RESEARCH ARTICLE

Equalizing student and teacher: Using COVID-19 to (re)imagine curriculum

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 created an opportunity to (re)envision students as partners in curriculum development and the curriculum process. Understanding the design and delivery of courses as a flattened hierarchy, particularly with graduate students as partners, is the focus of this study. This article reports findings from research undertaken collaboratively with students as partners in developing a new approach for conducting a capstone course and project. This research was enacted at a research-intensive university in the United States in 2020 and 2021. We describe the need for the shift in stance to students as partners in our institution as well as what the findings indicate as imperatives for teachers in both K–12 settings and institutions of higher education. The findings indicate how teachers' mental health and experiences of stress were affected by specific attributes of the pandemic and pandemic teaching (which aligns with the majority of COVID-19 research in education), as well as how some learned to cope with these demands. Findings also indicate the need for flexibility in all learning environments.

KEYWORDS

curriculum development, capstone, mental health, teaching, flexible learning

COVID-19 reminded researchers to consider the students' role in curriculum (Gravett et al., 2020; Cook-Sather et al., 2021). Like many in higher education, our university shifted quickly to online instruction while striving to maintain high-quality student experiences. We sought to understand the essentials for our students, and we were driven in teacher education to make

things as straightforward as possible during a crisis for public educators. This involved revising curriculum alongside students instead of relying solely on program data (e.g., grades, outcomes on key assessments, retention/graduation rates). Specifically, our work stands apart in the COVID-19 literature because we partnered with students to investigate solutions for a course highlighting their learning across a Master of Education (M.Ed.) program during COVID-19 and potentially post-COVID-19.

Envisioning students as partners (SaP) in research is not a stretch in graduate education courses. However, many course designs recreate hierarchical positionings with professors as experts (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Dwyer, 2018). Building dialogic (Fecho, 2014) relationships that equalize student and teacher requires "shared responsibility and joint ownership for teaching, learning, and assessment" (Matthews, 2017, p. 1). In this project, students in a U.S.-based Master of Education (M.Ed.) program simultaneously collaborated as research partners in developing a new approach for conducting the program's capstone course (i.e., a culminating project that integrates what was learned) (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2022) and completed their own capstones. The students went beyond consumption of resources and created a new approach to this course. As such, this new version of the course and the accompanying research project were also transformative for the faculty researchers, who, as academics/faculty, "have typically possessed . . . sole agency and authority in conceptualising, designing, implementing, evaluating, and researching educational practices in higher education" (Cook-Sather et al., 2018, p. 3).

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in a capstone course in which students became partners in curriculum revision, data generation, and analysis (Chick, 2017). Henceforth, we will refer to the students/in-service teachers as *partners* and their students as *students*. All partners (a) collaborated as critical friends; (b) conducted research, inquired about the process, and refined curriculum; and (c) collaboratively generated knowledge. Additionally, seven helped develop codes, four analyzed capstones, and three co-wrote this manuscript (see Table 1).

Table 1. Partners' contributions

CONTRIBUTION CATEGORIES	PARTNERS (N)
(1) Collaborated as critical friends, adapted curriculum, conducted research, inquired about the process, and generated knowledge	7
(2) Made all category 1 contributions and helped develop codes	2
(3a) Made all category 2 contributions and conducted additional analyses	2
(3b) Made all category 2 contributions and co-wrote this manuscript	1
(4) Made all category 1, 2, 3a, and 3b contributions	2

LITERATURE REVIEW

We begin this literature review with the role of students in graduate programs and engagement with SaP. Next, we review research on teacher stress and teaching through crisis before presenting our research question.

Co-generation of knowledge in self-study

Approaching the capstone project alongside students (as partners and critical friends) introduced a collaborative mindset in our research team, which allowed us to make program revisions informed by the connections between faculty, students, and curricula. This included the decision to have students conduct self-study research, a qualitative method "used to represent autobiographical inquiry with critical and reflective revisiting" (Samaras, 2011, p. 103) of teaching experiences. Thus, the capstone project focuses on reflection, with conclusive findings/results as secondary objectives (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017). Components of self-study provide opportunities to examine what is said to be valued (e.g., equity, student-learning, community) and what is demonstrated in teaching practices (Austin & Senese, 2007). This examination and "critical and reflective revisiting" produce details that make the reflection "usable" (Samaras, 2011, p. 103).

