New England email, the potential participants received the recruitment email (Appendix A), which also included the

Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) for them to review. The recruitment window was open for two weeks. Potential participants responded to the recruitment email and through email correspondence and we decided on mutually agreeable dates and times to schedule the interviews. After the date and time was confirmed, I created a password protected Zoom link and sent it to each potential participant via email. By the end of the first week, only five participants responded, so another recruitment email was sent to remaining potential participants in hopes to acquire the minimum number of participants proposed for this study, which resulted in an additional four participants. By the end of the second week of the recruitment window, nine participants had agreed to participate in the study.

Each interview was conducted and recorded through a video-based communication application known as Zoom using an interview protocol (Appendix C). Before the interview began, the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B) was reviewed, and each participant gave verbal consent to the interview and participation in the study. The interview recordings were stored in a password protected file on a password protected computer. Interview lengths differed from each participant, ranging between 40 minutes to 75 minutes. Eight of the nine participants chose to have their camera on for the interview.

After each interview, a transcript was generated through the Zoom application. Watching the video recording again, I read along the generated transcript and corrected words that were spelled incorrectly or did not have the right context. For example, COVID was generated as COVEN in all nine interviews. This process was conducted 24 hours after each of the interviews took place. At the conclusion of each of the nine semi structured interviews, the participants were informed that after the transcripts were transcribed, they would receive an email with the transcript attached. As also indicated in the Participant Information Sheet, participants were

informed that they would have one week to review for accuracy and let me know via email if revisions and omissions were needed. The corrected transcript was emailed to each participant to check for accuracy. I used the timestamp of when the email was sent to calculate the seven day window for member checking. I did not hear from any participants during the seven day window. Participants were made aware that if I did not hear from them about revisions or omissions within that window, it meant participants accepted the transcript as it. The video recordings of the interviews were destroyed after the transcripts were verified by the participants.

After the nine interviews were conducted and all nine transcripts were accepted for accuracy by the participants, I began the coding process. At this point, I gave each participant a pseudonym and deidentified any identifying information to protect and ensure privacy. Going line by line through each of the transcripts, I assigned a phrase that “accurately describes the meaning of the text segments” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 244). Once each transcript was coded, I examined redundancy in each of the segments and phrases, constructing three themes that I felt reflected the purpose and meaning of the segments. The three themes that emerged, based off the coded transcripts include the importance of support, classroom challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessity of perseverance during an unprecedented time in education. The themes that emerged were emailed to each of the participants to gather feedback and check for accuracy. The participants were given one week to check, adjust, and validate the themes. There was no communication from the participants during the seven day window for member checking so the themes were considered as accurate.

Presentation of the Results and Findings

Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) write that the researcher is the storyteller, and the goal is to tell the story that you learned from the participants that is interesting while being accurate and

credible. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the reader to understand the participants, the first heading provides demographic information about each of the participants. The second section, listed as understanding the phenomenon of teaching during COVID-19 pandemic, provides answers, anecdotes, and evidence of the participants' experiences as it relates to each of the interview questions. Lastly, after the coding process was conducted, emergent themes were developed and outlined using participants' responses as well as literature to help the reader understand the experiences of the participants of this study.

Introducing the Participants

The first question in the semi structured interviews prompted each of the participants to provide background information, such as how long they have been in the district, their position, and how long they have been in education. Below is a vignette of each participant to provide background information about the participants of this study. Pseudonyms have been designated to protect the privacy and confidentiality of each participant.

Alice

Alice is a veteran teacher with more than 15 years of teaching. Over the years, she has taught and fallen in love with teaching middle school grades, highlighting that 7th and 8th grade are her favorites. She is new to the study site; however, she has many years of experience teaching in a neighboring school district.

Betty

Betty has more than five years as a classroom teacher at the elementary level. Right out of college, Betty began teaching in the study site. Betty has only taught one grade level. Also, she has only ever taught at the school located within the study site.

Connie

Connie is a veteran teacher with 15 years of classroom experience. She has taught many grades, both at the elementary and middle school level, but specifically enjoys teaching at the elementary level. Connie was the first participant to reach out for this study and was excited to share her experiences while teaching during the COVID pandemic.

Diane

Diane has been teaching in the classroom for more than 15 years. She has taught many grade levels and has worked solely in the school district that was used as the site for this study. Diane has taught at several of the schools within the district but has landed at her current school for the last few years.

Ernie

Ernie is a veteran staff member with more than 20 years of teaching experience. He has been teaching at the study site for more than 15 years. Over the course of his career, Ernie has taught many grade levels from kindergarten to middle school but enjoys working with younger students the most.

Felicia

Felicia has worked for just shy of ten years at the study site. She has taught the same grade level at various elementary schools within the study site but has landed in her current position and location for the last four years.

Greg

Greg is new to the study site but has been teaching for a few years. Greg began his teaching career when the COVID-19 pandemic began but his start began in another school district. Greg teaches at the high school level. During the interview, he provided answers from his experiences at his other school district, which was not located in the state where the study site is located. Greg was also clear about his experiences at the current study site as he has been there since the start of the school year.

Heather

Heather is a new teacher at the outlined study site. She is not from the state and began her career in education as a substitute teacher in a school district outside of the northeast region. She fell in love with teaching as it was not a solo job like her previous career path. Heather began teaching later in life, having a career outside of education before entering the classroom.

Irene

Irene has a lot of experience in the classroom. Teaching both regular and special education gave Irene experiences throughout her career to help her transition to a position within the study site that promotes enrichment and extends learning in and out of the classroom for all students. Irene has experience teaching elementary through high school students. She is very confident in virtual teaching as she needed it to teach at the high school level, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Irene has worked in other school districts but has been in the study site for more than ten years.

Understanding the Phenomenon of Teaching During COVID-19

Following the interview protocol (Appendix B) a semi structured interview was conducted individually with each participant to help glean an understanding of their lived experiences as public school teachers who were teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each question focused and elaborated on key timeframes during the pandemic, such as school closure in March 2020, remote teaching, and when the school district returned to in-person teaching. Participants provided responses of their experiences through answers and stories that reflected their time in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In-Person to Remote Teaching in Spring of 2020

During the semi structured interview, Interview Question Two asked participants to reflect on their experiences when schools shifted from in-person to remote teaching in the Spring of 2020 and discuss how they prepared for this change. Six out of the nine participants were teaching at the study site and had the same experience as to the how and when they were notified about school closure in March of 2020. Betty, Connie, Diane, Ernie, Felicia, and Irene all discussed their experiences within the district during this time frame. Betty reflected, sharing, “I was at a bicentennial party on March 15, 2020, and I got a call that our school, it was from the superintendent and just said, schools are going to be closed down for two weeks.” Ernie reported how he found out by saying “I remember getting a phone call saying you know we're not coming in, for a while kind of thing, and it really was a couple of weeks before even the school gave us any kind of guidance about what we were going to do.” Diane and her teaching team had a feeling something was going to happen, and she described her plan once she heard about the school being closed for two weeks. Diane shared, “there were a couple of us teachers who actually went in that weekend and started getting packets put together.”

During this time from March to June 2020, the participants who were teaching at the study site had a variety of unexpected expectations, such as communicating with families over Zoom, and connecting with families who needed support. There were no teaching expectations, according to Connie, Betty, and Ernie. Betty reached out to all her families through the telephone, and held one Zoom meeting a week, but only had 20% of her class participating. Ernie attempted to reach out to his students with little success as many of his students experienced ADHD and they had difficulty accessing and maintaining their learning virtually. Felicia revealed it was a stressful time relaying,

Trying to schedule parents to pick up their phone... they wouldn't, and conferences took about all day because I had to keep calling them. Participation in March through June was nonexistent. We didn't have the technology, we were not prepared for a pandemic at that time, I tried to do videos on an app called Class Dojo and that really didn't work very well.

When asked how the participants prepared for the school closure, Connie and the others simply stated, "We were not prepared, especially us veteran teachers." Ernie expressed, "We had no support or idea what was going on." Connie affirmed that during this time frame, the lack of communication on the expectations and how to engage with the students was very stressful. Elaborating on this, she clarified "It was stressful in figuring out how to deliver assignments and the same and content that would be as complete as possible, easy to navigate for students and trying to still maintain some sense of student engagement".

Felicia had a similar experience when trying to identify her role during the school closure, We didn't have computers for every student, but we tried to do Zoom meetings, and I would have kids participate once or twice. One or two kids would participate every time. I would do a meeting and most kids did not participate, I had to call them all.

Greg, Heather, and Alice were not within the outlined study site during the Spring of 2020, however, had similar experiences in the school district where they had worked. Greg was finishing his degree and declared he was shocked about the closure of schools. He disclosed,

It was quite a shock for me and that initial change of going from in-person to online, especially from a learner's perspective, and then putting it into practice. Zoom was a big one. I would say lesson plan-wise, especially for math. I sort of had to think on the fly whenever I was making my lesson plans because I wasn't familiar with any readily available software for my subject area.

Alice shared that when she got the call on that Sunday night in March of 2020, it became emotionally, mentally, and physically hard for her. By the following week, after the school building closure was announced, Alice, like her colleagues, needed to go in the school building, to their classrooms to gather teaching supplies. Her district leadership, especially the assistant superintendent, had expectations that teachers develop new units of instruction in her subject area in which students have not had taught to them yet collaborate with colleagues, and then deliver the newly crafted lessons and units for all students in the grade level. School buildings were open if teachers chose to work in the building, but Alice had her own children to care for due to their school closure. In relation to teaching, Alice outlined the struggle, sharing

It was really hard, we had to come up, we had to find one unit that neither one of us had taught and we ended up teaching about electricity, which is one of the hardest things to teach from home.

Heather was a long-term substitute teacher at the time in a state within the central east coast region. The school district she was working in went virtual in March of 2020 and expected teachers to continue teaching using technology and a variety of virtual resources. Heather

decided not to continue her subbing role during this time due to the workload. Heather stated the profession was “just complete insanity, like it didn't even make sense. The workload for teachers was insane and I was like this is a shit show. That ok to say shit? Just checking...”

Remote Teaching

Interview Questions Three and Four of the semi structured interview focused on experiences of teaching during remote learning, and how the participants prepared to teach remotely. Participants at the study site outlined how the 2020-2021 school year was planned over the summer of 2020 by district leadership. According to Connie and the other participants in the studied site, the district created and utilized a hybrid model for instruction during the 2020-2021 school year, meaning that teachers taught in-person lessons two days a week and students worked remotely for three days. Though the district used a hybrid model, Felicia shared that building administrators went around and asked grade levels if there was one teacher who would teach students who did not want to come into the building and be taught fully remotely. This entailed teaching students 100% virtually. Felicia volunteered to be a fully remote teacher for her grade level. Due to his extensive knowledge and comfort with technology, Ernie was also approached and accepted as a fully remote teacher for the 2020-2021 school year. Fully remote teaching was done concurrently while other teachers in the school district used a hybrid model.

Betty and Connie shared that they were part of the hybrid model where students were in cohorts and gave a description of their teaching schedules for when students were in-person learning versus at home working remotely. Betty stated she had a cohort of students, in person at school on Mondays and Thursdays. She outlined how remote teaching occurred on “Tuesdays and Fridays, and then Wednesday was like a remote day for everybody.”

Though not teaching at the study site during the 2020-2021 school year, Alice, Greg, and Heather all shared that their schools also followed a hybrid model where they taught two cohorts of students during the week, where students were in person for two days and remote for three. One variation to this hybrid model was shared by Greg. He reported that the model his previous school district used allowed for students to come and go as they pleased, stating, “they could either come and be in person or and at any time, they could choose to go online.” Greg also shared that there were also a few times in the year the whole district needed to go virtual due to high COVID-19 infection rates, stating they had some of the highest rates in the United States. Greg shared that this constant switch between teaching in-person and then remote created a lot of attendance issues.

