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The Effects of Remote Teaching Pedagogy on Online Writing Instruction

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE EFFECTS OF REMOTE TEACHING PEDAGOGY ON
ONLINE WRITING INSTRUCTION

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

ENGLISH

by

Natalie Henriquez

2021

To: Dean Michael R. Heithaus
College of Arts, Sciences, and Education

This thesis, written by Natalie Henriquez, and entitled The Effects of Remote Teaching Pedagogy on Online Writing Instruction, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgement.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

Glenn Hutchinson

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Vanessa Sohan, Major Professor

Date of Defense: November 12, 2021

The thesis of Natalie Henriquez is approved.

Dean Michael R Heithaus
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Andres G. Gil
Vice President for Research and Economic Development
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Florida International University, 2021

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
THE EFFECTS OF REMOTE TEACHING PEDAGOGY ON
ONLINE WRITING INSTRUCTION

by

Natalie Henriquez

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Vanessa Sohan, Major Professor

This thesis will investigate the development of online writing instruction and the new innovations or adaptations that were created to cope with the online learning environment during the pandemic. I conducted interviews with four Writing & Rhetoric professors from Florida International University. The interviews focused on the experience that these professors had and how they faced certain challenges along the way such as building an online community and promoting communication and collaboration in the online classroom. I argue that the themes of mindfulness, flexibility, balance, community, and empathy that were found in the interviews are the foundation or the origin of why certain key areas of interest such as active learning, community, digital literacy, and trauma-informed pedagogy are so important for teaching online writing instruction remotely or online. By representing some of the experiences and changes to pedagogy that happened during the pandemic, this thesis adds to the existing conversation around pandemic pedagogy, and helps professors learn more ways they can create a comfortable, safe, and efficient learning space whether it is online or in-person.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has made a big impact on our lives and on educational institutions across the country. In spring 2020, universities and colleges had to cancel in-person classes and transition to remote and online instruction. Life has been slowly returning to normal over time, but there is still a long way to go. These times have been very stressful and hectic for everyone, but teachers have learned so much since this all began. Before the pandemic, many professors never had any experience teaching an online class, but all at once, they were expected to change all their plans and adapt their teaching style, strategies, and pedagogy to a different setting. Professors responded to this shift to remote synchronous and online teaching in many different ways. There is a lot we can learn by reflecting on the challenges and obstacles that these professors have surpassed during the pandemic. One of the biggest challenges for these professors was building an online community where there was effective communication, collaboration, and active learning. Therefore, some of the most effective teaching strategies used during the pandemic revolved around these concepts. Reflecting upon these new innovations and adaptations will not only make us more prepared for a similar turn of events in the future, but it will also support our traditional classroom with more ways of learning and building community. However, we continue to deal with the pandemic and although we've recently shifted back to face-to-face classes rather than synchronous, the impact of the pandemic is still evident as well as the impact it has had on online writing instruction (OWI) is still trying to be understood and the lingering effects it has on OWI in the future.

The concept of remote teaching has manifested quite recently, so there is not enough primary research in the field of writing and rhetoric related to remote teaching, therefore I will help to fill the gaps of knowledge by investigating the development of OWI and the new innovations or adaptations that were created to cope with the online learning environment during the pandemic. In my study, I conducted primary research consisting of interviews with full-time Writing and Rhetoric faculty from Florida International University who taught during the pandemic. I supplemented my primary research with research in secondary sources on OWI from Writing and Rhetoric and related interdisciplinary fields, and more popular articles about pandemic teaching. I analyzed these secondary sources using the method of cross-sectional data indexing (Mason 150) to compare traditional OWI to the new ways it has evolved throughout remote teaching. This method was utilized to compare and analyze the data collected through the interviews. It was important to compare and contrast old knowledge with new knowledge on OWI, so that the amount of knowledge gained is clear and easy to assess.

My key research questions included, “In what ways did writing and rhetoric faculty respond or adapt to the shift to remote synchronous and online teaching during the pandemic?” and “How did those shifts affect their pedagogy?” The sub-questions were focused around the key areas of interest which are active learning, community, and trauma-informed pedagogy. These concepts were chosen because they are some of the most important aspects of teaching when it comes to remote teaching (see Hammond & Pilkington & Halfond & Giesbers). If a professor focuses on improving these aspects of their classroom, then their students will learn what they need to more effectively whether it is a remote classroom or the traditional setting. I found five common themes

throughout the interviews that I conducted which were mindfulness, flexibility, balance, community, and empathy. By incorporating these five themes in the classroom, professors will be able to create a comfortable, safe, and efficient learning space whether it is online or in-person. These themes represent how professors were more actively recognizing and reflecting on a pedagogy of care and understanding and they were increasing their attention to how they and their students were actively feeling. Based on the results of my study, I argue that there is an evolution of previous teaching practices which revolve around these themes which act as key principles for the changes that have occurred to teaching practices throughout the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, previous teaching practices have evolved more into a pedagogy of care and understanding. I also argue that my work adds to the existing conversation around pandemic pedagogy and expands upon it not only by offering experiences from professors who experienced this step in the evolution of teaching, but also by analyzing these experiences even further to find the meaning behind these changes.