In the previous version of the capstone course, during the first major U.S. wave of COVID-19, we determined self-study to be an appropriate methodology due in part to the flexibility of design and implementation in reflective research studies (Samaras, 2011). However, to simplify the task, research questions and relevant literature on teaching during a crisis were provided by the instructor. In creating the new version of the course, greater emphasis was placed on promoting engagement and allowing for "self-directed and autonomous learning" (Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018, p. 48). Specifically, it became imperative to allow students to determine research questions that were suited to their teaching context.

Relevant literature on stress and crisis

Drawing on Bala and Kahn's (2021) observations about course/program redundancy, the pandemic prompted us to "question what matters and is necessary" (p. 1). It also prompted us to investigate teacher stress, particularly when teaching during a crisis, to better understand our partners' experiences.

Teacher stress

Although definitions of teacher stress vary, all describe the psychological, emotional, and physiological distress caused by a teacher's work. High rates of stress among teachers have been consistently documented (Kyriacou, 2011). Teacher stress has been associated with detrimental effects on teachers, including reduced occupational commitment (Gilbert et al., 2014), lower job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017), and burnout (Herman et al., 2018; Yu et al., 2015). However, teacher stress also affects students and school communities. Herman et al. (2018) found that teachers who reported high levels of stress and low levels of coping were more likely to reprimand students and less likely to engage with students' families. Most alarmingly, self-reported depression was significantly more likely among students of high stress/low coping teachers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, stress levels increased significantly in the United States (Park et al., 2020) and around the world (e.g., Gritsenko et al., 2020; Islam et al., 2021). For teachers, however, COVID-induced stress was compounded by increased occupational stress, which was exacerbated by factors including the abrupt change from face-to-face to virtual instruction (Klapproth et al., 2020). Some even considered teachers "frontline workers during the pandemic" (Pressley, Ha & Learn, 2021, p. 367).

Teaching through crisis

To provide educational continuity during a crisis, teachers must meet students' academic and emotional needs (Ash & Davis, 2009; Auger et al., 2004). As Sommers (2002) explains, "school curricula material, equipment, supplies and buildings may not be available [during a crisis], but if teachers are present and able to respond, educating children can continue" (p. 25). Even before COVID-19, research has demonstrated that digital content cannot replace interacting with a teacher face-to-face (Ash & Davis, 2009; Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020). Moreover, Both Owusu-Fordjour et al. (2020) and Ash and Davis (2009) suggest that teaching during a crisis calls attention to inequity in district infrastructure for student e-learning supports and parent-school connections. This leads to questions about how individuals engage with students and teach during a crisis like COVID-19.

Research question

The research question guiding this study is: How did our partners respond to the forced changes brought about by COVID-19 in terms of pedagogy and understanding of teaching context?

METHODS

Context of the study

This study is situated in the culminating course of an M.Ed. program, in which students write a capstone research paper to illustrate their transformation over the course of the program. Capstone students are classroom teachers, often with substantial teaching experience. Yet, as novice researchers, they are treated as "customers or consumers" in higher education (Cook-Sather & Felten, 2017; Cook-Sather et al., 2018, p. 2). This new version of the course was collaboratively designed as students completed their own project. This was a transformative experience for the SaP team. The transformation was informed by previous research on students as partners and the understanding that working with SaP involves "complex, context-specific practice[s] that [are] ultimately relational" (Matthews, Cook-Sather, Acai et al., 2019, p. 285).

Research design

The methodology involved a layered approach including self-study and narrative inquiry alongside students as partners. Partners conducted self-study research (Samaras et al., 2016) as the culmination of an M.Ed. program. Self-study draws directly from teachers' personal experiences within their teaching contexts and requires collaborative inquiry using a critical friend framework (Samaras et al., 2016). This framework allows partners multiple opportunities to reflect upon their teaching and students' learning during the pandemic. It also allows self-

study to be transparent and systematic as teachers strive to make their practice explicit and generate knowledge about teaching and learning practices. Our partners' individual self-studies became our primary data sources.

