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INTRODUCTION: EDUCATION AND TEACHER PREPARATION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: COPING, ADAPTATION, AND INNOVATION

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Welcome to the special issue on COVID-19 and education from the *Journal of Curriculum, Teaching, Learning and Leadership in Education.* Our journal is housed at the University of Nebraska Omaha, a metropolitan university with a strong commitment to serving the greater Omaha community. In this issue, the articles presented consider the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic not only in Nebraska, but throughout the United States. To begin, though, let us consider an editorial published in the Omaha World-Herald on November 21 of this year. Calling for greater support and recruitment, the editorial notes the significant burdens teachers in Omaha area schools have experienced since returning to classroom instruction in the fall of 2021. It observes:

> Staff vacancies force teachers to sub for others, take on additional students or even attempt to teach a subject for which they're not certified. Teachers are finding that after last year's topsy-turvy COVID-disrupted instructional year, the divergence in classmates' academic performance level is now exceptionally wide. Addressing that need requires more one-on-one attention with students—yet teachers now have reduced opportunity to provide that extra help. Meanwhile, the return of "normal" in-person school routines has revealed that a distressingly large percentage of students have returned to class without needed social skills, heightening teachers' frustrations over classroom management. (Omaha World Herald, 2021)

As the situation described above illustrates, among the many disturbing aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic is the exacerbation of our nation's already chronic teacher shortage. Records show teacher resignations in the Omaha Public School system increased in 2020-2021 compared with previous years (Nitcher, 2021). This is not unique to Nebraska, of course. Since more than 44 percent of new U. S. teachers were already leaving the profession within the first five years (Brown, 2020), it is perhaps not surprising that teachers are now even more likely to leave, or consider leaving, due to the pandemic-related stresses of the past year and a half. Combined with retirements, this creates a worrisome state of affairs for anyone concerned with education in the United States. The articles in this collection illustrate the tremendous efforts made at all levels of education, from practicing teachers to principals to teacher education faculty, to keep our public schools functioning and our children learning. But the pandemic has taken its toll, and we will need to apply what we have learned from coping with it if we are to keep the shortage of teachers from getting worse.

Of special concern at this time is that the pandemic is not over. The fantasy that this year, all would return to normal has not happened. Infections continue, with hospitalizations highest among the unvaccinated. Social distancing and masking continue to be needed, despite complaints from many parents. Last year, teachers and teacher educators responded to the crisis with strength, creativity, and caring, as the articles in this issue will show. They changed their teaching methods in major ways, in the shortest possible period of time. They learned to teach simultaneously in person and virtually, in classrooms full of potentially contagious students and without access to vaccines. They redesigned lessons for their students to work on at home. They coached parents to help their children with lessons in ways never needed before. And they risked their lives every day they walked into a classroom.

Just as health care workers were lionized for their heroic efforts early in the pandemic, teachers were also called heroes for a while. But this year, with the crisis supposedly "over" and the public demanding a return to "normal," teachers have returned to their classrooms with an even more difficult job. They are working with students who have missed out on both academic and social skills. Conditions that increase the likelihood of infections (such as ventilation systems in schools) have not been addressed in school buildings. Evolution of new variants of the virus will continue to put students and teachers at risk, with the situation exacerbated by the politicization of mask mandates and vaccinations. Some teachers have simply found it too much to bear, and have left the profession. But for those who have not, and remain teaching, the lessons we learned while in "crisis mode"

must now be applied to the ongoing struggle of recovering, reclaiming, and renewing their educational mission. We believe the articles in this issue offer many such valuable lessons.

To the extent that the pandemic is ever considered "over," we know that education in the United States will never be the same. COVID-19 has forced us to examine many uncomfortable truths: inequities in educational resources and health care, the willingness of the American public to risk teachers' health so children can play sports, our national dependence on schools to provide daycare so parents can work, and the devastating effects on family income when that free daycare is not available. It has also necessitated a hard look at instructional delivery systems, not only in terms of inequities in internet access, but in the recognition that remote instruction can be effective and empowering, sometimes allowing people to participate in education who otherwise could not. (This was brought to my mind recently as I conducted a class on Zoom that included two nursing mothers).

The studies in this collection, some from our own University of Nebraska Omaha and others from different parts of the United States, illustrate the "all hands on deck" nature of pandemic-related research, with efforts focused in schools and at universities, and from teachers, principals, and faculty members. We have research about practicing teachers and teachers in training, as well as studies that include principals and graduate students in leadership. An historical perspective on the 1918 influenza pandemic provides insights and lessons from the past.

COVID-19 and Classroom Teachers

Educators at all levels, from classroom teachers to higher education administration, had to make decisions quickly in the spring of 2020. Let us consider first the papers related to classroom teachers, since the pandemic forced them to make the most radical changes.