Greg outlined that the district did not make attendance mandatory. He stated, “We did have universal broadband out there, so we could justify making attendance mandatory for Zoom and online learning whenever. However, some students were in situations where they couldn't have access to it.” Irene, who worked at the study site during this time, also mentioned attendance as a core issue, stating “attendance was really sad” when students were part of a hybrid model. Irene shared that when she went to get coffee on her lunch break, a family of five was at the local store, “And then I checked and they were supposed to be in school, so a lot of parents didn't value attendance last year, which was pretty sad.”

All participants expressed some level of stress during this time in their teaching due to the need to learn new forms in the delivery of instruction. During this time, teachers needed to do extra planning, for both students in person and for students learning remotely. Betty, Felicia, and Ernie shared that they needed to learn how to maneuver the Seesaw program to help with online learning for students while they were home. According to the Seesaw website, the

Seesaw program is a virtual platform where teachers engage students, communicate with families, and assign projects and lessons to be done virtually (Seesaw, 2022). When teaching remotely, Connie, Alice and Greg, and Heather reported that they utilized Google classroom. Ernie shared that there was little to no direction for professional development provided to him and his school on how to use these applications effectively. “I had to do my own research by going online, finding out what other teachers were doing and talking to some of the other teachers in the building on the programs that they were using.” Betty stated that she learned through “trial by error” when it came to setting up her lessons with her students, who were both in person and at home. Connie, who struggles with technology, stated that she is “not as savvy with technology as younger, newer teachers,” and sought support from her colleagues when it came to how to use Google classroom. “It was stressful figuring out how to deliver assignments.” Irene had used Google Classroom before, however, felt stressed when there were so many moving parts, not really understanding the students’ side of the program, and when certain tasks or assessments would not open for the students. Irene shared that there were a lot of miscommunications, for example,

It was challenging as a PC person, but I also faced challenges like doing tests and stuff that had to be in certain formats, like a PDF and then, how do you open the PDF with the Word Doc, so I think, in a nutshell, it was that Google did not have a common language with other word processing programs.

One huge stressor for Alice and her teaching partner was the expectation to redesign all their lessons and put them in a Google classroom. However, she, as well as Connie continued to utilize Google classroom for instruction.

Student engagement was another area where all participants noted having some sort of impact on their levels of stress and frustration during the remote teaching timeframe. Alice shared that nothing was graded, regardless of attendance or work. Frustration set in for Alice once students knew that they were going to pass, no matter if they did work or not. She shared,

I didn't mind that they were all going to pass, but as soon as they found out, they were all going to pass, the interest level of coming or doing work died off, and that was frustrating to me because I had to do the plans and I still had to still teach.

Heather shared that she only lasted a few months as a teacher during the 2020-2021 school year. She mentioned that she quit her position within the first few months of school due to the lack of consequences for her students who were not engaged or held accountable for their learning. Heather shared,

You know the thing that kind of kills my soul the most, is the apathy of kids. Just know there's no consequences that I can give them if they won't do the work, even if I try to go, like the positive praising route and then eventually that tends to be okay, but you haven't done anything in a week at all and you don't do anything in class. It leads to punishment-type things, and they don't show up to the detentions, or they get suspended and they're like sweet, that's what I wanted.

To prepare for remote teaching, there were a variety of experiences among the participants. Connie simply stated, "We were not prepared." Ernie stated that there was no support from the district and had to try to find things on his own, while Heather shared that her previous school district provided all sorts of different professional development opportunities, but she also did a lot on her own. By the start of the 2020-2021 school year, all students had access to technology. According to all nine participants in the study, all teachers in the study site

had to prepare either a Seesaw or a Google classroom. Connie, Betty, Ernie, and Felicia shared that they elicited help from others to get their sites up and running.

In-person Teaching

During the interview, participants were asked to discuss the return to in-person teaching, and how some of the changes that were identified due to returning to the classroom influenced their teaching. Participants shared their experiences as it related to starting back in person and where they are in the current 2021-2022 school year. Each participant recalled a different aspect, such as the need for additional discipline and routines, while others discussed safety protocols such as how masking and social distancing impacted their teaching.

Alice, Diane, and Heather all discussed the issue of student behavior and how it has impacted their in-person teaching experience. Alice outlined that she spent the first three months of the school year reviewing expectations and routines. Alice stated, “Because we went four months of really not doing structured learning, I would say, we spent the first three months going over how to sit in a classroom again.” Heather described her students’ behavior and lack of empathy and how it impacted her stress levels, especially during this current school year. Heather stated that she was a first-year teacher, and this may have had something to do with managing behaviors but noted that she contended with “decently large behavioral issues.” Heather continued to share an experience where a student was physically aggressive towards her because he was refusing to do his work,

He was not held accountable and spent the day in school but got to sit in the guidance counselor’s office, and she helped him type up his work, and she gave him some coloring sheets to do and then he was back in my classroom.

Heather asked herself, “So, how does he learn?” Diane shared a story of a student who was very disruptive and lacked accountability for their actions. Diane shared,

One thing I am proud of is that I’m very honest with my kids. I’m very open with them and I tried to really prepare them for the real world. I’m not allowed to do that because I am not allowed to hold kids accountable. When they make mistakes, not even when they make mistakes, not when they do things that are not okay. I’m no longer allowed to hold them accountable for that. I can’t give a kid a consequence, I need to find something that they did good and give them a sticker. Everybody else has control of the classroom except for the classroom teacher and it’s now starting to be more of a moral dilemma for me that I cannot meet the needs of my students.

Alice, Diane, and Heather all shared that they have seen a steep increase in behaviors in the classroom upon returning to in-person teaching and learning. Connie stated that because students were far behind and have experienced the loss of learning, there has been an increase in negative student behaviors in her classroom.

Connie, Betty, and Ernie shared their experiences with their students who had many gaps in their learning upon their returning to in-person teaching and learning. Connie explained that due to the remote learning portion of this whole experience, “kids weren’t learning at the same rate as the in-person kids, and they were beginning to lose ground.” Connie continued to state, “We were trying to provide a quality education, and we tried our darndest, but they still lost significant ground.” Betty explained that kids at her grade level should be at a certain reading level. However, “You can’t be thinking like that anymore like I feel like as long as they’re making progress and they’re growing then that’s what they should be doing.” Ernie outlined his thoughts as it relates to learning gaps. He shared,

Kindergarten through grade two students are in trouble, because they did not get much instruction during that time. So now suddenly those second and third graders are back in school full time, and the teachers are freaking out. They're referring every kid to special education saying that the kids are behind. You know, is there somebody that's even more behind, well yeah okay that's not a special education issue. You know that's not a disability, that's a pandemic issue. That's hard because regular teachers just don't understand it, because they're expecting a certain level but there has been so much of a gap before that.

Participants were asked to discuss changes in their classroom as it relates to social distancing and masking expectations as those were related to the state recommendations for a safe school return. Greg added that one of his biggest stressors during this time was the need to contact trace when there was a positive case in his classroom. Greg shared that he, had to have assigned seating charts for everyone and keep them in groups, just so I know where every student is sitting and, if I must contact trace, I know, okay, these are the list of students that were sitting next to them.

Due to the age of the students, Heather, Irene, and Greg shared that masking was not an issue for them. Greg and Heather explained that when they told their students to put their masks up, they did. Alice described an experience where she took her mask off to get a sip of water. A student said, "Oh my gosh you're happy". Alice shared why the student stated this. The student stated that Alice "always seems so mad at us, because we cannot see you smile." This was heartbreaking for Alice. Betty shared that her students were very adaptable to wearing masks and contributes this to only being all they have known during their school experiences.

Levels of Support

Question Five of the interview had participants share and describe levels of support they received from four different stakeholder groups: parents, administrators, colleagues, and the community. All participants shared their experiences on how they were supported while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Parents. All participants shared their experiences related to support from their students' parents. Each participant had a different experience, both positive and negative during the COVID-19 pandemic. During the school closure in March of 2020, participants from the study site concluded that parents were hard to reach. Felicia outlined that it "was very stressful trying to schedule a time for parents to pick up phones to talk and they really wouldn't answer." Betty stated that she spent most of her day during March and April trying to track down her families to check on them and provide resources for learning. Work completion and accountability were not really a focus for about half of Alice's families. According to Alice, "The students' families were stressed about finances, COVID, and childcare issues." Diane shared that one of her families told her it was not our fault her school went hybrid. The families told Diane they were not having their children do their work at home on remote days; they stated they were not teachers.

As for positives, Connie and Ernie shared that there was an increase in parent communication and engagement. Ernie pointed out that "It was almost because they had to because it was right there in their face, it was in their home and didn't have much choice." Zoom helped teachers maintain an open line of communication with families. For example, Ernie shared that over Zoom sessions, he would connect with families,

Because they'd be on screen or they'd be in the room, and you know I could say, hi mom how you are doing, you know that kind of stuff. Sometimes I would even say, 'Hey mom can you wait till after the class? I can talk to you about knowing your daughter, and how she's doing and things like that.'

Connie used email to reach out to families, and Betty and Felicia used Seesaw to help connect with families. Alice felt that this time to connect with families was positive because she could make sure they had everything they needed. "It helped bring us closer," she said as she talked about the opportunities to connect with families. Along those lines, Ernie believed that during the school closure, it was more about supporting the students and parents and less about the teachers, when it came to making connections with families.

Administrators. According to the participants in this study, the level of support varied depending on the building and the level of support participants received when it came to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Alice, Betty, Connie, Ernie, and Greg had positive support from their school-based administrators. Alice stated that she was "supported like you wouldn't believe" by her principal and assistant principal. She shared, "If we would suggest something, if we needed something they would get it." Betty had a detailed encounter where she sat down with her assistant principal and collaborated on strategies to effectively teach remotely. "I was very fortunate to have this level of support on something I didn't know how to do." Greg stated that his administration team was "completely understanding" and "everything we needed, like anything we asked for, they do their best to accommodate that". Connie felt that her administrator grew a great deal during this pandemic, especially "her capacity for understanding us...which made her a better administrator because of it." Connie shared a story in which her principal supported a teacher along with herself when family members were impacted by

COVID-19, reporting that the principal offered to spend time at the hospital or at her house to support her well-being.

Heather and Diane did not have the same level of support from their administrators. Heather shared that her administrators had their own agendas and continued to add more duties to the teachers' plates. Also, Heather stated that she was micromanaged in everything she did. Diane felt that "This year was more stressful than the last two just due to demands from administration... I would say morale is low and I think there will be a lot of openings soon." Diane reported that administrators added professional development on days that were supposed to be for prep for lessons. Data meetings, additional intervention blocks for teaching students who were missing school, and professional development training such as Mandatory Reporter and other district initiatives occurred on Wednesdays. Diane felt all these demands were too much and felt it was not a good use of her time, stating, "So, again there they were just putting more things on us."

Colleagues. All participants in this study shared they had positive support from their colleagues all through their experiences with teaching during the pandemic. Connie reported spending a lot of time learning how to build her Google classroom as she felt she was not as tech-savvy as others. Connie also shared that the school did a book study on Wednesday which helped collaborate strategies for remote teaching. Connie said,

We really gelled, which is something I hadn't seen in the former years of teaching in that building and it certainly has gone the reverse this year because, if anything, I think that we are suffering more now from stress and burnout.

Greg, Betty, and Felicia shared that they had a great team and could go to them for anything and felt supported. Betty pointed out that “We have a nice family dynamic in my school.” Betty shared that during the 2020-2021 school year:

It was stressful to not be with my colleagues. Last year, it was hard because we couldn't spend as much time with each other. For example, we couldn't eat in the teacher's room, and that was a big time for us to decompress, just like yapping for us, and we weren't able to do that. So that was hard and especially with all of us remote teachers, we were just in our rooms all day it felt really isolating.

Community. Responses varied when asked about how the community supported the participants during school closure up to in-person learning. For example, Irene felt that there was a great deal of support from the community but added that she thinks that everyone in the community is exhausted, stating that “It's very hard to give 100% to anything when you're exhausted.” Connie felt that her hands were tied as they related to the activities within the classroom and how to teach. For example, according to Maine Law LD-378- An Act to Promote Physical Activity for Schoolchildren, teachers cannot take recess away from students (Maine Legislature, 2022). Connie did not want to say it was a power thing but felt that there was less and less recourse for students when they were making poor choices and she was not regularly supported by parents or administrators.