The primary research conducted for my thesis consisted of interviewing four full-time English faculty members from Florida International University through Zoom. The interviews were administered using the method of qualitative interviewing, which is an in-depth, semi-structured form of interviewing (see Mason; Blakesleey and Fleischer). As Jennifer Mason argues, qualitative interviewing requires much more planning and focuses more on the structure and the flow of the interview than an unstructured interview. The interviews did not last longer than an hour and there were ten questions asked in total each time. Their responses were all quite different, but common themes were observed among all of the interviewees' responses. The five common themes were

mindfulness, flexibility, balance, community, and empathy. It was interesting how these concepts were a common underlying influencer of how a professor chose to answer a question. This emphasizes how many professors have common goals, but different ways of accomplishing them. The various themes were related or a part of one another, such as mindfulness and empathy. Both of these themes deal with being considerate of the student and what they're going through. Empathy is more focused on the emotional aspect of it, while mindfulness covers a wider spectrum of things that a teacher needs to be aware of. Professors had to have a lot of mindfulness during this pandemic not only for their students, but for themselves as well. This research will benefit any teacher or professor who needs to teach online, remote, or hybrid classes since it will provide information on effective strategies and various pedagogies from multiple professors who had experience with remote teaching during the pandemic.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

College writing professors have had to make all kinds of innovations and adaptations to their teaching methods and strategies in order to adjust to the challenges that the pandemic presented to us. In "On the Lesson Design of Online College English Class during the COVID-19 Pandemic," Zhen Zhou writes, "...teachers have experienced great teaching reform, teachers have experienced a lot of progress and growth from being at a loss and anxiety to gradually adapting, slowly getting used to and innovating education" (1485). Through this process of adapting, interlaced with being lost, confused, and anxious, professors were able to reform their traditional teaching format into something suitable for remote teaching and perhaps even improved it in some way. There are many positive side effects to this experience that professors had to go through such as

becoming more familiar with online tools/platforms, incorporating more technology-based instruction in the classroom, and innovating new teaching strategies.

Active Learning

Multiple articles published during the pandemic revolve around active learning and how to get their students to engage more in the remote or online classroom. Zhen Zhou writes about the impact of the pandemic on college students' learning behavior which she describes as passive and in need of supervision and guidance from teachers: "College students themselves are adults, parents will not conduct the same strict management as to primary and secondary school students, which leads to the lack of sufficient supervision and motivation of students' learning state" (1486). Zhou points out one of the biggest issues with remote learning for college students which is the lack of motivation. Working and studying in the same environment that they sleep and relax in is not a good idea. At home, there could be so many distractions such as parents needing help with something, pets, siblings, etc. Therefore, all these distractions make their home a terrible place to have class unless they're focused, responsible, and motivated. However, the reality is that a lot of college students get distracted easily and lose motivation if someone isn't there to guide or supervise them. This is why creating a sense of community is so important when it comes to remote and online teaching because it supports these types of students who need that extra push from their instructor and peers to get up and do their work.

Active learning can be any instructional method that engages students in the learning process, so it is heavily based on student engagement. A lack of student engagement has always been a challenge in the classroom, but remote synchronous

classes made this even more difficult. This could look like not getting enough discussion talk in class, missing assignment submissions, and low-quality work with little to no effort being put into them. Student engagement can be affected by many factors outside of the classroom which are out of the professor's control, but it is still the professor's responsibility to encourage students to engage in the classroom and do everything in their power to help them succeed. These outside influences include the lack of sleep, mental health issues, and lack of motivation. Some articles such as "A Framework of Implementing Strategies for Active Student Engagement in Remote/Online Teaching and Learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic" discuss the issue of student engagement during the pandemic. This article presents a framework that implements activities/strategies to ensure active student engagement in remote/online teaching: "The research findings indicated that Moodle e-learning platform, Google Meet, Google Chat, Jamboard, Mentimeter, and Google Meet Breakout Room are effective tools in implementing active student engagement activities" (Ahshan 22). These are all examples of tools teachers can use to implement active learning activities in the classroom in order to encourage student engagement. One of the most important aspects of promoting active learning online is conversation. In an excerpt called, "Conversation: Online, Course "Talk" Can Become Writing," Warnock discusses the importance of "the use of asynchronous message boards to facilitate student communication" (68). An asynchronous message board means students can chat with one another anonymously which creates many more opportunities for participation since nobody has to wait for someone else to finish talking to say something and nobody will ever know who said what.

Community

One of the best ways to build a sense of community in the online classroom is by encouraging collaboration among your students. Creating a collaborative learning community in the classroom was made even more difficult to accomplish when the big shift to remote teaching happened. Therefore, professors had to come up with new ways to build this sort of community from afar. In the article “Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and Interaction: Three Communicative Strands in the Language Classroom” written by Rebecca L. Oxford, she states “collaborative learning has a ‘social constructivist’ philosophical base, which views learning as the construction of knowledge within a social context, and which therefore encourages acculturation of individuals into a learning community” (443). This article focuses on students learning a second language, but the idea of collaborative learning being based on social constructivism can be applied to any classroom. Social interaction can be a huge motivator for students to learn especially when they’re under circumstances where there is a lack of social interaction. There’s a reason why the traditional classroom setting has always been more popular than the online alternative. Classes that are taught face-to-face have a certain sense of community that classes taught through Zoom just lack. In a traditional classroom environment, it’s easier for students to freely interact with one another and get to know their peers. In the article “Trading Spaces: Covid-19 and the Big Move Online,” Peter Streckfus emphasizes how “Having a community of people with whom you can share this work as it develops is a key element of a healthy writing practice.” This backs up the statement that community was a key aspect of teaching online writing instruction during the pandemic.

In the article “COVID-19 and its impact on education, social life and mental health of students: A survey” Chaturvedi et al. investigate and analyze the potential consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the life of students: “The peer-to-peer impact in the school environment motivates individuals to work hard and learn social skills, which may not be possible in an online setting” (Chaturvedi et al. 6). This sense of community between peers that motivates them to do better can be difficult to replicate in an online class, especially if the professors lack digital skills. The kind of interaction that happens through Zoom is quite different from how things work in an in-person class: “Moreover, the biggest challenge for online learning is the requirement of efficient digital infrastructure and digital skillset for both students and teachers” (Chaturvedi et al. 6). Chaturvedi et al. describe one of the biggest challenges that we’ve all had to face during this pandemic in the educational setting which is developing the skills to function effectively through online tools and platforms.