The stories our partners told faculty and those stories told to partners by K–12 students during the pandemic embodied narrative inquiry. The stories were ever-changing: one moment partners felt hopeful that technology could save the day, only to have desperation set in the next day as students went "off the grid" for weeks at a time. Thus, making meaning of the capstone reports through narrative inquiry was a powerful experience in which our partners were "both living their stories in an ongoing experiential text and telling their stories as words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 4). The narrative inquiry framework allowed faculty and partners to tell each partner's story and the story of the group as a sample of voices from teachers across the state. We framed the experience as students as partners, as opposed to researcher and practitioner, to maintain focus on "the research process as one in which all participants see themselves as participants in the [research] community" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 4).

SaP work is based upon the premise that students and teachers should have a reciprocal relationship and shared responsibility (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Matthews, Dwyer, Russell et al., 2019). In previous iterations of the capstone course, students conducted research featuring their own classrooms and investigated moments of transformation. This was not, however, SaP—neither the curriculum nor the project was designed collaboratively with faculty. True reciprocity was also missing; students completed a project to earn a grade but were not treated as equals in determining educational outcomes. However, when COVID-19 closed U.S. schools, faculty teaching graduate education courses wondered what to expect from their students, who were also teachers. How could faculty provide meaningful experiences for students while understanding the impossible situation they faced in their personal and professional lives? Therefore, we felt the need to explore "alternatives to 'getting back to normal,' which seems neither possible nor desirable" (Cook-Sather & Bala, 2022, p. 1). In part due to the program goal of transformative teaching, the research team decided to experiment with a self-study capstone research project where students would act as partners with faculty to develop shared ownership of and responsibility for learning and curriculum (Cook-Sather et al., 2014; Lubicz-Nawrocka, 2018).

Analysis

Partners indicated that they preferred for faculty to initiate analyses, which they did by reading all the self-studies before creating the initial set of codes. Using a similar inductive process, faculty then employed Atlas.ti (qualitative data analysis software) to aid in creating themes. Partners were asked to use the same inductive process to review, add to, edit, and revise the themes and codes.

Partners' analysis experiences were particularly important. Reading their own self-studies during the coding process, they were able to reflect on the data and its relevance as a narrative. They also forced meaningful connections as they coded other partners' self-studies, allowing deep analysis to occur concurrently with member checking. For example, during initial coding, a partner added the code "skepticism." A fantastic conversation ensued when one faculty researcher and two partners discussed the differences between "skepticism" and

"uncertainty." Ultimately, we kept both. The partners were correct that certain narratives surpassed uncertainty about COVID-19 (and its implications for teaching) into skepticism (i.e., is it possible to meet student needs remotely?). These moments illustrate the benefits of having students as partners.

FINDINGS

Codes were organized into four themes: stress, coping, and mental health; pedagogical changes; newly developed understandings; and use of resources. Findings for each theme are included below.

Stress, coping, and mental health

Partners addressed how pandemic teaching induced stress and affected their mental health, and how they attempted to manage these demands. Three codes denote stress-inducing emotions/experiences and three denote positive experiences that supported coping. The code "mental health" was applied when partners commented on relationships between their and/or their students' pandemic experiences and mental health.

Stress-inducing emotions and experiences

Half of our partners recognized how remote schooling induced feelings of isolation and fear in themselves and students. Although isolation and fear were common emotions at the time, the switch to remote instruction isolated teachers in unique ways. Specifically, one participant noted they "lost [their] personal connection with . . . students and families," as well as colleagues. Additionally, for those whose pedagogy was grounded in relationship-building and collaboration, isolation and fear interfered with what they deemed effective instruction.

Several partners expressed skepticism about the ability to meet student needs in the pandemic context. One described how her own "numbness" prevented her from supporting students and how "online learning exacerbated anything that was already making school difficult" for students (e.g., exceptionalities, financial demands). She was concerned that online teaching "was all about completing tasks as opposed to learning" and wondered whether it would cause more harm than good.