Betty felt that there was not a lot of support from the community when the pandemic started impacting schools. “They wanted us to jump right into remote learning and just be doing grades and doing lessons and it was just very intense for a while.” Betty added that the community has become more supportive as time has gone on and is appreciative that some of the

safety recommendations and mandates have been lifted. Ernie felt that he did not see a lot locally but saw how other communities supported their teachers based on the news.

Local community support also had a somewhat negative impact on one participant. Felicia stated that because of the negativity that was going on in the community and school board meetings regarding remote learning, masking, and school decisions to close, she made the decision to stop listening and attending school board meetings. She shared there was a lot of arguing back and forth, and felt sympathy for nurses, “who got some of the worst attention.”

Challenges and Accomplishments

Participants were asked to share their biggest challenge while teaching during COVID-19. I also asked participants to share the biggest accomplishment they felt during this time of teaching during the pandemic. There were some similarities about the participants' responses which mainly focused on the students and their well-being. Accomplishments were focused on the teacher and his or her development and survival.

Challenges. The biggest challenge for most of the participants was mainly focused on students. Diane, Greg, Felicia, Ernie, and Connie all felt strongly that their biggest challenge was their ability to make sure they gave their students what they needed during this time. Diane wanted to make clear that her biggest challenge was about students' physical and emotional needs and making sure she gave them what they needed to meet those needs. “You know there are academic needs, and for me, the emotional and physical stuff comes first. Once I get that, then we can teach.” Felicia, Heather, and Connie’s challenge was how to teach remotely, which neither has done before. Felicia was challenged with the ebb and flow of students who changed their minds about being remote or in person. She stated,

Organization was hard for students who kept switching. they could change at any time, so I had some kids who were like, never mind I don't like this and I'm going remote fully and then I had some kids be like never mind I don't like fully remote I'm coming back two days a week. Keeping this while still trying to keep everything organized was probably the hardest thing.

Betty and Heather stated their biggest challenge was their ability to continue in the field of education. Betty stated that she is thinking about “how much longer, I want to stay in this career, especially after COVID. I was just feeling like I don't know...I think this is only going to get worse.” Heather stated that she is more tired than she has ever been, stating,

This job is so exhausting, and I really wish every single human could be a teacher for at least a year to see what we deal with, see how hard it is, see how tired everybody is and how much respect you should have for these people.

Irene and Alice focused on their own health and family as their biggest challenge during the pandemic timeframe. Irene said her challenge simply was “feeling safe in schools,” with the constant struggle to make sure everyone felt safe, including herself. Irene reflected and stated:

With the whole virus and everything, just having to be the adult in the room and not show my own fear of getting COVID and getting sick and... trying to be stable for my students and give them some sort of stability and structure.

Alice's biggest challenge was how to maintain her family life and her students. Teaching remotely did not change for her but having to teach while trying to get her own kids, who have their own academic limitations, on Zoom while maneuvering the technology, the student engagement, and instruction for her students was challenging. Also, daycare for her own children was a challenge due to her expectations to be teaching during the day.

Accomplishments. Though Betty and Heather found teaching during COVID-19 to be a challenge, Alice discussed how surviving teaching during COVID-19 was one of her accomplishments. Elaborating and sharing that, “I know I don't say this lightly, making it through and not quitting.” Additionally, she felt that she was able to adapt to what her students needed, while others around her could not and left the profession. Diane and Greg had similar accomplishments and added that they survived due to the students. Diane expressed that “They are what kept us going.” Heather had the mantra “Life goes on” and felt her accomplishment was that she took this time in her career in stride and learned how to prepare and be organized for whatever happens.

Connie, Ernie, and Greg discussed how what they learned about using technology for virtual teaching has helped them in the future. Learning how to use Google Classroom and Seesaw, they can continue to focus on how to make learning engaging using technology. Felicia felt proud to have learned how to teach remotely and use those resources today and for future classes, confirming that, “I would rather teach remotely, now.”

Emergent Themes

The nine interviews conducted in this study produced 1,919 lines of data to code and analyze. Over nine hours of semi structured interview transcripts were coded to help identify themes of the experiences of public school teachers who were teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Saldana (2013) defines a theme as “a phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and /or what it means” (p. 139). To identify themes for this study, I looked for repeated codes to help identify the themes that helped answer the question, “What is this expression an example of?” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016, p. 194). According to Bloomberg and

Volpe (2016), repetition is the most common technique to identify themes. Three themes were derived from these codes. These themes include:

Theme #1. The importance of support

Theme #2. Classroom challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic

Theme #3. The necessity of perseverance

Theme #1: The Importance of Support

All participants in this study highlighted or shared their experiences with support from a variety of stakeholders, which included colleagues, administration, and parents. All nine participants highlighted that support from their colleagues was very helpful during their experiences of school closure and returning to in-person teaching and learning. According to seven of the nine participants, school based administration was more supportive than district leadership. Additionally, participants experienced a wide range of levels of support from parents.

Colleague Support. Teachers need support to build confidence in their ability to teach during the COVID-19 pandemic (Birch & Lewis, 2020). Birch and Lewis (2020) found that to be proactive with teachers' needs, and help develop fundamental support, teachers need to be listened to closely, especially their frustrations and concerns. According to Huck and Zhang (2021), teachers used their peers as support networks when there were concerns about curriculum, students, and barriers they faced with remote learning. Support among colleagues emerged as important to all participants in this study. Connie, Betty, and Felicia talked about their collaboration with older grade teachers to help build their Google classrooms and according to Connie, this collaboration "helped us meet and discuss the curriculum." Both Alice and Betty disclosed that the staff at her school have "a nice family dynamic" which was helpful when it

came to helping one another. Connie recognized that she was not that savvy when it came to technology, so “I relied on a lot of colleagues to help me.” Felicia also relied on her partner teacher, stating that,

The other teacher was doing the hybrid and fully remote option and was the most useful because she knew what was going on more than anybody else, so we shared staff all the time and, in the end, it saved me.

Felicia also openly admitted that she would run down the hallway to other classroom teachers, not just her partner teacher, and ask, “What are you doing?”

Heather outlined the process for when her students were back in school, using a hybrid model. She shared that she and other teachers in her subject area would collaborate and create tests for each unit. She shared, “I would do the test for unit one and someone else would do the test for unit two, and we’d share every single thing.” Ernie praised the increased engagement he witnessed with his colleagues starting in March of 2020. “That was good because you had to rely on each other and if you didn’t, you were screwed,” he confessed. Diane shared that she collaborated with her colleagues and used them as therapy sessions offered by the school guidance counselor weekly, stating that she altered her remote teaching schedule to be available for teacher collaborating sessions. Ernie summed it up by saying “We all had our own little Fiefdoms” meaning we all had our little work groups; however, his biggest support was all his colleagues.

Support from school-based administrators was also noted by the participants as being important. Seven out of the nine participants shared how the administrators in the study site were found to be helpful and supportive since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Alice was amazed by the support she received from her principal and assistant principal. She stated, “I

sat down with them and asked for help, and they asked what I needed, and they got it for me.” Alice also discussed her support from her assistant principal when she was frustrated with how to plan for 10 students who were learning remotely, and for the 10 students who were in front of her in the classroom. She stated, “I felt so supported at that moment.” Greg also commented on how his administration did whatever they could to support the teachers. He shared and praised their open-door policy while stating, “I thought it couldn't get any better than this, like everything we needed, like anything we asked for, they do their best to accommodate.” Connie and Alice praised the support they received from their school administrator, which helped open their eyes to see how much their principal grew in their leadership and support for the staff. Connie shared how her administrator went above and beyond to support her. She shared,

My parents, who are elderly, contracted COVID. My administrator called me twice at home to check on me and helped me not feel guilty that I had to travel and take care of them through COVID. She helped me understand that school would take care of itself and that my family was more important. She gained a lot of points from me.

Betty also said that her administrator was very supportive, “She has just been such an advocate for the teachers, and she just has gone to bat for us so many times like. We are lucky that my principal also feels like that.”

In March 2020, new methods of teaching created more stress for teachers and disrupted the normal functions of schools (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021; Oducado et al., 2020). Though the participants received support from their administrators, that was not the case around the world. According to Marshall et al. (2020) teachers received very little support from administrators which caused more stress for teachers. According to Braun et al. (2019), demands

on teachers also created additional stress and burnout for teachers, noting the lack of administrative support as one of these demands. Klapproth et al. (2020) shared that challenges with administration have amplified stress and burnout for teachers.

Parent Support. The shift in remote learning and the changing of the learning environment has required teachers to adjust and collaborate more with parents (Klapproth et al., 2020). Parents' support for teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic was mixed for the participants. Four of the participants, Alice, Connie, Betty, and Felicia shared that around half of their students' parents supported them during COVID-19. During remote teaching, Felicia said parents would sit by their children and listen to the lesson. Ernie said that he experienced more engagement with parents than ever before. Ernie said he talked to all his parents, and they were supportive and very understanding. According to Lepp et al. (2020), during the pandemic, learning and teaching shifted the paradigm for teacher and parents' partnerships. Teachers now became the point person for all barriers with remote learning, including technology and the curriculum and this caused high levels of anxiety for teachers (Ferguson et al., 2012; Pressley, 2021). Irene and Betty said they saw a different level of support from their remote parents. Betty stated, "Remote parents knew what was expected and supported their child and me every day." Felicia also shared that same experience with her remote student and their parents. She said,

For the most part, the remote kids' parents, the five days a week, remote kids' parents understood what they were getting into and were okay with that and they knew I was learning too, so they were very good about whatever it takes.

There were also instances highlighted by the participants that illustrated a lack of parental support during the COVID-19 pandemic. This posed as one of the many challenges that caused

burnout and stress for teachers (Hurley, 2021; Pressley, 2021). Teachers experienced many challenges such as lack of parent support for the teacher (Klapproth et al., 2020). Felicia shared that parents were mad and unsupportive because of the plan the district made for students to be fully remote, as school officials saw COVID-19 infections in the area started to rise. She shared that there “were the parents who really just wanted them in school, and the days they weren't in school, they were like ‘not my problem you guys made this choice’.” Taylor and Asmundson (2021) highlighted this shift in 2020, sharing that parents and lawmakers had begun a culture war fueled by mandates outlined by school districts and aligned by health professionals with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Irene discussed how in her experience parents did not support the teacher and allowed their children to skip school when they wanted. Irene stated, she had some parents claim that “You know it's online, you don't have to go to school and when asked, where are you today, the students would answer ‘Oh my mom wanted to go to the beach because it was nice’.” Also, she saw many students with their parents at the local coffee shop during her lunch break, when she knew they were meant to be at school. Heather was even verbally assaulted by a parent when she called for support on a student’s behavior, sharing that the parent stated, “Why are you calling me about it?”

Through the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced challenges that caused stress that were beyond their control (Pressley et al., 2021). Teachers needed to learn and have support from a variety of stakeholders to help them be successful at implementing these new methods of teaching (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021; Marshall et al., 2020). Teachers need to learn when there is social and moral support from one another, including colleagues, parents, or other stakeholders (Hargreaves, 2021). While learning to maneuver this new normal, support and collaboration in groups help teachers self-internalize the new learning to help master the tasks

(Green & Gredler, 2002; Powell & Kalina, 2009). Research from Vygotsky (1962) highlights this as social and cultural influences are key to learning (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Theme #2: Classroom Challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic

COVID-19 created many new challenges for teachers, not only involving changes to methods of teaching but also adapting to new technology (Boté-Vericad, 2021). Spitzer (2020) outlines that masking, though beneficial, created barriers that participants of this study described. For example, Spitzer (2020) claimed that masking impairs face recognition and identification, along with verbal and non-verbal communication. Alice shared her story about removing her masks and students told her she looked happy. The students indicated that since Alice wears a mask all day, the students only saw one emotion and they perceived that as mad. Barriers such as learning loss, student motivation, and engagement, increase in student behaviors, masking and safety protocols, and the overall barriers of remote learning were discussed by the participants in this study.