One more common issue found when trying to build a sense of community would be encouraging collaboration because it’s more difficult to build trust and maintain communication from far away than it is if students saw their peers on a regular basis. D. R. Garrison’s article, “Online Collaboration Principles,” states that “Team projects should be introduced during the core part of the course. If expectations and guidelines are clear, team projects can provide opportunities to develop collaboration skills as well as engage in a substantial realistic and applied problem” (32). One of the best ways that teachers and professors use to encourage collaboration is by making students work in groups for a project or activity. Many classes have taken place through Zoom instead of the traditional classroom due to the pandemic, so if the professor wanted to put the

students in groups, it was actually easier to organize them than in a traditional classroom because they can just put each group in their own breakout room. This way nobody even has to move, and they are not distracted by any other groups because they cannot see or hear them. The amount of time and effort it would take everyone to get into their assigned groups in person is way more than doing it all through Zoom where it can all be done with just the click of a button.

Digital Literacy

Another issue which college writing professors run into with online teaching is digital literacy which is the ability someone has to use a computer, technology, and all of its components like social media, e-mail, and apps. Many new applications and websites are being used every day, and it is impossible to be familiar with every single one, so professors are constantly learning about a new website or online tool they can use to make teaching easier which can be beneficial, but also challenging. In “The Influence of Digital Tools and Social Networks on the Digital Competence of University Students during COVID-19 Pandemic,” Rodriguez-Moreno et al. touch upon the topic of digital literacy and how it has affected students during the pandemic. There are many reasons why professors and students should be digitally literate, especially if they’re taking remote or online classes. They write, “Social networks are a great tool to promote learning in the community, encourage the participation of students, and generate knowledge discussions” (3). This knowledge of social networks could benefit students greatly in the classroom by building community, promoting communication, and collaboration. Rodriguez-Moreno et al. bring up many benefits of using digital tools in the classroom: “These tools will facilitate the acquisition of positive attitudes in the

construction of knowledge and group cohesion, while boosting the acquisition and retention of knowledge, improving problem-solving abilities, the expression of ideas, motivation, and personal satisfaction, thereby generating critical thinking” (2). If a professor is going to integrate a new online tool or website into their curriculum, they must first teach their students the basics of digital literacy, including the ethical use of digital resources, how to protect themselves online, and how to use digital communications safely and appropriately. If their students are already familiar with all this, which most college or university students are, then they need to teach the students how to use the new digital tool or website in the way that they intend to use it.

Trauma-Informed Pedagogy

Trauma-informed pedagogy has expanded even more in response to one of the biggest challenges that many people faced during the pandemic which was dealing with trauma caused by the pandemic, such as losing a loved one to COVID-19, getting sick, or losing your job. In her webinar, “Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning,” Dr. Mays Imad talks about her own personal experience with trauma, how trauma affects learning, and some useful strategies in order to teach students going through a traumatic experience. When Imad was in middle school, she went through the 1991 Iraq War where students could not come to school for over a month due to the bombings and war going on, and when they finally returned to the classroom, some of her fellow classmates had died in the bombings. She compared her traumatic experience of war to Covid-19 and even claims that the social isolation that we have had to endure is even more traumatic than what she had gone through. Imad argues that trauma impairs our ability to make decisions, remember, and learn, making it even more challenging for our students and

teachers to succeed academically remotely. One of the strategies that she mentions which helps us to cope with the situation is talking about the traumatic experience and just complaining to others about what we have had to go through can be therapeutic. Dr. Imad states, “Professors can create an optimal learning environment by building relationships with students and making themselves available to those who need help.” This reveals another effective strategy she brings up which is to encourage and maintain communication between the teacher and students, as well as promoting a sense of community in the classroom by creating a safe environment where everyone can speak freely.

Pandemic Pedagogy

Some articles discuss the benefits of pandemic teaching, such as Zhou’s “On the Lesson of Online College English Class during the Covid-19 Pandemic.” One of the points that Zhou brings up is how there is no need to maintain classroom discipline through remote learning because interaction among the students without the instructor noticing is impossible in that environment. This leaves professors with more time to focus on how to help students improve the effectiveness of their learning. This article emphasizes how administering an online classroom is not as difficult as it is to administer a traditional classroom setting. In the traditional classroom, students can have conversations with each other and get noisy or distracted easily by others; however, this isn’t possible through a Zoom meeting because multiple people can’t have a conversation at the same time in a Zoom room unless it’s through the chat, and that is way easier to manage. It is also easier to manage certain activities through online platforms because the professor has the ability to separate everyone into groups and to bring everyone back

together as a whole class with just the press of a button. This saves a lot of time and takes a lot less effort for both the professor and the students.

Alternatively, many articles that discuss remote teaching make it seem sub-par to the traditional classroom setting. In one such article, “Teacher’s Challenges towards Online Learning in Pandemic Era,” Elsa Rosalina et al. describe the challenges that teachers face while teaching during the pandemic by dividing them into three points of view. As Rosalina et al. write, “They are supporting facilitation, the process of learning, and the climate of learning activities itself. The teachers miss the deep interactions of their students, so they cannot control students’ affective factors which are also important for the teaching and learning process” (81). This article identifies the challenges of pandemic teaching by realizing what this kind of teaching lacks in the social interaction and affective factors. These challenges are what make pandemic teaching so different from traditional classroom teaching.

Online teaching became a very convenient way of temporarily fixing the situation with social distancing; however, this is not something that we could have kept up forever because there are too many negative side effects to it. Zhou mentions the long-term effects of online teaching such as the deterioration of students’ eyesight and body development. Many students also developed irregular and bad studying and living habits which lead to some bad conditions such as anxiety, depression, inattention, and insomnia. This pandemic and remote learning has been a challenge to teachers’ and students’ physical and mental health, but we have finally returned to teaching in the traditional classroom setting and finally get to socially interact in person again. A July 27, 2021, news article called “The Coronavirus and College This Fall” describes the current

situation with the pandemic and college classes and says “We’re in a much better position to have a successful fall in terms of health and safety. While there likely will still be cases of COVID-19 on college campuses, Malani expects that those will be a nuisance that shouldn't shut down business as usual.” This is a good representation of the current attitude towards the pandemic that most colleges seem to have. It may seem that things have returned to normal, but many changes have been made such as vaccines being mandatory in some places, financial aid has become more flexible, dining halls and dorms have increased capacity, and COVID-19 precautions have been written into the student codes of conduct. The vaccines have given us the opportunity to return to some form of a traditional classroom setting. However, professors need to be ready for something like this to happen again in the future, so they should learn everything they can from this experience and prepare their classroom format accordingly.