All partners addressed uncertainty in ways that evolved alongside the pandemic itself. When schools first shut down, they grappled with uncertainty about how COVID-19 would reshape the meaning of "school." While many resolved these initial uncertainties within weeks by identifying effective remote instructional practices, new uncertainties evolved about whether wellbeing and learning were mutually exclusive in the pandemic context. One partner reflected on "[the] tension between not wanting [students] to have gaps in their learning, but [also] understanding they may be struggling at home." Uncertainties evolved again by Fall 2020 as schools reopened despite the ongoing threat of COVID-19 and the politicization of masks. One partner predicted how "great uncertainty [at this time] would give rise to the possibility of a troublesome school year." Still others described uncertainty about which students they would have from day to day, or when they would be sent home to quarantine.

Positive experiences and coping

Partners found inspiration from creating classroom joy by reflecting on, appreciating, or attempting to recreate the joyful experiences of pre-COVID teaching. Often, they attempted to replicate the sense of community typically fostered in person by designing interactive learning activities or leaving class time for students to catch up. Another "exhibited emotions of hope and inspiration . . . to distract [herself] and students from the crisis at hand." Sharing joyful moments helped her support students' mental health and her own.

Only three partners discussed how district support helped them cope. Two noted specific policies or resources (e.g., increased flexibility for teachers, technical support for students/parents). The third, however, described a March 2020 email in which the county ensured that all school personnel "would still be paid throughout the academic year, despite not physically being at work." The email assuaged uncertainty plaguing faculty/staff at the time while demonstrating that their work was valued and safety prioritized.

Various partners discussed resilience when reflecting on what they learned about themselves and their students during the pandemic. Among students, resilience manifested in their "acceptance of digital learning," ability to "[stay] positive," "[willingness] to work hard and persevere through tough times," and academic success. Interestingly, partners' realizations about their own resilience often were tied directly to students' resilience. Partners noted how confidence in their ability to teach online increased thanks to the challenges they overcame during the pandemic, which in turn supported student resilience and learning.

Mental health

Partners connected their mental health to instructional effectiveness during pandemic teaching. Some attributed their (perceived) inability to meet students' academic needs to their own and/or students' mental health struggles. Similarly, many noted how COVID-19 "exposed the underlying needs of [their] students and community." Recognizing how students' contexts and backgrounds affect mental health, and therefore learning, inspired partners to address students' outside-of-school needs in the classroom. Still others' mental health diminished amid concerns about students' wellbeing and safety. One partner recalled "[grappling] with the fact that the pandemic became the much-needed downtime I was longing for [while] wondering if [students] and their families were okay." Overall, partners were unanimous in calling for greater attention to mental health throughout P–12 education.

Pedagogical changes

Teachers noted several pedagogical changes brought about by the pandemic. The most prevalent changes involved accommodating all learners, communication, engagement, and student collaboration. As with our other themes, there were positive and negative issues raised in each.

Accommodating all learners

Partners wrote about how the hybrid-flexible (HyFlex) teaching model posed particular challenges in making necessary accommodations for students. In HyFlex, students may attend in person, participate virtually, or watch a recording of the class asynchronously. While this model provides the most flexibility for students, it was challenging for our partners, who had to

plan for and attend to multiple audiences. Partners also grappled with the digital divide and accommodating instruction for students who lacked adequate internet access or otherwise could not access remote instruction. One partner recalled, "adapting to the needs of students is what all teachers do, but I did not know how to meet their needs in a virtual world." Partners learned that some students lacked access to web-enabled devices while others "only had access to computers late in the evening or on the weekends due to their parents using the computers for their own work." Similar disparities existed for other common school supplies, such that one partner had to modify activities "because we do not know the level of school supplies at a student's home."

Assessment was another concern, as partners expressed uncertainty about the purpose and fairness of assessments for online learning. A partner and math teacher described uncertainty about how to have students show their work online, which hindered her ability to assess students' thought processes. Another partner noted that students' inability to show their work interfered with her ability to "give more detailed feedback [and] hold them accountable for doing their own work." Partners necessarily "learned to be flexible and accommodate [assessments]" based on students' limited access to technology and limitations of the technology itself.

Communication

Partners discussed communication frequently in their self-studies, including extremely positive and negative experiences. Several noted that school/district leadership had "wonderful ways in which they communicated with all stakeholders (teachers, parents, community members)." One partner described how the administration "figuratively held our hands" following initial school closures and helped teachers feel "comfortable in a situation that was not." For others, however, "[the] lack of . . . solid community prior to the pandemic" could be seen "in [the] absence of effective two-way communication."