We begin with a study by Frances Hamilton, Dana Skelley, and Kimberly Hile, all from the University of Alabama in Huntsville. Last year, they surveyed practicing teachers from seventeen school systems in Tennessee and Alabama about the impact on students and student learning in a virtual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their phenomenological design and analysis revealed four themes related to virtual learning: personal perceptions, instruction, impact on students, and communication. Although many of the teachers reported negative experiences with virtual learning, both for themselves and for their students, some positive changes included gaining new technology skills and increased communication with their students' caregivers.

A study focused on virtual learning is valuable because the Covid-19 pandemic probably caused the largest change in instructional methods, in the shortest period of time, in the history of American education. Of necessity, teachers learned the technology required to develop their virtual teaching skills and put them to use with minimal preparation time. Concerns remain about the effectiveness of this kind of instruction and the learning loss experienced by students, and Hamilton et al. note that one effect of the stress from the pandemic could be the exacerbation of teacher shortages. They offer suggestions for how some of the negative impacts of the pandemic might be ameliorated, and share their predictions about how virtual learning may continue to be utilized, now that so many teachers have gained the skills to use the technology.

Next, a group of researchers from several locations report on a survey of 33 early-career mathematics teachers and eight supervising school principals in California. James Martinez (University of Tennessee Knoxville) collaborated with Kelly Gomez Johnson and Frances Anderson (University of Nebraska Omaha) and Frederick Uy (California State University Office of the Chancellor) on the only article in the collection that explores the perspectives of principals, who of course assumed great responsibility for keeping schools functioning. The survey results included a variety of associations among teacher perceptions of support and their efficacy and job satisfaction in the face of challenging circumstances. In particular, feeling that "My principal cares about me" was associated with a number of positive outcomes, such as professional accomplishment, feeling like part of a team, and connecting with both principals and teaching colleagues about best teaching strategies as a result of COVID-19. Participants who were school principals expressed confidence in their ability to support teachers as they adapted instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to evaluate their online teaching appropriately.

In another study of classroom teachers, Christina Wilcoxen (University of Nebraska Omaha) offers a look at what can happen when the worst pandemic in a century coincides with your first year of teaching. It is one thing for an experienced teacher to cope with the restrictions, changes, and stresses of a pandemic. This study illustrates how much more challenging it was for first-year teachers, particularly those whose student teaching, the final training that leads to certification, was also interrupted by school

closings, the switch to virtual learning, and everything else that took place in the spring of 2020. This paper offers a study of a very particular time in the lives of teachers—the transition into one's first year of teaching—when that transition happens at a very particular time in history—the year 2020. Nothing like this had happened before, and the study also describes an effective response to it, namely the induction efforts made by seven school districts and one teacher training program to support new teachers. As Wilcoxen notes, *induction* programs, such as the one described here, support beginning teachers as they transition into their own classrooms and provide guidance in meeting performance standards. The support comes from experienced mentor teachers, so this study describes not only the reactions of new teachers, but also the efforts and reflections of experienced teachers as they provided the support. The paper outlines changes in targeted mentoring and coaching actions (the actions most affected by COVID-19), compared with the same actions that occurred in the induction program in the year before the pandemic. Of particular interest is the way the study applied Moir's 1999 model of the stages of a first-year teacher (anticipation, survival, disillusionment, rejuvenation, and reflection) to what was likely one of the worst years in history to be a first-year teacher.

Training Teachers and Education Leaders

While the pandemic was changing the face of American education, future teachers and education leaders were still being trained. The obligation to provide teachers in training with opportunities to practice teaching skills remained, even in the face of school closures and the transition to virtual learning that took place in most public schools. Adaptations and innovations were required at the university level, and each of the next three studies offers a unique perspective on that process. A study by Paula Jakopovic, Jennifer Lemke, Tracie Reding, and Sheryl McGlamery, all of the University of Nebraska Omaha, reminds us that students cannot learn to be teachers without teaching—no amount of university classroom time will take the place of hands-on experience with real children. Yet in the pandemic year, teacher educators were faced with exactly this dilemma: how do preservice teachers learn how to plan and present lessons when they are not able to do so in their traditional field experiences, because the schools that provide those experiences are closed, or are offering only remote learning?

To adapt to the social distancing and remote learning taking place in their field placements, teacher education programs needed to be creative. These teacher education faculty members implemented a hybrid field experience model that included microteaching (an organized practice in front of peers, rather than children, that concentrates on a specific teaching behavior). Microteaches allow for a larger number of pre-service teachers to teach simultaneously while receiving feedback from peers and instructors. Using thematic analysis, Jakopovic and her colleagues examined written reflections on the microteaching experience by both students enrolled in an instructional block course and their university instructors. They identified codes and themes that aligned with Bandura's (1997) four sources of self-efficacy. Their discussion of themes related to mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal offers an interesting look at an effective way to mitigate the negative impacts of the limited experiences available to pre-service teachers during the early months of the pandemic. While microteaching is not a substitute for authentic classroom-based field experience, the results suggest it was a useful alternative in a difficult time, and did provide students with a meaningful way to develop self-efficacy.