All of the previous issues I mentioned are also prevalent in traditional classroom settings; however, the transition to remote learning due to Covid-19 has made these issues even more difficult to deal with, and college writing professors all over the world are coming up with new ways to face these challenges in the virtual classroom. So far, this literature review has covered many of the ways that the pandemic has influenced online writing instruction and the way professors teach citing secondary sources which discussed major themes of my research including building a sense of community, promoting active learning, and incorporating trauma-informed pedagogy. These sources have contributed to a recently developed topic and my research will be contributing to this conversation by providing the personal experiences, adaptations, and pedagogies from four writing and rhetoric professors who taught during the pandemic, and by

analyzing their responses to find commonalities and useful information for future educators. While going through my interview transcripts, I realized that many of the themes I found like flexibility, mindfulness, empathy, community, and balance are all the underlying factors that influence pandemic teaching and all of the adaptations that happened along the way. My interviews and findings showcase what was going in the minds of many educators during these unprecedented times.

III. METHODS

After receiving IRB approval during the summer of 2021, I set up the interviews with the help of an intermediary from CASE who helped me send out a request to participate in my study to all full-time writing faculty in the English department who taught from spring 2020 to spring 2021. Four faculty members responded, and I set up Zoom interviews with each individual. I developed my interview questions by thinking about all the ways that the pandemic could have influenced someone's teaching and coming up with questions which revealed what faculty members did to build an online community where there was effective communication, collaboration, and active learning. Each interview was about an hour or less, and we discussed their experiences with teaching remotely, how the pandemic has affected their teaching environment, and what sort of changes they have to make to overcome certain challenges. The subject population consisted of four participants who are Writing & Rhetoric professors at Florida International University. The pseudonyms which will be given to each professor are Charlie, Emily, James, and Sophia. Charlie and Emily are both Associate Teaching Professors at FIU and the majority of the classes that they teach are first year composition courses such as ENC1101 and ENC1102. Sophia and James are Assistant Teaching

Professors at FIU, and they also mostly teach first year composition courses. James has been teaching for 16 years, and he was more prepared than anyone for the pandemic because he designed his courses to be online adaptable. All of the participants either taught remote synchronous classes or online classes during the pandemic. Each of these professors emailed me because they received the request to participate in my study. I coordinated with each professor to discuss what times were best for them to conduct the interview over Zoom. All of the interviews were conducted during August 2021. My study remained private and confidential. The participants were anonymized to reduce any risk against them and to secure their personal information.

My study uses qualitative interview techniques which focus on a structured interview with open-ended questions and follow-up questions to foster deep discussion of the interview topic. It is important to start off with questions to get to know the person you're talking to and to actively listen while they respond. There are many aspects to qualitative interviewing that Jennifer Mason brings up in her book *Qualitative Researching*. As Mason writes, "You will not have a standard script of questions and will instead need to think on the spot how best to ask about whatever it is that you 'really want to know', and how to generate meaningful contextual and situated discussion" (73). Mason describes qualitative interviewing as having to generate questions as the conversation progresses in order to find out more information about what you want to know. I had a list of general questions that I wanted to ask, but I made sure to ask more specific questions when needed in order to get more meaningful information out of their answers. I transcribed the audio of the interviews by using the auto-transcript button on Zoom, and I used the application Descript to make the transcript for one of the interviews

I forgot to transcribe on Zoom. Afterwards, I coded the transcripts in search for common themes that were brought up among all of the interviews which ended up being mindfulness, flexibility, balance, community, and empathy. In order to come up with these themes, I used the method of coding, indexing, and writing a research memo from Blakeslee and Fleischer's "Becoming a Writing Researcher." (see Blakeslee & Fleischer)

Throughout the interviews, more questions were asked such as "How are you?," "What do you teach?" and follow-up questions depending on their answers. Every question in the list was asked in each interview, and each participant shared their thoughts and feelings.

Limitations

Some of the limitations in this study during the interview process were the time limits and the pandemic itself. Some of the specific challenges that I faced during the pandemic were the stress that comes from fear of getting COVID-19 and social distancing as well as having to learn how to do everything online, including the interviews. I would have preferred to do the interviews in person because doing it through a screen makes it less enjoyable and personal. Due to this topic being relatively new, there isn't a lot of information available on topics related to pandemic teaching, so this also made it more difficult to find secondary sources. The time I had to conduct the interviews and then review and revise all of the data in a span of a month was also quite a challenge. Another limitation was the number of participants involved in my study because it would have taken me way too long to process more than four interviews, and I only had a few months to conduct interviews and write the thesis itself. The research would have been more accurate if there were more participants, but I had to choose an

amount that was manageable for me and the time that I had. I had a total of four full-time faculty members from FIU participate in my study. I also decided to focus more on full-time faculty instead of TAs for reasons related to IRB stipulations for student participants. All of the interviews went well, and everyone seemed to like talking about this topic since it gave them a chance to express what they had been going through.