Many noted frustration that consistent efforts to communicate with students and families were not reciprocated. As one partner noted, "I was willing and even eager to communicate online with students, but my students were much more reluctant to communicate with me and each other in those online platforms." To increase communication with students during remote instruction, partners used strategies like "host[ing] virtual office hours [and bringing] fun to these help sessions through games such as Kahoot." Another partner recognized the chat feature as an affordance of online learning platforms, which seems to increase communication and participation among "students who often would not verbally ask questions in class."

A consistent refrain in the self-studies was how COVID-19 highlighted the importance of consistent two-way communication between families and schools. Partners saw communication as necessary to "foster relationships with both students and parents through the virtual setting." Partners developed innovative communication channels to keep their community connected, including "a social media account for other teachers, parents, and family members to be able to get a glimpse of what it is like to be in my classroom." They also employed digital tools such as Padlet to keep everyone informed of class activities.

Engagement

Engagement was a major concern in the move to online learning. Partners found that "students were not as engaged [in] the online setting and often did not complete assignments." One partner reported that approximately a quarter of students "never completed an assignment," while another noted more than 80% of her students were missing "several formative assessments." Similarly, partners noticed that certain students never logged into their digital classrooms. When one partner examined student participation data through her school's learning management systems, she found "that students are not interacting with our content because they simply are not logging into the platform." Others observed students logging in but not participating. One participant was particularly troubled by the lack of "consistent participation amongst the students with disabilities," who were not receiving the services typically administered at school.

Newly developed understandings

Codes within the theme of newly developed understandings were permanent changes in teaching, realizations about teaching, student responsibilities, inequitable accommodations, assumptions about COVID-19, student success, and teachers-as-caregivers. Findings from these codes are described in the following section.

Two codes, permanent changes due to COVID-19 and realizations about teaching, overlapped in interesting ways. For example, referring to the use of web-based tools, a partner said, "these sites and resources are not just for pandemic teaching; they have revolutionized the way I will teach from now on." Similar realizations were repeated by many partners. Another common realization about permanent changes was the need to stretch professionally. Partners noted how "limitations for all of us were brought to light" during the pandemic.

The codes student responsibilities and inequitable accommodations demonstrated how COVID-19 heightened partners' awareness of students' (and families') reliance on services provided in school. Reflecting on Hy-Flex teaching, a partner indicated, "my face-to-face students have access to all of these materials because I have them in my classroom, but distance learners are not guaranteed to have a printer, scissors, and glue readily available." Another commented on "the inability to provide accommodations for students with special needs" when teaching remotely. Concerns about the inability to provide accommodations for students with disabilities were repeated frequently.

The sense of access to teachers and community was frequently repeated in partners' comments about teachers-as-caregivers. Partners cared deeply for their students and expressed concern about how the pandemic disrupted their ability to demonstrate this care. Many found that "[the] quick transition to digital teaching . . . impacted [their] ability . . . to personalize student learning, provide emotional support . . . and connect with the community." Another expressed concern about whether she would "be able to chaperone prom [or] see [her students] walk across the stage for graduation." Many partners described how the pandemic increased the importance of addressing students' emotions and wellbeing in the classroom. As one explained, "I found that teaching math amidst a global pandemic was less about teaching math and more about managing students," in reference to the challenges students faced outside of school, which nonetheless impacted their learning.

Use of resources

Within this theme, "resources" were defined broadly, ranging from praise of web-based applications as resources to augment remote instruction to students' inability to complete work due to lack of reliable internet access. In fact, four of the five codes within the theme refer to ways resources made teaching/learning more challenging during the pandemic, while one code (digital resources) involved resources participants found helpful.

Partners spoke of the lack of district support in the transition to remote instruction and the resultant increase in workload. When one partner asked her mentor-teacher for help using Google Classroom, her mentor said, "I am unsure of how to properly use this software, but we are expected to make our students and their families use it without proper training." Another described how she had been given resources to help her create instructional videos; however, "many students struggled to learn the material from watching a video." Even after spending substantial time creating instructional videos, she had to spend more time creating non-video resources to share with those students who needed additional support.