Barriers to Learning Loss. All nine participants referenced seeing a sharp decrease in learning from their students after March of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic caused many challenges for both teachers and students. According to Baker et al. (2021) one of these challenges was the anticipated loss of learning. Felicia stated, “They fell behind and it’s been catch-up time trying to at least get them moving, get them to make progress this year.” It was noticed by Connie and Felicia that remote students were not “learning at the same rate as in-person kids, and we knew that.” Felicia stated that her hybrid students, “didn’t make as much growth and it’s because they were with me two days a week.” Connie continued to share, “The students are developmentally delayed, socially and they’ve also lost at least two years of learning, even though with everybody’s best efforts in delivering.” Drugas (2020), Hargreaves

(2021) and Uzun et al. (2021) highlight those additional challenges teacher is facing include lack of connection with students, trouble accessing remote learning, learning loss for students, and having challenges with adapting to new ways of interacting with their students. Alice explained that teachers knew their students were going to be behind, however, stress was evident because there was “added pressure to make sure kids were getting caught up to where they needed to be at the end of the year.” To this point, Greg stated that 80-90% percent of his students were at least two to three years behind due to remote learning and lack of regular attendance in school during COVID-19. Herman et al. (2021) shared that lack of attendance and poor active engagement in lessons created widespread disruptions to teaching. Diane and Heather talked about how it was a challenge to teach class not knowing or having kids of all different learning levels. Diane stated, “It was hard to teach whole-group and not really know exactly where the kids are academically.” Diane also felt that due to the increased demands of teaching, she protested,

because I felt like we were really pushed to get so many academics in, I never did any fun reading aloud, like I didn't have any time to just read to the kids for fun. You know, which I think is huge. You know that was hard because that's one of our favorite times of day it has been and it's getting to be now so I'm able to do a little bit now, still not as much as I used to.

Betty knew her kids were behind but clarified that,

A big thing at our school is that you just meet the kids where they are at. I think that's like all over the country. You know kids are supposed to be at a specific reading level, but we cannot be thinking like that anymore, like I feel like as long as they're making progress and they're growing, then that's what they should be doing.

The U.S. Department of Education (2021) released a handbook to help schools reopen safely along with how to address loss of learning and instructional time. According to Engzell et al. (2021) data on learning loss during school closure is slowly becoming available. However, participants in the study site were not given teaching expectations during the March to June 2020 school closure and academics were not the focus for the students. Participants saw a decline in learning and student achievement when the students returned to in person learning. Zviedrite et al. (2021) found that school closure had its challenges at the start of the pandemic such as providing continuous learning and teaching opportunities for students.

Barriers to Student Motivation and Engagement. Tay et al. (2021) wrote, “teaching and learning with technology inevitably adds another layer of complexity in understanding student engagement” (p. 300). Bangert-Drowns and Pyke (2002) define student engagement as three constructs: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. During this study, participants shared that their students were less motivated and engaged during remote learning. Betty stated that only eight students would show up on any given day she provided remote teaching. Felicia saw similar attendance and engagement rates, sharing that those kids would only “participate once or twice, one or two kids, every time I would do a meeting, most of the kids would not participate and I had to call them.” Alice shared that once her students knew they didn’t have to attend and they would all pass the course, they stopped showing up and doing their work. Alice shared,

I didn't mind that they were all going to pass, but as soon as they found out they were all going to pass, the interest level of coming or doing work died off, and that was frustrating to me because I still had to make plans and teach them.

Connie struggled to maintain engaging lessons that were easy for her students to navigate, especially when they were at home learning from their computers. Greg and Alice shared stories

of students who would not keep their cameras on or would have a hood over their faces. Greg shared,

I had situations where students were just looking at TV, or they would have the actual video game controller sitting right there and I look at them and think, you're really going to do this, like just right in front of me. You could obviously tell their attention was not on what was in class.

According to Tay et al. (2021), student engagement is “paramount for productive learning” (p. 300). Irene felt immense stress from her students' lack of motivation. She thought, “Wait a minute, we have to catch up for a year and a half and students are not really interested.”

Student accountability was noted by four of the nine participants. “It is frustrating to us because there was no accountability... and students knew it.” Heather tried remaining positive during this time, but shared,

I try to go the positive praising route and then eventually that kind of leads to you not doing anything in a week at all you don't do anything in class and that leads to punishment, but they don't show up to the detentions.

Diane shared her concern about accountability and her lack of ability to hold her kids accountable for anything. “I have kids who don't do their work and we are no longer allowed to keep students in for recess, and...they are not held accountable for anything anymore.”

During the COVID-19 pandemic teachers shifted how they taught due to moving to remote learning with technology (Tay et al., 2021). Student engagement is impacted on how the content is being taught or delivered, whether face to face or online (Tay et al., 2021). Teachers report that they are challenged with the complexity of online teaching and how to prepare to get their students to willingly engage in classroom instruction (Kaden, 2020). Bond and Bedenlier

(2019) highlight student engagement is high when students believe their teachers to be supportive, effective, and knowledgeable. Goetz (2020) explained that remote learning has also caused stress for teachers due to the inability to build relationships with their students. Participants in this study saw a shift in engagement once the learning went virtual instead of traditional face to face instruction.

Increase in Student Behaviors. Student behaviors have increased over the last few years and have created stressful situations for all nine participants. Connie shared that “never in my lifetime I would look at someone and give them a job to do and have them say I don’t think so, I don’t want to do that.” Connie deems that her students are more immature than before and believes it is “their God-given right to act like this.” Greg, Heather, and Felicia also saw a sharp increase in disrespectful behavior. “They are rude and not doing work and really don’t care about anything,” according to Heather. Adding, “Behavior issues have been more challenging than any other year.” Diane shared that she has also seen an increase in students assaulting each other or their teachers. This created a barrier for learning as “It scared the class, and they didn’t want to see me hurt.”

Heather shared that in the past, prior to the pandemic, she would correct behavior in the hallway, however since the pandemic, “but to speak with them and have them scream at me and escalate the situation, you know that's been surprising this year. They’re just rude and disrespectful.”

The COVID-19 pandemic has created disruptions and additional stressors, more specifically related to classroom management, in classrooms today (Espino-Díaz et al., 2020; Herman et al., 2021). The shift to online teaching and learning left many teachers unprepared, with little knowledge and skills to teach and virtually manage students’ disruptive behaviors

(Herman et al., 2021). Teacher stress has a positive association with managing students' problematic behaviors (Benita et al., 2019; Sezer, 2018). Sezer (2018) wrote that teachers report they are spending more time correcting negative behaviors than teaching their students. Kaden (2020) highlighted these shifts and inexperience with classroom management techniques, which are a direct result of the pandemic, and have only amplified teacher stress. Participants in this study saw an uptick in behaviors which impacted instructional time, mental health, and well-being.

Masks and Safety protocols in the classroom. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), along with the U.S. Department of Education and the Academy of American Pediatrics (AAP) provided guidance on mitigation strategies for a safe return. These mitigation strategies included masking to support the health and well-being of teachers and to limit the spread of COVID-19 (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021). Experiences with masking in the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic were not similar across the nine participants. Greg, Heather, Irene, and Betty discussed and shared that when students were reminded to put their masks on, they did without any hesitation. Alice shared that it was more parents that had the issue with masking. Schwartz et al. (2021) found that masking in schools has contributed to teacher stress. Fischer et al. (2021) contribute this stress to the increased politicization of the school mandates for mandatory masking in schools. An anti-mask culture began and was fueled by parents and lawmakers who believed that mandating students to wear masks was ineffective, inconvenient, and violated civil liberties (Taylor & Asmundson, 2021). Alice noted that parents, thought the mask mandates were stupid. They weren't going to make their kids wear them. So, they pull their kids out. They were mad that they were in school wearing a mask, but they weren't going to help if they were at home, either.

Diane shared that for her students, “Mask-wearing really wasn't an issue. I was most concerned about how the kids are going to react to the mask, but I feel like they handled it better than the teachers.” Betty highlighted that her students were adaptable and “This is all they have really known because the pandemic started when they were in kindergarten.”

In the classroom, Alice, Connie, and Ernie shared that masking was a barrier to how to teach their students. Greg shared that the “most difficult part with masking is if you are trying to teach articulation, the mask is an impediment when you try to teach pronunciations of things of that nature.” Both Connie and Alice talked about body language and facial recognition as their barriers to masking in the classroom. Connie shared that it was, “hard to teach when students wear masks...because I think a good teacher relies also on body language and facial expressions. There are so many nuances that you pick up when you're working with students.” Alice shared a similar experience sharing that she struggled to work with her students who wear hoods and masks. When wearing masks and hoods, Alice says to her students, “You know, I can't see your face, and when they walk in now, and they have their hood here and there, mask up here, I said you got to lose the hood.”

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) (2021), teachers are on the front lines in school when it comes to implementing the health and safety recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO). Additional responsibilities to help enforce these safety protocols, along with their day to day teaching has created additional stress for teachers (Lizana et al., 2021; Park & Clemson, 2020). Participants did not have issues with students following the safety protocols. Alice said it was mostly parents who did not want their child to wear masks. All other participants shared that students were adaptable and easily directed if needed.

Barrier to Remote Learning. There were many barriers that occurred during the remote teaching and learning timeframe of the pandemic. All nine participants had similar experiences regarding the model utilized by the district, however, the biggest barrier that all nine encountered was technology and the usage of remote teaching. The switch to remote teaching was swift and expected teachers to adapt and transition to virtual teaching abruptly (Birch & Lewis, 2020). Felicia, Greg, and Ernie shared there was no direction, no guidance or training in March of 2020 when schools in the study site made the transition from in-person to remote. “I had to do my own professional development on how to use some of the apps,” stated Greg. Felicia remembered that “there was no advice really, but they gave us Seesaw and we were told to figure it out, there was no training for us.”

Putting technology in the hands of students was also a barrier at certain schools and grade levels. Betty and Diane recalled there was no learning software to send in March, however, Diane’s school had computers ready to send home with their students. It was such a quick transition that “we were not prepared for it,” according to both Connie and Alice.

Student interactions with technology were also a barrier for teachers, especially during the remote teaching portion of the school year. Connie claimed that “students are savvier than I am with technology.” She recalled a student who, while on Zoom, appeared to be playing video games. Adding, “They had two monitors and were sneaking in video games, while I was teaching.” Alice shared that though students had the technology, many of her students “claimed there was no internet, or their internet was down,” so they could not participate in the lesson. Heather stated that due to the number of people in her Zoom or Google classroom, the internet would overload, and students were unable to participate.

Ernie, Alice, and Greg highlighted times when students could not access their learning. Ernie felt he had strong relationships with his students' families, however one time he saw a mother hand off the baby to his student to care for, during his lesson. He shared, "I didn't know where the mother was going. I was like you gotta be kidding me. I was like, would you walk into the school and hand the baby off to her if we were in class?" Alice recalled similar situations where her students had similar circumstances. Alice shared,

I had students who were the oldest, but they were taking care of four siblings as their parents went to work. They would say, I can't do the work because I'm getting younger siblings online to do their work and helping them.

Hargreaves (2021) found that during COVID-19, teachers had to acquire new methods of instruction. Blagg and Luetmer (2020), Herold (2020), and Scott (2020) shared that when schools closed their doors in March, teachers continued to learn alongside one another, rely on their colleagues and learn ways to deliver instruction remotely, making them active learners alongside their peers and students. Participants in this study were not provided with professional development on how to best teach remotely and with the use of technology. Garcia and Weiss (2020) wrote there has been lack of professional development on how to use computers and integrate them into instruction, which left teachers unprepared. The shift to remote learning was quick (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021), however even if there was a slow transition to remote learning, difficulties, challenges, and stress would still occur for classroom teachers (Marshall et al., 2020).