IV. FINDINGS

The data collected show the professors' perceptions of the impact of the pandemic on their own pedagogy and online writing instruction as a whole. Each interviewee discussed the challenges they faced with remote teaching, the changes they had to make to adapt to the situation, and how this experience will continue to affect them throughout the rest of their career. The data collected from these interviews is representative of what Writing and Rhetoric professors went through during the pandemic and what changes have happened to online writing instruction along the way. Throughout these interviews, themes such as mindfulness, flexibility, balance, community, and empathy were found.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness was classified by the professor being aware of what the students were going through and helping them to become more aware of their situation and how to practice mindfulness by implementing certain activities or strategies. In the article "Teaching Mindfulness for Pandemic Times," John L. Pecore defines mindfulness as "an acute awareness of thoughts and feelings within the surrounding environment, through a gentle, non-judgmental lens. When practicing mindfulness, thoughts center on sensing the present moment as opposed to focusing on the past or imagining the future" (164). An example of mindfulness which was seen in one of the interviews was when the professor

had to become more flexible because they were aware of the stress the students were going through because of the pandemic and how they had a lot of other things going on like sick relatives, inability to access the internet in ways that they were used to, trouble with other classes, etc. The professors had to communicate that they were aware of what the students were going through and adapted accordingly to the situation by helping them with resources and being flexible. Each interviewee was asked how the pandemic influenced their teaching which was one of the broader questions that started off the interviews. Every participant mentioned something related to mindfulness in their responses. They all had some sort of heightened “acute awareness” of what their students were going through such as sick relatives, inability to access the internet, lack of social interaction, etc.

The pandemic made it more difficult for everyone including the professors and they were completely aware of this, so they tried to make their Zoom classes manageable for both parties. One of the ways that the pandemic made it more difficult for professors was the fact that it was easier for students to go unnoticed without participating. Through Zoom, professors weren't always able to see their students and make sure they were listening because many of them didn't require the students to turn on their cameras. The students could have been doing something else and the professor would have no idea because they couldn't see what they were doing. This led to many professors trying different strategies to get their students to engage more with the class. According to one of the participants, Charlie, being mindful of how a different environment could influence the student is key to remote teaching:

A lot of it was thinking about how to encourage participation when students are learning from a different environment, how to still allow them to feel comfortable, to feel safe enough to participate. I think I kind of took that for granted in a lot of ways, this sort of like, I don't know what the best word for it would be, but the sort of affordances of having a class where everybody is in the same room.

Charlie describes how important it is to make students feel safe and comfortable in an online environment. He also expresses how he took the physicality of a classroom for granted and this speaks to how teachers' expectations and understanding of the classroom environment as a space changed as a result of the pandemic. However, there are outside influences that the professor has no control of such as a quiet space or distractions in their environment. Many students have siblings or even children which may cause disruptions during class time that the professor has little to no control over.

The most that the professor can do is make all aspects of the remote classroom as safe and comfortable as possible. There are many ways to create comfortable, safe spaces for students to share such as getting to know your students, making each student feel included, and sharing your own perspective before asking them for theirs. It's important to make your students feel safe and comfortable in the classroom in order to have them function to the best of their abilities. One of the ways that the professors I interviewed did this was by implementing mindfulness practices in the classroom. Charlie discussed one of the mindfulness practices he started doing while teaching remotely:

And I also use a lot of teaching strategies that are rooted in mindfulness practices and those sort of reflective practices and giving students the opportunity to sort of like check in with themselves. Because I think if people are able to check in with

themselves and feel a little safer and feel a little more comfortable, then that also contributes to the sense of community in the classroom.

He states how he uses reflective practices to check in with the students and give them an opportunity to express what they're dealing with. He also mentions how he always uses mindfulness practices and this prior knowledge that he had most likely prepared him even more for the situation during the pandemic compared to other professors who have never implemented mindfulness in the classroom before. Charlie argues that these practices help to build a sense of community in the classroom which makes sense because this kind of self-awareness allows the student to become more aware of their surroundings and their peers at the same time. An example of reflective practices that Charlie provided in the interview was journaling at the beginning of each class in order to give the student some time to collect their thoughts and be aware of how they're feeling at that moment. Professors have to actively create these opportunities and make time for mindfulness because it is necessary in order to set the tone and create a safe, comfortable environment for students.

Flexibility

The second common theme which I discovered was flexibility which can be described as the ability to adapt or respond to certain changes in the classroom environment and your students. This skill allows professors to respond effectively to students' needs, abilities, and interests. One of the examples of flexibility which I saw in the interviews was when a professor mentioned how it is still possible to achieve the same objectives in an online classroom that you would achieve in a face-to-face class; however, the strategies or methods used might have to be different or translated for the

online environment and this requires flexibility and creativity. The pandemic caused a major disruption to everyone's lives and professors' curriculums. One of the participants of this study, Sophia, describes the way that she managed to adapt her in-person classroom to the online environment:

There is nothing that can be accomplished in a face to face class that can't be accomplished online. It may be different how you do it, but if you have an idea for what's important to you in a face to face class you need to translate that to an online class, not give it up. You can achieve the same objectives. You may not be able to use the same strategies, but you can achieve the same objectives and giving up on those just comes from a lack of experience or a lack of imagination.

Sophia points out how the same objectives in a face to face class can be accomplished in an online class; however, you might need to change the way that objective is met. She has a very can-do attitude and that can be very helpful as a teacher because that way you'll always find some way to meet your objective. This kind of flexibility is what most professors needed to have when they moved their classes to the online platform. She mentions in the last sentence how the inability to find a different way to meet the same objective comes from a lack of experience or imagination which can be accomplished by seeking advice from more experienced individuals or getting creative. One of the questions which was asked in the interviews was about what they learned from this whole experience that they will continue to apply in their future classes. Sophia explained one of the new methods she used to create a flexible schedule for her students.

So, what I did is I created a catch up schedule where students have to get the penalties on the smaller assignments waived and the penalties on larger assignments capped at 5%, then they have to create a new schedule with me. And so, they take everything that they're behind on everything that they have in front of them, they tell me when they can work during this week, like five hours on Monday and two hours on Tuesday, And I fill that into a schedule and give them new deadlines. They have to meet the new deadlines to get the waivers and if they don't, then it goes back to the previous penalties.