Two of the codes in this theme (inequitable technology access and working without supervision) involved students' lack of resources and/or the school's failure to ensure students had the resources they needed at home. Inequitable internet and technology access during remote instruction has been noted in mainstream media and previous research. What is unique about our partners' accounts, however, is how they juxtapose students' resilience and resourcefulness in "consistently finding ways to access the Internet and complete assignments despite barriers such as a lack of devices and Internet access at home" with the inadequate measures taken by schools to meet students' needs.

Partners noted similar inequities regarding students' lack of supervision, which left them to "[manage] online learning on their own." A partner noted that "students [were] not prepared for . . . the responsibility and time management" necessary for self-directed online learning. Still others recognized that students who had to work during the pandemic and missed synchronous class time still "found time throughout the day to complete their assigned work, even if it was 3:00am!" Although the resilience required to learn and complete schoolwork in these circumstances deserves recognition, it should not have been necessary, which is why the lack of resources and support provided by schools saddened and frustrated partners.

The final code in this theme involved digital resources and what partners learned about using such resources effectively. As one partner reflected, "students are all now educated on how to use remote learning platforms, even at the elementary level, and many of the technological tools we might have previously dismissed we have now embraced." Others expounded on how the normalization of digital resources as part of pandemic teaching will improve future educational experiences. All partners who commented on this topic agreed that despite the stress, they became better teachers by being forced to identify and use digital resources for instruction during the pandemic.

DISCUSSION

The relevance of our themes (stress, coping, and mental health; pedagogical changes due to newly developed understandings; and use of resources) in teachers' experiences during the pandemic are well represented in mass media and recent research. However, the ways in

which these themes overlapped and intersected with one another in our partners' self-study research adds to the literature on students as partners. In the following sections, we put our findings from each theme in conversation with other themes and literature on COVID-19 and its impact on teachers and teaching.

Stress, coping, and mental health

Our findings expand on copious research indicating teacher stress increased and mental health declined during the pandemic (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021; Kim & Ashbury, 2020 Klapproth et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Pressley, 2021). Our partners witnessed how stress, anxiety, and depression interfered with instructional effectiveness and students' ability to learn, which fueled their desire to find ways to support students' wellbeing, along with their own. Specifically, partners established personal and professional goals around wellbeing/mental health and made strategic use of resources they developed or identified to take on the challenge of creating positive learning environments during a pandemic. These behaviors typify proactive coping, (Greenglass, 2002), a form of coping that (a) focuses on preventing future stress, (b) is goal-oriented, and (c) frames demands as challenging, not threatening (Greenglass & Fiksenbaum, 2009). Proactive coping among teachers has been linked to increased wellbeing (Bermejo-Toro et al., 2016), self-efficacy (Verešová & Malá, 2012), engagement (Bermejo-Toro et al., 2015, Christian et al., 2011), and reduced emotional exhaustion and burnout (Duli, 2015; Nizielski et al., 2013, Pietarinen et al., 2013).

The self-study research process that partners undertook may have facilitated development of new understandings, approaches, and perspectives central to proactive coping. The self-study required partners to reflect on their pandemic teaching experiences in ways that allowed them to think deeply about challenges they faced but also to identify resources that could help them meet these challenges. It also required them to reflect on what they learned about themselves, their students, and their communities, and how their experiences (and reflections) should inform future instruction. In doing so, they developed strategies for how to use resources and make pedagogical changes to meet students' needs and achieve goals that supported their personal and professional wellbeing.

Pedagogical changes due to newly developed understandings

Teachers were forced to make sweeping pedagogical changes during the pandemic (Kim & Ashbury, 2020), including adopting new technologies and web-based teaching tools (Agarwal et al., 2021; Krouska et al., 2022 Tawafak et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2019). Our findings add to existing literature on pedagogical change by conveying our partners' perspectives on the changes they felt forced to make. In line with previous research, our partners recognized benefits in transitioning to online learning (Krouska et al., 2022, while also indicating how forced changes, in the absence of adequate resources and support from school/district leaders, caused stress and dramatically increased workload. They also expressed frustration about how these changes exacerbated inequities for students who lacked access to necessary technology. Although approximately "95 percent of all 3- to 18-year-olds had [internet] access in 2019" (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2017, para. 4), only 72% of households in rural America have internet access (Vogels, 2021). Furthermore, of the 95% with internet access, only 88% access the internet through a computer, with at least 6% accessing internet via

smartphone (NCES, 2017). While smartphones can be utilized, they are less effective for online education and have limited utility without expensive data plans (Basilaia & Kvavadze, 2020).