Theme #3: The Necessity of Perseverance

March of 2020 drastically changed the lives of teachers in more ways than one, leaving schools and teachers to transition to and adapt to virtual teaching, with limited time to do so

(Birch & Lewis, 2020). This shift was overwhelming for teachers (Birch & Lewis, 2020). Participants in this study highlighted and shared their experiences that increased their stress, questioned their perseverance, and helped them survive. The participants in this study contended with many stressors such as lack of support from parents, limited attendance and learning loss. At the end of the day, participants in this study survived and remained in the classroom because of the connections they made with their students, the climate and culture of their classrooms, and support from their colleagues.

Teacher Stress. Hurley (2021) stated that teaching is among the most stressful professions today. Pressley et al. (2021) highlight this increase in stress may be due to many factors that are out of teachers' control. The COVID-19 pandemic has created concerns of how stress has impacted the education profession (Nuri & Tezer, 2018; Oducado et al., 2020). Teaching was a stressful profession, but currently, the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the paradigm of teaching, which created additional stressors for teachers (Alves et al., 2020; di Fronso et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021).

Participants in this study shared many things that caused stress throughout their experiences while teaching during COVID-19. Connie was stressed as she was not as savvy with technology and disclosed that "It was stressful in figuring out how to deliver assignments virtually, so they were the same as before... worrying that I was not giving the students what they needed." Felicia was worried and stressed that she was struggling with how to maintain two classes at once, especially with students who cannot read, nor do they have the experience with technology. Ernie's stress level was through the roof this year, claiming he was getting burnout and had the feeling of leaving, but "my dad raised me to think, you can walk, then you can work, kind of thing." Alice proclaimed that these have been the two most challenging years ever, even

stating that it has been more stressful than her first two years of teaching. Alice also stated that this was the hardest time emotionally, mentally, and even physically when she had to move all her teaching materials home in March of 2020. Greg was stressed the most as he was a novice teacher and had elevated stress due to teaching double the classes, “because you are teaching online and in-person of the same class and have to communicate with students and parents” which he said was overwhelming and he felt overworked.

Stress on a teacher’s mental health was also mentioned throughout the interviews. According to Alves et al. (2020), Ayub et al. (2018), Hurley (2021) and Phillips (2021), exposure to stress during COVID-19 has impacted teachers' mental health, their well-being, and their ability to teach. Alice shared that she asked her child’s teacher why she left the profession and she stated, “because my mental health is not where it needs to be.” Alice felt that her mental health was stable because she kept adapting and made changes in her career that she needed, such as moving school districts. Betty was feeling stagnant in her role and to help build her mental health, she enrolled in classes. Heather started to work on her mental health. She said, “I was like, I literally lost my mind, and I couldn’t do it anymore, so I quit halfway through the year.” Nakata et al. (2013) concluded that satisfied teachers were less absent and demonstrated better mental health and coping strategies from stress. Irene’s mental health continued to be challenged as she was the adult in the room who was “trying not to show my own fear of getting COVID and getting sick... not showing my own sadness of community members dying from COVID.” Diane said this whole experience doesn’t make sense and she could not make sense of it and cried every day.

Shackleton et al. (2019) wrote that teachers who exhibit high stress symptoms are more likely to have higher rates of absenteeism and have more frequent staff turnover. Farmer (2020)

and Taylor et al. (2021) found that stressful situations created burnout and caused links to early attrition for teachers. Taylor et al. (2021) showed that interventions based on teaching mindfulness and self-care helped to improve teacher resiliency, perseverance and possibly reduce attrition in schools.

Perseverance. Although highly stressed, five of the nine participants highlighted ways they persevered while teaching during COVID-19. Alice kept telling herself that, “We want to teach our kids to also persevere, so I think that was my biggest thing, like, I have made it through.” Additionally, Alice found that since she persevered and did not leave the classroom, “I am a better teacher because of it.” She did state that she does not wish this experience of teaching remotely or during a pandemic on anybody. Alice wanted to keep the continuity for her students. Alice stated that some of her colleagues did not return, but her team stayed together, which was helpful for her and her students. While Alice was committed to staying, Betty and Diane kept asking themselves, “How much longer do I want to stay in this career, especially after COVID?” Not wanting to constantly complain, Diane felt that having eyes on her students is what helped keep her in the classroom. Diane made connections with her students. Building Trusting connections with students and colleagues offers teachers a feeling of satisfaction and leads to lower susceptibility to stress and burnout (Toropova et al., 2020). Irene felt that her biggest accomplishment was the fact that she’s still there, doing the same thing she was doing before, and has made it through.

Jokić Zorkić et al. (2021) shared that the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted traditional learning, impacting, and challenging the need to build relationships with students. However, empathy for their students and others was discussed by Alice, Connie, Diane, Heather, Greg, and Felicia. The participants found that knowing their students were taken care of helped them

survive each day in the classroom. Diane said, “Teaching is hard, but you want your kids to be successful and you know you're sending them off with the skills they need.” Irene spent many classroom periods letting her students vent and helping them with their social needs. Irene reported, “And some of them just wanted to talk, they just wanted to cry, I mean that was really what my role was for the first half of the year was just being the listener.” Connie stated that she felt bad that children were suffering but used Wednesdays when the students were not in school physically to make connections with all her students. Alice felt bad as students did not receive the closure they needed back in March of 2020 stating, “They left and didn’t return.”

Survival. When asked what their biggest accomplishment teaching during the pandemic was, five of the nine participants clearly stated, “I survived.” Alice continued to say,

I know I don’t say this lightly, making it through and not quitting... I don't want to say I thrived, but I’ve made it through, and I have done well with it, and I’ve made sure not only that my students have been able to adapt but they can learn that they can too.

Betty has survived but is constantly thinking of how much longer she wants to be a teacher, “knowing like this is only going to get worse.” Irene said, “I can say I survived, I know I didn’t quit my job, but many times I came home crying and felt like I was going to, but I didn’t quit.” Greg simply said, “I am getting through.”

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Nine participants participated in semi structured interviews that provided the participants an active voice for others to listen to their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teacher agency, as noted by Dewey (1966) allows for purposeful

reflection on the world and for active participation in learning to help make critical life decisions. Listening to teachers provided them a platform to share their knowledge as well as an avenue for others to glean from their interests and experiences of each other (Dewey, 1966).

The semi structured interviews were coded, and themes were derived from the responses of all nine participants of the study. Emergent themes were developed to best outline the experiences of these teachers who participated in the study. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants experienced barriers that prevented them from actively engaging in their profession. Support was provided by many stakeholders, most noted that positive support from building administration was a highlight in almost all interviews. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced classroom teachers to new experiences and requirements that have both positive and negative impacts on their ability to teach as well as their well-being (Kaur & Kumar, 2019; Pressley, 2021). According to Hurley (2021) and Kaur and Kumar (2019), these changes caused many teachers to express their heightened stress levels, and this has become a concern. Over time, consistent exposure to this stress may lead to burnout which has an impact on the quality of education (Hurley, 2021; Kaur & Kumar, 2019; Klusmann et al., 2016). Though there were stressful encounters during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers in this study persevered and claimed they made it through, even though some of them still questioned their ability to continue in the teaching profession.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic created widespread disruptions to classroom teaching experiences for teachers (Espino-Díaz et al., 2020; Herman et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the traditional model of education, most specifically the method of face to face instruction when schools closed their doors and swiftly transitioned to remote learning due to the spread of the virus and shifted to remote learning (Oducado et al., 2021; Pressley, 2021; Pressley et al., 2021; Scott, 2020). According to Hodges et al. (2020) remote learning was the shift of the instructional delivery to an alternative mode of instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, since the shifting of the teaching paradigm, the COVID-19 pandemic created additional stressors for teachers (Alves et al., 2020; di Fronso et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). Kadan (2020) highlighted that teacher stress has become amplified because of COVID-19 and the shifts on how teachers taught during the pandemic.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Semi structured interviews were utilized to gather data to help answer the research questions which were focused on teachers describing their lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, and how they perceived stressors related to teaching during the pandemic. Additionally, since the COVID-19 pandemic has required the implementation of new teaching methods for teachers, participants were asked to describe their experiences as learners while adapting to teaching during the pandemic.

Nine interviews were completed and transcribed. Once all nine interviews were complete and checked for accuracy by participants, the transcripts were coded to find emergent themes. The emergent themes that were identified described teachers' lived experiences while teaching

during the COVID-19 pandemic and included the importance of support, classroom challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessity of perseverance. Based on the coding process, the following emergent themes were identified to describe teachers' lived experiences while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic: (a) the importance of support, (b) classroom challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, and (c) the necessity of perseverance.

This chapter provides an interpretation of the findings which guide in answering the three outlined research questions, as well as implications of this study and recommendations for action and further study. Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state that Chapter 5, the conclusion, provides concluding statements and recommendations that flow directly from the findings of the study. Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) claim that conclusions are “assertions based on your finds and must therefore be warranted by the findings” (p.271).

Interpretation and Importance of Findings

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) qualitative research starts with questions, “and its ultimate purpose is learning” (p. 233). Interpretation is an intuitive process, and not mechanical or technical (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This section outlines the interpretations and important findings for each of the research questions that guided this study.

Interpretations for Research Question 1

Research Question 1, “How do K-12 public school teachers describe their lived experiences while teaching during a pandemic?”, was created to explore and understand the experiences teachers went through during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Phillips (2021) and Pressley (2021) teachers expressed feelings of frustration, anxiety, and stress as they moved into teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this was also found in this study. All nine

participants were active in the profession at the time of the pandemic and shared their experiences. The participants of this study provided ample evidence to explain that their experiences when teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic were extremely stressful, frustrating, and challenging for the participants.

Experiences Were Stressful. Leech et al. (2020) stated that teaching is stressful under normal circumstances, but the COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges and has increased the stress of teachers. All participants in this study shared that they experienced some level of stress while teaching during the pandemic. The collection of experiences surmounted to how each participant viewed their stressful experiences. The lack of technology skills and the requirement to use technology for teaching remotely was a stressor for many, including Connie who stated that her students were savvier at navigating remote learning than her. Ernie, Betty, and Alice said that they felt comfortable using technology as a tool to teach their students, but when it came time to work with the virtual platform such as Google classroom or Seesaw, they were left on their own to seek out learning with no support or direction from school leadership. Alice also shared that her experiences during the pandemic were mentally, and emotionally taxing. These feelings of stress and subsequent burnout made Alice reflect on if she wanted to continue teaching.

The stressful experiences that these participants experienced when teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted all participants' mental health. Alves et al. (2020), Ayub et al. (2018), Hurley (2021), and Phillips (2021) wrote that exposure to stress during COVID-19 has impacted teachers' mental health, their well-being, and their ability to teach. For example, Heather expressed that due to exposure to stress during COVID-19, she quit her position as a teacher in the middle of the 2020-2021 school year, stating that she was “losing her mind” and

her mental health was more important. Taylor et al. (2021) found that teachers who endure ongoing stressful experiences may become burned out and this may lead to early attrition for teachers. For instance, Betty and Diane shared that their experiences teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic have made them ponder leaving the profession. Teaching is one of the most stressful professions today, and the participants clearly articulated that their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic have created a lot of extra stress (Hurley, 2021). Khachatryan (2021) found that teachers have experienced significant emotional burnout due teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Ernie even stated he is experiencing burnout, however decided to stay in the profession for his students, listening to what his dad said growing up sharing that “If you can walk, you can work.”

Experiences were Frustrating. Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic created experiences that were frustrating for the participants in this study. According to Amirkhan et al. (2018), emotional signs of stress may include being angry or frustrated. Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic created a variety of obstacles that participants experienced. For instance, lack of parent support during remote learning created frustrating experiences for Alice, Betty, Connie, Ernie, and Irene. Betty stated that she spent a lot of time trying to reach her students and parents who did not show up for remote learning, went missing when schools closed their doors to in person learning, and when additional student needs arose. Irene expressed frustration that the parents of her students did not take remote learning seriously. For example, on her lunch break, Irene saw her students out in public when they should have been at home participating in class remotely. For Alice, using a model of having students face to face and those attending class from home, concurrently, was a frustrating experience. She met with her assistant principal and worked through this frustration and developed a plan to meet her needs. Phillips (2021) and

Presley (2021) found that teachers expressed frustration as they moved to the daunting task of learning virtual learning platforms. For instance, Connie felt this frustration of learning virtual learning platforms as she was not as comfortable with technology and relied on her colleagues for support. Connie expressed her frustration for not being prepared for the prompt shift from in person to remote learning.