She created this catch-up schedule which was based on the students' needs which seems like it would be difficult to do when you have a large number of students because keeping up with everyone's individualized schedules must be a lot to manage. Sophia mentioned how it was a little time consuming, but she was able to do it because she created a calendar where she could just plug everything in, and that made it a lot easier for her. Many professors seemed to have been putting in extra effort into being more flexible for their students. Another professor who shared an interesting perspective on being flexible in the classroom was James.

Look for those students who did the assignment in a way you weren't expecting and honor that. Look to the students who arrived at different conclusions from the reading and honor that. And if you can do that, then you're replicating a lot of what an instructor should do, which is to be in conversation with their students. You know, for all your expertise, you're not the expert. You have authority over sets of authorship, but you're not the authorities. Nobody's paying you to be a cop

in the classroom. So be, be good, be generous, be accommodated, and create space.

James expressed how the perspective of the instructor matters when it comes to students doing something in a way that you didn't expect them to do it. It could be regarding an assignment, an action, or even just a response to a question you asked. He provided interesting imagery of a teacher being a cop in the classroom which gave the impression that a teacher isn't supposed to be enforcing rules or expectations all the time like a cop. This just meant that a teacher should be open to different interpretations and responses. When compared to other professors that were interviewed, James had a unique perspective on flexibility and his perspective of the teacher as the authority in the classroom. Some of the other professors like Sophia also had a bold approach when it came to being flexible. She was firm in what she believed and determined to find any way to meet the objective.

Teachers need to keep an open mind and be flexible because, in the subject of Writing and Rhetoric, there is room for different interpretations, so therefore there is always more than one right answer. This kind of flexibility with what your students give actually creates a safe space where students are not afraid to express themselves in writing because they know there are many correct ways to view or do something.

Balance

The next common theme was balance which is when the interviewees would talk about how balancing work with personal life was important as well as not overworking yourself or the students and finding a middle ground where everyone can function effectively. Balance can also relate to the topic of mindfulness because there needs to be

a certain amount of awareness in order for someone to understand how to balance their time and effort. Balance was a common theme throughout the interviews because there were quite a few instances where the professors would talk about prioritizing their time to make the best use of it while at the same time considering their own mental health. There are many aspects of life that we strive to balance every day. In the classroom, professors are always trying to find that balance between work and the personal lives of their students. They also have to be aware of their own needs for balance because a classroom cannot function properly if the professor is overwhelmed with the amount of work. Sophia mentioned how you can't be available to your students every single day because that is just unrealistic:

And you know you can just make yourself crazy available and that can make you just crazy. But on the other hand, not checking your email for three days can be really destructive to your students. So, you know, figuring out the hours that you're going to work and what you can and can't do for your students in terms of availability I think it's really important.

Sophia understands that there should be a healthy in-between when it comes to being available for your students as much as anything else related to the classroom. The idea of having certain hours to do certain things aligns with her approach of rescheduling deadlines for students. There are extremes in every situation, and everything usually works much better if you find the sweet spot in the middle. Emily also talked about the importance of balance in the classroom:

Maybe we just need to take a step back and really think of our priorities and think of where and how we should prioritize our time. And I also think the idea of

considering mental health as part of the equation is important, and not just the students mental health but also our own as well. Like I'm trying to be very careful not to assign anything that I'm not going to enjoy grading.

Emily brings up the issue of mental health which is very relevant in regard to the pandemic because everyone was going through something throughout these stressful times. She emphasizes on the professors' mental health matters as well by saying how important it is for them to prioritize their time. This part reminded me of Sophia's comments on how you shouldn't drive yourself crazy by being available all the time. People were living in fear of getting Covid-19, we had to quarantine, social distance, wear masks, and at the same time wonder when everything would go back to normal. Our world has completely changed because of Covid-19, and we need to focus on our mental health during times like these. One of the main priorities for professors and educators should be their own mental health and their students.

Community

Another common theme was the topic of community which consists of social interaction, building relationships, encouraging communication, and constructive feedback. The classroom inherently becomes a community of people who are trying to learn something together, and educators need to be aware of this and help create the best kind of community for learning which involves there being a safe space, open communication, and helpful feedback. One of the biggest challenges that emerged during the pandemic for professors who had never taught online before and were expected to teach remotely was building community in an online classroom environment. This is why it was such a common theme throughout the interviews. One of the main ways to build

community in the classroom is to encourage social interaction, so that the students can learn to work together and help each other. Sophia brought up some of the ways that she encourages this kind of interaction in the classroom.

One of the things that I want them to do is what you would do in an academic collaborative community. Once they start to know what their peer is working on, I want them to keep an eye out for anything that might be of interest to their peer's research, and that is a form of collaboration and support, and they get points for doing that.

So, one of the ways she promotes collaboration and community in the classroom is by giving points to students who help their peers and I think this is a great strategy for building community in the classroom. She does this by encouraging students to become invested in each other's research projects. One of the issues that professors had with Zoom classes is that they felt less connected to their students because there were many cases where most of their students wouldn't show their faces on Zoom, so it felt like they were talking to a screen with just a name instead of a person. Some of the professors that I interviewed required their students to turn on their cameras, but some felt as if that was unnecessary or crossing a line. In order to build a stronger community, professors had to come up with new means of interaction such as the chat in Zoom, breakout rooms, and conferences. Community in the classroom is very important, but so is the community of faculty members. Many professors, including Emily, sought out advice from other educators that had more experience than her. She said,

Also, talk to other people around you and find out what they're doing. We have a listserv, and we have workshops, and we have teaching circles where people go

and share what they're using and they're teaching and how it's helping them. So, taking advantage of the community of teachers around you would be a big thing that I would tell them to do.