A positive change came when some districts learned to effectively communicate with families. However, the stress of losing comfortable forms of communication and failing to hear from some students was described repeatedly by our partners. From 2020 to 2021, public school enrollment in the state decreased by 36,000 students (Butler & Morley, 2021). Once many schools returned to in-person learning in 2021, daily absentee rates in the U.S. were approximately 11%, with a 13% absentee rate for high schools (Kirkland & Young, 2021). Thus, in addition to discussing changes due to hybrid or online teaching, partners were forced to manage changes related to locating absent students and helping them catch up on missed curriculum (Butler & Morley, 2021). These changes meant developing new understandings about the barriers to learning facing American children during COVID-19 (Beames et al., 2021; Butler & Morley, 2021; Kirkland & Young, 2021).

Use of resources

All partners described resources in their narratives. Some resources made work easier and satisfied partners' goals (e.g., a Facebook group to communicate with parents) while others felt unnecessarily complicated and increased demands on time (e.g., recreating learning materials for new formats). Currently, there is ample literature detailing resources that were helpful for online learning during the pandemic (Garcia-Morales et al., 2021; Lawrie, 2021). What is absent from the literature, however, is whether and how certain resources will remain relevant and beneficial for teachers and students post-pandemic. To decrease stress and mental health burdens, schools/districts should develop and disseminate plans and resources to support teachers, students, and parents if it is necessary to transition to online learning again in the future (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

The final research team consisted of three female faculty, three female graduate students, and one male graduate student. This correlates to the literature on the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women in education (Baker et al., 2021; Beames et al., 2021). Teacher workloads increased during the pandemic, as did the responsibilities of primary caregivers (Beames et al., 2021). This study expands upon research indicating that stress and mental health are factors that must be addressed post-COVID for educators (Beames et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2022; Saltzman et al., 2021). The primary benefit of focusing on the needs of the teachers when working as research partners with faculty was the community created (Ntem et al., 2020; O'Shea, 2018). The findings, particularly within the themes of stress, coping, and mental health and newly developed understandings, are clear indicators of the emotional turmoil caused by COVID-19. Pursuit of the values "central to partnership praxis" such as "inclusivity, reciprocity, empowerment, trust, respect, courage" and communication motivated our inclusion of students as partners in exploring these shared experiences and researching them alongside faculty (Ntem et al., 2020, p. 1).

This research was approved by the researchers' University's Institutional Review Board.

NOTE ON CONTRIBUTORS

Megan Adams *is an associate professor of Reading Education in the Department of Secondary and Middle Grades Education at Kennesaw State University. Dr. Adams is a Qualitative Research Specialist and active member of the Interactive Research Methods Lab at Kennesaw State. Her research focuses on marginalized communities and structures needed for those communities, particularly children, to thrive. Her most recent publications have been in the* Journal of Ethnographic and Qualitative Research *and* Frontiers in Education*.*

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Anete *Vásquez* *is a professor of curriculum and instruction in the Department of Secondary and Middle Grades Education at Kennesaw State University. She serves as the coordinator of their 160-student EdD program and as assistant department chair. She has co-edited a Teachers College Press book on preparing teachers to work with diverse learners and co-authored two books for Routledge about working with multilingual students in non-sheltered, high school English classrooms. She has published articles in The ALAN Review, English Journal, Voices from the Middle, Action in Teacher Education, EDUTEC, and Teaching and Learning Inquiry. One of her favorite parts about her job is working with students and colleagues in the Interactive Research Methods Lab in her college at KSU.*

Alyssa Noland, Faith Castellano, Sharae Gowdie, and Paige Carter *were all students in Secondary and Middle Grades Education graduate programs. They are teachers in Georgia and are phenomenal advocates for children and families.*

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