There were many experiences that participants felt that were frustrating since the beginning of the pandemic in March of 2020. Alice, Betty, and Heather noticed that the pandemic caused a downward spiral with student engagement once the school went into remote learning. Alice shared that her frustration came when she found that her students did not have to attend the remote classes, or complete their assigned work, and still received a passing grade for the 2020-2021 school year. This was an experience that was common for most educators during the pandemic (Dembereldorj, 2021). During the 2020-2021 school year, Heather also experienced frustration due to the lack of student accountability. She expressed that students would skip class, did not complete their work, and were disrespectful towards her and other students. As a result, when students were disciplined by school administrators, they did not go to their detentions or get suspended.

Furthermore, participants in this study also shared that they felt their concerns and needs were not acknowledged by school leadership. For example, Betty shared that she thought that some administrators had their own agenda and did not listen to the teachers. Birch and Lewis (2020) found that to be proactive with teachers' needs, and help develop fundamental support, teachers need to be listened to closely, especially their frustrations and concerns.

Experiences were Challenging. Hurley (2021) and Pressley (2021) stated that there was no shortage of challenges that caused stress for teachers during the COVID-19

pandemic. Participants in this study felt that many of their experiences during this time created new obstacles. Klapproth et al. (2010) reported that teachers have experienced obstacles with colleagues, parents, students, and administration, but the COVID-19 pandemic amplified these challenges.

Participants in this study felt they were faced with many barriers from the beginning of the pandemic through the 2021-2022 school year. Participants shared they were faced with challenges when it came to having consistent communication with families and their students. Participants also claimed that due to the lack of direction from school leadership, there was uncertainty about what their expectations were during school closure in March of 2020 with respect to how to navigate remote teaching. Hodges et al. (2020) and Scott (2020) highlighted the challenges to school systems created by COVID-19 that were the result of school closures and moving to emergency remote teaching.

Remote teaching produced the most challenges for the participants. Leech et al. (2020) found that the change of the delivery of instruction, which was a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, created additional obstacles for teachers. The experiences participants had when teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly student engagement, and lack of resources and training, escalated teachers' stress. Handayani et al. (2020) stated that remote learning created challenges that only elevated teacher's stress. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many public school teachers were asked to deliver instruction using online platforms in which they were not sufficiently trained, or were completely unfamiliar with (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020). Participants of this study provided insight into the challenges of delivering instruction using online platforms. For example, Connie, Ernie, Greg, and Heather stated that they learned how to use virtual learning applications as lessons progressed, relying on their own

resources and collaboration alongside their peers. In addition, participants in this study felt their colleagues were part of their family during this challenging time which made it easier to glean new ideas and overcome their uncertainties with each other's support.

Research Question 1 explored and analyzed the experience of participants as it related to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. All nine participants shared that they were frustrated, stressed, and faced many challenges because of this shift to the traditional paradigm of teaching from traditional in person to a remote delivery model of instruction. This research question was created to highlight the phenomena of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for the challenges and successes of these public school teachers to share the impacts the pandemic has had on their teaching.

Interpretations for Research Question 2

Research Question 2, "How do K-12 public school teachers describe their perceptions of stressors related to teaching during a pandemic?", focused on the stressors that impacted teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. When teachers were first exposed to changes in the delivery of instruction, they had to scramble and adapt to create teaching and learning opportunities when schools closed their doors to in person teaching (Lepp et al., 2021; Scott, 2020). This shift, this new paradigm from traditional in person to a remote delivery model of instruction, created additional challenges for teachers such as new virtual teaching platforms, new forms of engagement, and new health and safety protocols (Lepp et al., 2021). These challenges created ripple effects of elevated stress for teachers (Besser et al., 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). For example, stressors related to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted the participants of this study included the lack of communication about expectations once schools were closed to in person learning, challenges with remote teaching to include the lack of

professional development, and the decrease of student engagement and lack of support from parents.

Lack of communication. When schools closed to in-person teaching in March of 2020, participants of this study shared they felt lost, out of the loop, and did not know what to expect. For example, Betty remembered exactly where she was on March 15, 2020, when she got the call from the superintendent that schools were closing for two weeks. She shared there were no other directions or expectations that were linked to that phone call. Ernie received the same phone call and reported that the call did not give any kind of guidance on what teachers would be doing. Alice expressed feeling lost as she and her team were told the school was closed, but no timeframe was given on when the school would reopen. Alice also shared that this was emotionally, mentally, and physically challenging for her due to having to bring all her teaching materials home, with no clarity of why or how to use them with her students.

The lack of communication about school closure was not the only stressor for the participants during this study. Participants' roles and expectations during this time were also a stressor. For example, Connie, Betty, and Ernie shared that there were no teaching expectations shared with them from March to June of 2020. Connie affirmed that during this time frame, the lack of communication on the expectations of being a teacher and how to engage with the students was very stressful. Betty took it upon herself to reach out to every family of students in her class but was stressed as she was unable to reach all her families, claiming she was only in contact with 20% of them on a regular basis. Ernie attempted to reach out to his students and their families as well. He had limited success as many of his students have a disability that impacts their ability to maintain focus and this impact was amplified during remote learning. Felicia was stressed as there were no expectations provided on how to use technology

for teaching, how to reach out to students and families to check in, and how to continue to work with her students once the schools were closed in March of 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the complexity of teacher expectations, which has contributed to increased teacher stress and burnout (Gacoin & Watts, 2021; Pressley, 2021). Reimers and Schleicher (2020) stated that COVID-19 has put teachers at the forefront of the abrupt changes to the traditional paradigm of teaching and had a ripple effect on their stress. Participants in the study site were not given direction when they were told the school would be closed to in person teaching, which contributed to role ambiguity and enhanced their stress. Richards et al. (2018) stated that role ambiguity happens when performance expectations are incomplete and does not accurately identify expected behaviors for the teacher.

Challenges with Remote Teaching. COVID-19 has altered the traditional brick and mortar approach to teaching and learning and has impacted education in profound ways (Engzell et al., 2021). Birch and Lewis (2020) highlight teachers were expected to switch and adapt to virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Around the nation, it was reported that teachers were provided guidelines on how to teach remotely (Lepp et al., 2021). However, that was not the case for the participants in this study. Participants shared they did not receive professional development or expectations on how to teach remotely, which created another layer of stress.

For example, Connie and Alice both shared that they were not prepared for such a quick transition once the schools closed and went into remote teaching. When schools closed in March of 2020, Betty and Diane shared that in their school, there was such a small quantity of computers or iPads, that not all students would receive a device. Diane shared that over the summer, the district purchased iPads for all students in the district but did not give teachers the tools or training to use them efficiently. All nine participants shared that they used virtual

teaching platforms such as Google Classroom and Seesaw to communicate with families and students and to provide instruction during remote learning.

Blagg and Luetmer (2020), Herold (2020), and Scott (2020) shared that when schools closed their doors in March 2020, teachers continued to learn alongside one another and rely on their colleagues. Teachers also learned how to deliver instruction remotely, making them active learners alongside their peers and students. Garcia and Weiss (2020) wrote there has been a lack of professional development on how to use computers and integrate them into instruction, which left teachers unprepared. For instance, according to the participants, their school district did not provide training on how to use the technology and platforms and participants had to reach out to peers for support as well as seeking out learning on their own. Felicia, Greg, and Ernie shared there was no direction, guidance, or training in March of 2020 when schools in the study site made the transition from in-person to remote. “I had to do my own professional development on how to use some of the apps,” stated Greg. Felicia remembered that “There was no advice really, but they gave us Seesaw and we were told to figure it out, there was no training for us.”

Tay et al. (2021) wrote, “Teaching and learning with technology inevitably adds another layer of complexity in understanding student engagement” (p. 300). Additionally, Tay et al., (2021), described student engagement as “paramount for productive learning” (p. 300). Participants in this study identified a shift in engagement once the learning went virtual instead of traditional face to face instruction and shared that student engagement during remote learning was also a barrier that contributed to the stress and burnout. For example, Ernie, Alice, and Greg found that most of their students did not access their learning remotely, increasing learning loss from not accessing their education. Alice also shared that though students had the technology, many of her students “claimed there was no internet, or their internet was down,” so

they did not participate in the lesson. However, Connie expressed that “Students are savvier than I am with technology.” She recalled a student who, while on Zoom, appeared to be playing video games, describing the student’s actions during class, “They had two monitors and were sneaking in video games, while I was teaching.” Furthermore, Heather stated that due to the number of students in her Zoom or Google classroom, the platform would overload, and students were unable to participate.

Participants in this study shared that the lack of student engagement was closely tied to student attendance. Herman et al. (2021) shared that lack of attendance and poor active engagement in lessons created widespread disruptions to teaching. For example, according to Greg, attendance was not required during the remote learning phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. Alice was extremely frustrated and stressed once her students knew attendance and participation would not count against them. In addition, Alice shared she did not mind they would pass, but once they knew they were going to pass, the level of interest decreased, and work completion died off. Alice was more frustrated that she still needed to produce remote lessons, even though she knew her students would not be engaged.

Lack of Support. Participants shared their experiences with the lack of parent support as a leading stressor when teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Felicia and Betty shared they experienced stress when they continuously attempted to reach their students’ parents and were rarely successful. Alice knew her students’ families had their own stress, but it was still stressful knowing that she could not touch base with families on a regular basis. Irene noticed her students and their families out in public on days in which they should have been in school or doing their learning remotely. She recalled that one day when she was on her lunch break, getting a coffee, she noticed some students from her school who should have been home

doing remote learning. When schools closed in March 2020 and the school district did not have a plan, Diane shared that she received push back from families which amped up her stress level as she was on the front line for parent communication. She perceived that parents felt that it was the school's responsibility to educate their child when schools closed for in person teaching. Additionally, she reported that parents told her that they would not teach their students because it was not their decision to close the school. In further reflection, Diane recalled a statement that one parent stated to her about remote learning, "You made the decision, and you need to teach them". In addition, parents wanted the schools to jump right into remote learning and everyone's tensions were high, according to Betty. Furthermore, Felicia noticed a lot more arguing and negativity among parents and the community which really created more stress for her.

According to Birch and Lewis (2020) teachers need support to build confidence in their teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Birch and Lewis (2020) also claimed that teacher's needs are developed when teachers are listened to, especially about their concerns and frustrations. When the participants did not have the support from their students' families, or directions from school leadership, participants came together and supported each other on their challenges, frustrations, and strategies to teach remotely. Hung and Zhang (2021) found that teachers used peers as support when they had concerns and had barriers they were facing due to remote learning.

Interpretations for Research Question 3

Research Question 3, "How do K-12 public school teachers describe their experience as learners while adapting to teaching during a pandemic?" was created to explore the learning experiences of the participants that occurred while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Holmes (2019) wrote that learners need to be active participants in the learning

process. Many public school teachers faced challenges as they had never used, understood, or been trained to deliver instruction using online platforms prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020). This barrier forced teachers to shift gears as they needed to learn how to instruct students using new platforms and learn to adjust to ways to deliver instruction (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020; Scott, 2020). Participants in this study needed to become learners on how to use technology when teaching remotely while also learning how to support their colleagues during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Learning how to Teach Remotely. Blagg and Luetmer (2020) and Herold (2020) found that because of the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers needed to learn how to instruct students using new platforms and learn to adjust to ways to deliver instruction alongside their colleagues and their students. For example, E eight of the nine participants had never used online teaching platforms before and needed to adjust and learn quickly how to use these platforms. Irene was the only participant who previously used Google classroom as part of teaching at a university level. Connie shared that she needed to learn quickly how to use Google Classroom to teach her students. Connie also stated that she went to her colleagues for help due to not being as tech savvy as other teachers in the building. Betty was proficient in technology, but never used Seesaw as a learning platform. but still Despite this shortcoming, Betty volunteered to be a fully remote teacher.