Many educators who had no experience with online teaching and were not prepared for the big shift to remote teaching went to others who had more experience than them for guidance. This is one of the reasons why building community in all environments is important because you never know who could end up helping you when something happens. The pandemic simply reinforced the importance of community in the classroom. James brought up another strategy that he used to help build community in the online classroom. “The first thing I did was make sure that there was some sort of discussion pretty much every week. provided those opportunities, put students in groups with no outcome expectation to say like you're in a group now do without what you will.” He made sure to give the students an opportunity to interact with each other and also put little to no expectations as to what they could do in their groups. It seems that his goal with this strategy was to build relationships among the students in order to foster communication and community.

Empathy

The final common theme is empathy which is when a person shows the ability to understand and share the feelings of someone else. An example of this in the interviews I conducted was when a professor pointed out that they like to give their students an opportunity to go over the content of the class, so that they have some knowledge to base their discussion on instead of feeling stupid for not knowing something. The professor took into consideration how the student might feel if they had to contribute to something

they didn't understand yet, so this was a good example of a professor empathizing with a student. This theme wasn't directly mentioned, but instead was represented when a professor took how students felt or thought into consideration. Empathy is one of the underlying reasons why professors would try to understand what their students were going through and come up with ways to make the classroom a safe, comfortable space to learn. The interviews demonstrated that the pandemic made professors realize how important it is to have empathy and to understand that everyone was going through a rough time. Sometimes just knowing that you're not the only one struggling makes it easier for you. Emily really emphasizes a perspective full of empathy when teaching and speaks about what lingering effects this whole experience will have on professors and students:

Well, I hope that we won't forget this idea of human interaction being the most important part of teaching and that we won't forget that each student is a human being with their own stories and their own situations and circumstances and trauma. We should always give students the benefit of the doubt and believe them. Like if a student sent me an email telling me that, oh my god this happened to me and I don't want to give any specific details, I say I believe you. I always start from the point of view of I believe you.

This kind of perspective that she is arguing for reminds me of the saying "innocent until proven guilty" which has a similar mindset of believing the person unless they give you a reason not to. This perspective seems to have worked for the law, so it definitely seems fair enough for the classroom as well. Emily points out that every student has their own circumstances and trauma, so that's why we should be kind and

empathetic since we never really know what someone could be going through. Although Emily focused on empathy, this was the least common theme I coded for in the interviews. I think this was because empathy can intersect a lot with mindfulness, so many times that category took the attention away from empathy. These two categories have a lot in common with one another, but since mindfulness is more ambiguous, it was able to categorize more circumstances than empathy could. Many of the themes found in these interviews easily overlap with one another and empathy is the one that can really be applied to every theme. For example, in order to build community, you need to understand how to make the students comfortable, what they like, and how they're feeling. Charlie describes one of the ways that he does this by considering how the student might feel.

But I think so much of it [getting students to participate more] has to do with giving people an opportunity to prepare and feel comfortable contributing something. Right. Because nobody wants to look stupid, but if you give people the opportunity to prepare beforehand. I find that that really helps.

Charlie explained how making sure that you give the student to prepare for class beforehand is really important if you want them to participate because a student doesn't want to look stupid in front of everyone just because they're unfamiliar with the topic. This is one of the strategies he suggests promoting student engagement and helps students feel more comfortable expressing themselves in the classroom. This idea of comfort relates to the idea of empathy because if you care about the students' comfort, then you technically care about how they're feeling.

V. DISCUSSION

The interviewees' responses help us to reflect upon the ways that professors were able to build a sense of community, as well as promote communication and collaboration in an online classroom. All of the participants shared their own strategies for achieving a safe, collaborative community where students engage with and help one another. Some of these strategies included mindfulness practices, a catch-up schedule, and peer support. In the literature review, I brought together interdisciplinary secondary sources on teaching and learning which relate to the experiences described in many of the interviewee's responses. For example, "COVID-19 and its impact on education, social life and mental health of students: A survey" states that the effects that peer-to-peer interactions have in the school environment may not be possible in an online setting. This is refuted by Sophia, when she argues that any objective that can be accomplished in a traditional classroom can be translated into an online environment in order to achieve the same objective. The way might not be the same, but the same effects like motivating the students and having them learn social skills are all possible with a mindset like Sophia's. Similarly, the webinar "Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning" stated that "Professors can create an optimal learning environment by building relationships with students and making themselves available to those who need help." This strategy that Dr. Imad brings up has a lot in common with Sophia's strategy of creating a catch-up schedule for her students and being available at certain times for them.

All of the interviewees agreed that the pandemic was going to have plenty of lingering effects not only on educators, but on students as well. Some of the lingering effects of the pandemic on online writing instruction include new teaching strategies

based on more flexible principles, the way that educators are prepared, and an increased appreciation for in-person classes. An example of one of these new teaching strategies which focus on being more flexible is James' advice on honoring the students that stray away from your expectations and giving them that space to express themselves. Every professor that I interviewed mentioned at least one thing that they started doing while teaching remotely or online during the pandemic that they will continue to use for their future classes. For example, Charlie mentioned how the idea of having a running chat similar to the one on Zoom could be helpful in a face-to-face class. It gives students the opportunity to ask questions and comment on things without disrupting the flow of the conversation. It also just gives the students another way to participate which may be more comfortable for some people who don't like to bring attention to themselves. Another example was when Sophia brought up her catch-up schedule which she created since a lot of students were falling behind on their work, so she created this system based on flexibility and accountability. This system she created is a good example of how professors had to learn how to be flexible with their assignments and deadlines during the pandemic.