In addition, Scott (2020) shared that teachers needed to be nimble when they made the switch to remote learning. Eastwell (2002) stated that new learning happens when the learner reflects and develops new ideas based on their “existing ideas and the socio-cultural context in which they find themselves” (p. 83). Participants in this study were active in their learning how to teach remotely, how to communicate with families, and how to use technology effectively

during the pandemic. Furthermore, participants were active in their learning by connecting with their colleagues and learning alongside them on how to teach remotely, discussed their challenges and frustrations of online learning, and created strategies on how to make them better teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, Alice met with her assistant principal to learn how to teach students in a hybrid model with some students learning remotely in their homes and others in person in the classroom, which is something she never experienced before.

Learning How to Support Colleagues. For the participants in this study, connecting and learning from their peers was not a new experience and most of the participants found this type of experience to be beneficial. All nine participants shared that they were successful participating in the learning process because they had the support of their colleagues. For instance, Connie shared that she and her colleagues conducted a book study on effective ways to teach remotely, and she gleaned many great strategies to support her students and help increase her effectiveness with her students. Ernie and Betty worked with their colleagues and brainstormed ideas and strategies to help with remote learning and ways to connect with families. Greg, Betty, and Felicia shared they had great team members to learn with. “We have a nice family dynamic in my school,” shared Betty. Felicia learned a lot from her teaching partner because her partner knew how to utilize technology and how to set up virtual platforms to teach remotely and communicate with parents. “This saved me,” stated Felicia. Because of the support from their colleagues, participants learned how to teach remotely and support each other. Mayer (2003) outlines this as constructivism, which is when meaningful learning occurs, and the learner strives to make sense of the new learning by selecting information and integrating with other previously learned knowledge.

Implications

This section discusses implications aligned with the rationale and significance of this study as outlined in Chapter 1. Exploring the lived experience of teachers who have experienced the phenomenon of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic has many implications. Listening to the experiences of the participants created an opportunity for the participants to share their reflections of teaching during a pandemic, which developed an opportunity for teacher agency. Roger and Wetzel (2013) define teacher agency as “purposeful and reflecting on his/her world.” (p. 63). Teacher agency gives teachers a platform to share their knowledge as well as an avenue for others to glean from the interests and experiences of each other (Dewey, 1966). This study provided all nine participants the platform and opportunity to share their experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant had a unique experience as it related to their stress, their accomplishments and challenges, and their ability to adapt and teach during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the traditional mode of teaching has been changed, and teachers continue to adapt to their surroundings due to new protocols and teaching expectations (Oducado et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021; Scott, 2020). This study highlighted these shifts and the impact it had on teachers in a public school setting. Pressley et al. (2021) shared that the shift in teaching expectations from a traditional structure of teaching to a remote delivery platform, has elevated stress and burnout among teachers in an already fragile workforce. Participants in this study expressed feeling stressed, high levels of frustration, and shared they were trying to just survive while teaching during the pandemic. The impact of stress on teachers was important to study because prolonged exposure to stress for teachers led to mental and physical health issues, burnout, and other negative consequences for teachers and their students,

such as lower student academic achievement and the departure of educators from the profession (Marek et al., 2021; Mariotti, 2015, Suture et al., 2019).

This study identified that teachers need to be heard and have their needs addressed to be successful in the classroom. According to Alves et al. (2020), Ayub et al. (2018), Hurley (2021) and Phillips (2021), continuous exposure to stress during COVID-19 has impacted teachers' mental health, their well-being, and their ability to teach. Listening to teachers gives them a platform to share their knowledge as well as an avenue for others to glean from their interests and experiences of each other (Dewey, 1966). This study provided the opportunity for the participants to share their experiences, stressors, and challenges that were endured during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings of this study are important to stakeholders across the profession that can make decisions that impact teachers. Teaching already existed as a stressful profession, but the COVID-19 pandemic has exasperated and shifted the paradigm of teaching, which created additional stressors for teachers (Alves et al., 2020; di Fronso et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021). The new teaching conditions created by COVID-19 have caused stress, burnout, and high levels of anxiety for the teacher (Ferguson et al., 2012; Pressley, 2021). Exploring the experiences related to stress and burnout of public school teachers during the pandemic was important to review and understand to avoid a national teacher shortage due to individuals departing from the profession (Hurley, 2021; Pressley, 2021).

Starting in March 2020, participants in this study had to become learners because there was lack of communication, lack of direction, and lack of expectations from key decision makers. Connie stated, “We had to do it on our own,” and Betty shared “We used trial and error” when learning how to use technology and teach remotely. Schulte et al. (2020)

highlighted how teachers are a community of learners who relate to the ideas of creating pedagogical goals, powered sharing, and collaborative relationships. Dewey (1966) also concluded that when there is active participation in one's own learning, self-reliance is developed, which helps the learner. The findings of this study indicated that teachers thrived on support and learning from their colleagues. The support from their colleagues helped them persevere and survive the school year, while contending with stressors, challenges and obstacles created by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations for Action

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants of this study were provided a platform to share their experiences while teaching during the pandemic. Data gathered from the semi structured interviews, literature reviewed, and the development of emergent themes provided the researcher with the opportunity to create three recommendations for action.

The first recommendation, based on feedback from the participants, was that clear communication was needed at the beginning, middle and end of the school's responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. The recommendation is for teachers to access a communication platform in which they are informed of their expectations, potential changes in those expectations, updated safety protocols, and communication when remote learning is needed. Pressley et al. (2021) shared that teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic have entered the classroom with new expectations, both instructional and for safety. At the study site, according to the participants, there was limited to no communication on expectations and how to teach during this pandemic within the first few weeks of school closure. Ernie and Betty stated that they did not

receive any communication from their superintendent when schools were closed in March. Connie elaborated and shared that she and her team were left to learn on their own when it came time to plan and start the process for remote learning. Betty took it upon herself and started her own Facebook page so that she could be in contact with her students while schools were closed. Klapproth et al. (2020) found teachers have adjusted their methods of instruction to meet the expectations and the needs of teaching during COVID-19, and faced many barriers along the way, therefore, increasing teachers' levels of stress and feeling of burnout.

The second recommendation is to develop professional learning opportunities for teachers that are focused on areas that COVID-19 has impacted in classrooms. Continued professional development on current teaching strategies that teachers can use to adapt to remote teaching or in person teaching, or some form of hybrid model might include how to utilize technology efficiently, creative ways to increase student engagement while teaching remotely, and how to plan effectively and engage remote lessons for students. This recommendation is supported by the participants' description of the lack of professional development provided to classroom teachers in the study site. "I had to do my own research by going online, finding out what other teachers were doing and talking to some of the other teachers in the building on the programs that they were using," stated Ernie. Betty used the term, "trial by error" to describe her experience with learning the new technology on her own. The Economic Policy Institute (2021) cited that there was an absence of professional development on how to use computers and integrate them into instruction, leaving teachers ill-equipped. Teachers in the study site utilized Seesaw and Google Classroom platforms to connect with their students and parents, however, according to the participants in this study, they were not provided any professional development related to using these tools. Connie, Felicia, and Diane relied on their colleagues to teach them

how to use these new teaching platforms. Quezada et al. (2020) found that stress was elevated due to a lack of experience with technology including the use of the internet, social media, or video-conferencing tools depending on the level of a teacher. Lack of knowledge, training, and resources for support with technology was a potential stressor and could lead to burnout for the teacher (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

Lastly, it is recommended schools incorporate mental health support for classroom teachers on a regular basis. Bottiani et al. (2019), Hurley (2021), Pressley et al. (2021), and Trudel et al. (2021), found that teachers may experience poor health conditions like depression and anxiety, negative emotions, and lack of motivation to teach when their mental health is not addressed. Heather, for example, chose to terminate her employment mid-way through the year due to her mental health concern, stating, “I was like, I literally lost my mind, and I couldn’t do it anymore, so I quit halfway through the year.” Irene’s mental health continued to be challenged as she was always cognizant of being the teacher in the room “trying not to show my own fear of getting COVID and getting sick... not showing my own sadness of community members dying from COVID.” Diane said the lack of communication and the change to remote teaching without guidance from school leadership really doesn’t make sense and she could not make sense of it and cried every day.

Recommendations for Further Study

This were limitations that may have also potentially weakened and limited the scope of this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). Limitations to qualitative studies represent outside conditions that may restrict or constrain the scope of the study and the outcomes (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016). This study utilized a qualitative approach to allow for participants to share their experiences, related to stress and burnout, while teaching during the COVID-19

pandemic. Further examination of this phenomena would benefit from a mixed method approach where data collected could be reviewed and quantified about the perceptions of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic using surveys. This would give a statistical way of reviewing the perceptions of teachers who are working during a pandemic. Mixed method studies integrate both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data and to analyze and interpret the collected information (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

Criterion-based sampling was used as the sampling method to select participants for this study. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2016), during a phenomenological study, criterion sampling works best when all participants experience the same phenomenon. In the field of education, there are more than just teachers. It is recommended that for future phenomenological studies on this topic, that experiences from other stakeholders within the school community are included. School leaders such as principals, assistant principals, or superintendents could be included as part of the participant pool. Parents and students also contended with learning through the pandemic and their voice could also contribute to understanding their experiences of the phenomenon.

Lastly, this study took place in one school district in the Northern New England region, but the COVID-19 pandemic impacted schools across the world (Trudel et al., 2021). It could be beneficial to increase the sample size and expand the study location. Creswell (2013) has suggested that a sample size for a phenomenological study be between three and 325 participants, however, I recommended that the potential participant pool increase to include other schools across other cities, towns, or states. This study explored the lived experiences of teachers utilizing a small subset of teachers, in one location. Exploring a variety of other study sites, along with more participation from other stakeholders could potentially reflect a more

diverse experience. Dewey (1966) outlines teacher voice as the ability to listen to each other which gives a platform to share knowledge, and an avenue for others to glean from their interests and experiences of each other.

Conclusion

Leech et al. (2020) found that teaching is stressful under typical circumstances, but the COVID-19 pandemic had teachers facing additional challenges, creating additional stress and burnout. Klapproth et al. (2020) stated that during the pandemic, teacher stress and burnout increased for many reasons such as lack of training for teachers on how to use technology to effectively teach remotely, and the minimal support provided by administrators, parents, and students. The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the traditional methods of the instructional delivery of teaching and has moved teachers to implement alternative methods of instruction, and in most cases virtually (Pressley et al., 2021). Increases in stress and burnout for teachers posed challenges in the classroom environment and failure to address stress and burnout in the workplace may have negative effects on the educational system and the ability for teachers to provide quality education for students (Hurley, 2021; Kaur & Kumar, 2019; Pressley, 2021; Suture et al., 2019).

The review of the literature conducted for this study focused on stress and burnout, the causes of COVID-19 pandemic stress such as new health and safety protocols and teaching remotely, the impact stress has on teachers, and consequences of teacher stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. Literature about health and safety protocols as indicated by health organizations, masking, social distancing, and remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic were also synthesized.

This study utilized constructivism as the conceptual framework and more specifically utilized social constructivism as the theoretical framework. Holmes (2019) states that constructivism focuses on the learner, who is active in the learning process and for learning to happen, knowledge is “assimilated by and incorporated into a learners’ existing mental patterns” (p 8). Many public school teachers faced challenges as they were unclear on how to use online platforms prior to the COVID-19 pandemic (Blagg & Luetmer, 2020; Herold, 2020). Constructivism was selected as the framework of this study because teachers needed to be active learners, developing their skills as it relates to teaching remotely while using virtual resources (Klapproth et al., 2020; Scott, 2020). More specifically, the theoretical framework was narrowed down to include social constructivism. Social constructivism is the understanding that knowledge is social and experience based, as well as constructed by the learner in a learning community where all aspects of the learner are connected, and the learning environment is inclusive and equitable (Kapur, 2018). Social constructivism, identified by Vygotsky, has a focus on the idea that learning is collaborative and cognitive development develops during socialization (Ozer, 2004).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pressley et al. (2021) declared that it is important to understand these lived experiences because teachers expressed elevated levels of stress and feelings of burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic. This qualitative phenomenological study was guided by three research questions: How do K-12 public school teachers describe their lived experiences while teaching during a pandemic? How do K-12 public school teachers describe their perceptions of stressors related to teaching during a pandemic? And, how do K-12 public school teachers

describe their experience as learners while adapting to teaching during a pandemic? Through questions asked in semi structured interviews, participants in this study were asked to describe their lived experiences while teaching during a pandemic, their perceptions of stressors related to teaching during a pandemic, and their experiences as learners while adapting to teach during a pandemic.

Nine teachers from one study site in Northern New England were invited to participate in this study. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and member checked by each participant. Emergent themes were developed from the coded transcripts. The themes that align with this study include: the importance of support, classroom challenges stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, and the necessity of perseverance.

Findings from this study helped guide and answer the research questions. Participants reflected and shared about their experiences during the pandemic. Participants found their experiences to be challenging, frustrating and stressful for a variety of reasons. Lack of professional development or experience utilizing technology for remote learning, or challenges regarding parents' support or frustrations of minimal student engagement during remote learning highlighted these experiences. Participants relayed many stressors that impacted their teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Stressors such as issues with technology, lack of direction from school officials, lack of parental support led to the conclusion that teachers were highly stressed during this point in their career. As learners, teachers felt comfort from learning from their colleagues and relying on each other for support, guidance, and new learning.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Email

Hello! My name is Andrew Bard, and I am a student at the University of New England in the Doctor of Education program. I am seeking participants for my dissertation research. To be a participant in this study, you must be a K-12 public school teacher who has been teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Information Sheet, which is attached, provides information regarding your privacy and confidentiality in participating in this study. Please be sure to review the Information Sheet.

For this research project, I will invite you to participate in an interview through Zoom, which will take between 45-60 minutes. Your interview will be recorded and transcribed, and all identified information will be removed and replaced with a pseudonym. Using your responses, I will find common themes from the interviews and email them to all participants for member checking to verify the accuracy of my interpretation.

Your privacy is a very important aspect of the research. As mentioned previously, your name and other identifying characteristics will be given a pseudonym. All recordings will be destroyed after transcription and transcripts will be kept in a password protected flash drive. You will be asked to provide verbal consent at the start of the interview.

Thank you for your time. If you are interested in being a potential participant in this study, please email me at abard@une.edu.

Thank you,

Andrew M. Bard

Doctoral Student

University of New England

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet Version Date:	January 23, 2022
IRB Project #:	IRB # 0122-25
Title of Project:	A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Public School Teachers' Experiences While Teaching During a Pandemic
Principal Investigator (PI):	Andrew M. Bard
PI Contact Information:	abard@une.edu (207) 212-9901

INTRODUCTION

- This is a project being conducted for research purposes.
- The intent of the Participant Information Sheet is to provide you with pertinent details about this research project.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions about this research project, now, during or after the project is complete.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- The use of the word 'we' in the Information Sheet refers to the Principal Investigator and/or other research staff.
- If you decide to participate, you have the right to withdraw from this research project at any time without penalty.
 - All data collected will be deleted and will not be used in the project.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS PROJECT?

The general purpose of this research project is to explore lived experiences of public school teachers who have been teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on stress and burnout.

Background:

- Teaching is a stressful profession, but currently, the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted the paradigm of teaching, which created additional stressors for teachers (Alves et al., 2020; di Fronso et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2021).
- Teachers have continuously experienced many challenges with colleagues, parents, students, and administration; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified these experiences (Fiorilli et al., 2016; Klapproth et al., 2020).
- Marek et al. (2021) found that most teachers across the nation felt that the switch to virtual teaching created additional stress, anxiety, and higher workloads.
- Teaching is stressful and demanding under typical circumstances, but currently, with the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers are now being faced with additional challenges due to the delivery of instruction (Leech et al., 2020).
- Heighted stress and burnout also lead to lower student achievement (Klusmann et al., 2016).

Rationale for this project:

- This project is part of a Doctoral dissertation through the University of New England.
- Project is timely, as we are still currently teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- There have been few research studies that seek teacher experiences in response to the pandemic (Marek et al., 2021).
- Eblie Trudel et al. (2021) states that teachers who are exposed to heightened levels stress and burnout over time suffer negative effects personally and professionally.
- When a teacher's stress and burnout continue and is not addressed, negative effects for the teacher include a decrease in their health and well-being, and a lowered drive to deliver high quality instruction and even can lead the teacher to leave the profession (Ayub et al., 2018; Klusmann et al., 2016; Sutchter et al., 2019).

WHY AM I BEING ASKED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT?

You are being asked to participate in this research project because you are a classroom public school teacher who is teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THIS PROJECT?

Prior the study, participants will receive recruitment email and an attached information sheet from me using UNE email. If interested participants reach out to me, I will contact via email to schedule a Zoom interview. Semi structured interviews will be conducted using on an online video conferencing tool known as Zoom and will last approximately 45-60 minutes. The interview will be conducted by the Principal Investigator and will be recorded for transcription and coding purposes. The interview will be transcribed within 48 hours after the interview is complete and will be sent to each participant who will have one week to review the transcript for accuracy and provide revisions as needed. If there is no communication from the participants during the week given to provide adjustments, the transcript will be considered as accurate. Once all 8-10 interviews are complete, coding and identifying common themes will occur. Once the collective theme-based coding is complete, the themes will be sent to each participant for member checking through an email using the blind copy feature, to protect privacy of all participants. Participants will have one week to respond with adjustments to coded themes. If there is no communication from the participants during the week given to provide adjustments, the coded themes will be considered as accurate.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORTS INVOLVED FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

The risks involved with participation in this research project are minimal and may include:

- Potential psychological harm: Teachers will be exposing their experiences, and the risk of negative feelings and emotional stress could potentially be elevated during reflection and could feel like an invasion of privacy and confidentiality. These feelings and added emotional stress may impact the participants responses, and or continuation of their participation in this study although the probability and magnitude of harm/discomfort anticipated because of participating in this study are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests.

- Should you become emotionally distressed, the interview can be paused, canceled, or rescheduled for another day and time.
- Please review the ‘WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?’ section of this Information Sheet for steps for how the Principal Investigator will minimize your invasion of privacy or breach of confidentiality from occurring.
- If you feel that questions are too sensitive, personal in nature, or do not want to answer, you may skip that question, for any reason.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE BENEFITS FROM BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

The possible benefits you may experience from being in this research project include the opportunities to give you a voice and platform to share your experiences while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to listen to teachers who have experienced this phenomenon of teaching through the pandemic to help develop teacher agency (Vu, 2020). Your experiences will help others glean from experiences to support others in the future as we still work through the pandemic.

WILL YOU BE COMPENSATED FOR BEING IN THIS PROJECT?

You will not be compensated for being in this research project.

WHAT ABOUT PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY?

We will do our best to keep your personal information private and confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Additionally, your information in this research project could be reviewed by representatives of the University such as the Office of Research Integrity and/or the Institutional Review Board.

The results of this research project may be shown at meetings or published in journals to inform other professionals. If any papers or talks are given about this research, your name will not be used. We may use data from this research project that has been permanently stripped of personal identifiers in future research without obtaining your consent.

The following additional measures will be taken to protect your privacy and confidentiality:

Privacy refers to the right to control access to ourselves and our personal information. Participants have the right to control the degree, timing, and conditions for sharing their bodies, thoughts, and experiences with others. Privacy must be protected before and during recruitment, the consent process, as well as during participation in research activities. Methods to protect participant privacy include:

- You will be informed that interviews will be conducted in a private setting to ensure others cannot hear your conversation.
- Your private data is not collected without your knowledge and consent.

Confidentiality refers to agreements made between researchers and participants, through the consent process, about if and how researchers will protect information provided by the participants. Methods to protect participant data confidentiality include:

- Any paper records or field notes will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office accessible only by the Principal Investigator.
- Safeguards for data will be utilized using a password-protected computer and restricted access to data.
- You will be asked not to repeat anything you have been asked or learned from to others after the interview has been conducted.
- All personally identifiable information during the transcription process will be stripped and will use a pseudonym instead of your name.
- All recorded interviews will be destroyed after all transcripts have been verified for accuracy by you.
- All personally identifiable information, such as your name, e-mail which was obtained for recruitment purposes will be destroyed after all transcripts have been verified for accuracy by you.
- A master list which was used during coding process, will be stored securely stored in a locked file cabinet, and separately from the study data. The master list will be destroyed when it is no longer needed, or at the conclusion of the study.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS PROJECT?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research project. If you have questions about this project, complaints, or concerns, you should contact the Principal Investigator listed on the first page of this document.

WHAT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT?

If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Office of Research Integrity at (207) 602-2244 or via e-mail at irb@une.edu.

Appendix C: Interview Protocol & Questions

Project Title: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WHILE TEACHING DURING A PANDEMIC

Time of Interview:

First, we will review content of the Information Sheet (Review Appendix B). Do you have any questions or concerns regarding the content of the information sheet or the research study? Please verbally acknowledge that you would like to proceed with the interview.

I want to thank you for your time and willingness to support my research. At any time, you wish to stop the interview, please let me know and we can continue later or stop the interview indefinitely. Please confirm with a verbal agreement that you wish to continue with this interview.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of K-12 public school teachers related to stress and burnout while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. You will be asked a series of questions to help me understand your teaching experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To protect your confidentiality, your name and any identifiable information will be replaced. All recordings will be destroyed after transcription and transcripts will be kept in a password protected flash drive.

Today's interview will take approximately 40 to 60 minutes.

Semi Structured Interview Questions

Question 1: Please tell me about yourself, how long have you been in the district and your position you currently hold or held in the district.

Question 2: Please take some time to talk about the shift from in person teaching, to remote teaching back in the Spring of 2020. How did you prepare for this change?

Question 3: Please describe your experience with teaching during the remote learning phase of teaching during the pandemic. What were some of the challenges you experienced?

Question 4: Describe your experience with learning how to teach remotely.

Question 5: Discuss your return to in person teaching. What were some of the changes that you identified in your classrooms? How did these impact your teaching?

Question 6: How would you describe your level of support from parents, administrators, colleagues, and the community

Question 7: What has been the biggest challenge for you?

Question 8: What would you describe as your biggest accomplishment while teaching during the pandemic? Please take some time to think about all you have done and who you impacted during this time.

Question 9: Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences while teaching during the pandemic?

Appendix D: IRB Approval Letter



**Institutional Review Board
Julie Longua Peterson, Chair**

Biddeford Campus
11 Hills Beach Road
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(207) 602-2244 T
(207) 602-5905 F

Portland Campus
716 Stevens Avenue
Portland, ME 04103

DATE OF LETTER: February 16, 2022

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Andrew Bard
FACULTY ADVISOR: Andrea Disque, EdD

PROJECT NUMBER: 0122-25
PROJECT TITLE: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of Public School Teachers' Experiences While Teaching During a Pandemic

SUBMISSION TYPE: Exempt Project
SUBMISSION DATE: 1/31/2022

ACTION: Determination of Exempt Status
DECISION DATE: 2/16/2022

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption Category # 2(ii)

The UNE Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above referenced project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104.

Additional IRB review is not required for this project as submitted. However, if any changes to the design of the study are contemplated (e.g., revision to the protocol, data collection instruments, interview/survey questions, recruitment materials, participant information sheet, and/or other IRB-reviewed documents), the Principal Investigator must submit an amendment to the IRB to ensure the requested change(s) will not alter the exempt status of the project.

Please feel free to contact me at (207) 602-2244 or irb@une.edu with any questions.

Best Regards,

Bob Kennedy, MS
Director, Research Integrity