There were various themes throughout the interviews which were related or a part of one another, such as mindfulness and empathy. Both of these themes deal with being considerate of the student and what they are going through. Empathy is more focused on the emotional aspect of it, while mindfulness covers a wider spectrum of things that a teacher needs to be aware of. Mindfulness can also be called attention literacy, and Wenger writes "attention literacy can be seen as a legitimate educational concern in our modern world where technology is a given and the shape of our writing and the pace of

our thinking are inevitably influenced by our networked lives” (58). This definition of mindfulness brings attention to how influential technology can be to our writing and mindset. An example of attention literacy could be found in Emily’s interview where she states, “I think the pandemic has really helped me think a lot more about the student’s situation and which activities, they might find the most rewarding, in terms of, you know, intellectually but also mentally and psychologically, and also being very careful and a lot more flexible with the workload.” In this quote, she is being mindful of her students’ circumstances and what kind of activities they might benefit from more. Mindfulness and empathy are also related to the concept of community because in order to function within a community, it is essential to have emotional intelligence, awareness, and social skills. Mindfulness also can be related to the topic of balance because there needs to be a certain amount of awareness in order for someone to understand how to balance their time and effort. We saw this in Charlie’s interview responses, which detailed how he encouraged participation in a way that helped the students feel like they were in a safe, comfortable space to share and his reflective practices. Many of these categories intersect and overlap with one another, but that makes sense since they all serve one purpose. That purpose is to find the best way to adapt and translate an in-person writing and rhetoric class to the online classroom.

The themes which were the most common among all of the interviews were mindfulness, and then flexibility and empathy. I think that mindfulness was the most popular theme because it is one of, if not the most important skills a person can have especially when teaching. Many obstacles such as stress, anxiety, and depression can be reduced in the classroom by implementing mindfulness practices. These benefits not only

apply to the students, but also to the teacher as well. Mindfulness is a growing area of research where mindful online teaching practices need to be further studied.

Overall, the professors that I interviewed had many different approaches and interesting teaching strategies that they shared. I thought it was impressive how much effort certain professors put into being flexible or mindful such as Sophia with her catch-up schedule for students and Charlie with his reflective practices. Many of these strategies that they discussed show how much hard work and dedication it takes to teach. Based on the results of this study, there have been advances made in the field of online writing instruction due to the pandemic. These advances include a shift to a more flexible and mindful pedagogy as well as professors becoming more inclined to include technology in their classroom. This experience was stressful and made life more difficult for everyone, however, there are many lessons and good things that can be learned from all of this. Though limited to four interviews, this study is just one example of the positive takeaways of the pandemic and it is important to continue this kind of research, so that we can continue to reflect upon different teaching experiences and learn new ways to advance the field of online writing instruction.

VI. CONCLUSION

The conversation of how the pandemic has influenced online writing instruction has just begun to circulate in the field of writing and rhetoric. Although a few writing and composition journals have recently published articles related to this topic such as *College Composition and Communication* and *Composition Studies*, there still seems to be a lack of articles in this field of research since the topic has manifested so recently. My thesis helps to fill that gap in primary research on the question of how writing instructors

adapted by providing insight into what they went through. Some of the specific questions that my thesis helps to answer include, “In what ways did Writing and Rhetoric professors respond or adapt to the shift to remote synchronous and online teaching during the pandemic?”, “How did this whole experience change their pedagogy?”, and “What teaching strategies did they use to build community, promote active learning, teach digital literacy, and address trauma in the online/remote classroom?” There are still many questions that remain to be answered such as “In what ways did the pandemic affect students?” and “What should professors do to be better prepared in case another pandemic happens again?”

The shift to remote teaching created the concept of pandemic pedagogy which is an accumulation of all the changes that educators had to make during the pandemic to teach more efficiently. These new ideas will have an effect on how Writing and Rhetoric professors choose to teach in the future. The article “Pandemic Pedagogy: What We Learned from the Sudden Transition to Online Teaching and How It Can Help Us Prepare to Teach Writing in an Uncertain Future” written by Jennifer Sheppard provides some insight on the concept of pandemic pedagogy by reporting their findings from a hyperlocal programmatic survey on writing instructors’ experiences in moving teaching online during the coronavirus pandemic. As Sheppard writes, “One of the most revealing comments in our survey focused on the perceived need to redesign curriculum and pedagogy around available technologies” (4). The instructors that I interviewed had to redesign their curriculum and pedagogy in this way because they were left with no other choice than to conduct their classes through Zoom or completely online. This is a good

representation of how our curriculums and pedagogies are shaped by technology and the advances that it makes.

My interviews provided more insight into the underlying motivators and reasons why professors used certain methods or strategies when adapting their pandemic pedagogy. For example, Dr. Mays Imad's webinar on "Trauma-Informed Teaching and Learning" talks about the concept of trauma-informed pedagogy and how trauma can affect our learning, and one of common themes discussed in my findings, empathy, relates to this topic because it is the underlying reason as to why we care about the trauma that our students go through. The professors I interviewed were very concerned for students' traumatic experiences and did their best to create a safe environment where students can talk about what they're going through and where they can communicate with the instructor if they need them to be more flexible. The results of my study support my argument that the themes which were found in the interviews are the foundation or the origin of why the key areas of interest that I chose to focus on are so important for teaching online writing instruction remotely or online. This study only goes as far as to research the effects of the pandemic on writing professors, but if anyone wishes to expand upon this research, then it would be interesting to see what kind of perspective students have gained from their experiences learning online during the pandemic. My work does not represent the full range of experiences and changes to pedagogy that happened during the pandemic; however, I believe that it adds to the existing conversation and helps professors learn more ways they can create a comfortable, safe, and efficient learning space whether it is online or in-person.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions

1. In what ways did the pandemic influence your teaching?
2. What teaching strategies did you apply to build a sense of community in the online classroom?
3. In what ways did you promote communication in the online classroom?
4. In what ways did you promote collaboration among students?
5. How did you develop your pedagogy to address the trauma caused by the pandemic?
6. What kind of advice would you give to another professor who is planning to teach remotely for the first time?
7. What are the biggest adaptations you had to come up with during the big shift to remote teaching?
8. What do you think will be the possible lingering effects of the pandemic on professors and students?
9. What were the biggest challenges you faced while teaching during the pandemic?
10. What did you learn from this whole experience that you will continue to apply in your classes?