The training of school leaders also had to continue during the pandemic, and graduate students enrolled in an educational leadership program were the focus of the next paper by Janice Garnett of the University of Nebraska Omaha. Here, their instructor reflects on the change to a virtual environment at the level of university teaching. Drawing on her experiences, Dr. Garnett offers helpful strategies for faculty as they reimagine teaching and learning for professional students in graduate programs. She describes many new possibilities offered by virtual teaching, particularly for students who are also working fulltime and balancing career and family responsibilities. Despite the challenges faced by both students and faculty, this paper emphasizes the positive effects of these changes. Garnett's hopeful reminder is that even when university teaching returns to "normal," faculty members are not likely to stop using the skills they have gained during the pandemic.

As noted earlier, the pandemic revealed many inequities in society that had deep impacts on education. Three colleagues who are very well qualified to comment on this (Ferial Pearson, Sandra

Rodríguez-Arroyo, and Gabriel Gutiérrez, all of the University of Nebraska Omaha) offer their insights in the next paper. As BIPOC educators, they share their own background stories as well as their educational philosophies and how they remained true to them during the crisis, constructing a framework they call "Cariño Pedagogy." Drawing on the work of such diverse scholars as Paulo Freiere, Alison Dover, Gloria Ladson-Billings, Geneva Gay, and the Equity Literacy Institute, the framework includes Humanizing Pedagogy, Trauma-Informed Pedagogy, Social Justice Pedagogy, Equity Literacy Pedagogy, and Culturally responsive and Sustaining Pedagogy.

The first priority this paper identifies is the necessity for reflection on our values and teaching philosophies as we proceed through all the changes brought about by the pandemic. The second is the absolute necessity of caring for students' emotional needs and mental health during such a crisis. These faculty members in a teacher education program could, because of their strong personal commitment, make many efforts to help and care for their students, who were preservice teachers. The study by Martinez et al., described earlier, similarly illustrates the importance of caring support for practicing teachers as they coped with the COVID-19 pandemic.

The "Cariño Pedagogy" framework demonstrates how many recognized concepts in education have become even more meaningful during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The importance of a trauma-informed approach, already increasingly stressed in teacher education even before the pandemic, is even more useful now. And the stark inequities in health care and educational resources that COVID-19 forced into American awareness have of course been outlined for many years in pedagogies of oppression (Freiere, 1993) and pedagogies of social justice (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Educators who have already been trained in these pedagogies can look at them with a new perspective as they have been integrated in the framework presented here. Pearson et al. note that "our positionality as participants in praxis and dialogue as Freirian scholars means that we need to reflect on our praxis to continue learning while in the act of teaching." That can surely be said for all the articles in this collection, for all of them reflect their authors' leaning processes as they taught during the pandemic.

Lessons from History

A final paper in this issue focuses not so much on educators' efforts to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic, but instead on the need for learning from the past by examining the effects of the 1918 influenza pandemic on educational policy. Phi Nguyen from the University of Missouri asks the question: "For educational policymakers and leaders interested in leveraging the COVID-19 pandemic to reimagine and transform schools, what lessons does the 1918 influenza pandemic afford?" Based on her extensive primary source analysis of Missouri education policy between 1917 and 1919, Nguyen observes that influenza-related policy talk was practically non-existent, and the talk that was present mainly focused on how the flu had disrupted, but not changed, school operations. Policy action during the years following the influenza pandemic continued along the lines of Progressive reforms, such as compulsory education and physical and public health, that were already developing prior to the pandemic.

Nguyen's discussion of the lessons learned from the 1918 influenza pandemic is enlightening. One particularly interesting contrast is in the way that pandemic had more similar impacts than COVID-19 did on all social classes in the United States, since it struck down people in rural and urban areas, rich and poor alike, in similar proportions. Although school closures were much shorter than those experienced from COVID-19, all students were on a similar footing in terms of learning loss. In contrast, the current pandemic has exacerbated existing educational inequities, because differences in parental education and income created unequal access to online resources, as well as and parental assistance with schoolwork. Wealthier parents, or those whose jobs allowed them to work at home, had more opportunities to help their children with schoolwork than parents whose jobs required them to spend time away from home and risk their health through exposure to the public. Hence, learning losses have been uneven, putting additional stress on teachers as more students have returned to classrooms.

Nguyen argues that we cannot repeat what happened in 1918, namely the framing of the pandemic as merely a "disruption." If we do that, we risk perpetuating discourses that maintain the status quo, and will fail to address the inequities that COVID-19 exacerbated. Instead, we should focus on reducing the disparities and creating a more resilient educational infrastructure that will mitigate future crises, especially for students who have been marginalized. She also warns against letting our policy talk be dominated by a

focus on "lost learning," since by doing so we risk intensification of accountability and high-stakes testing policies that have dominated American schooling for the past two decades.

Conclusion

We hope our readers will find the articles in this special issue useful and thought-provoking. As these studies demonstrate, a major part of the pandemic's effect on education has been a crisis orientation, focused on ameliorating negative effects on students, teachers, and educational systems as a whole. But for educators at all levels, another effect is hope, born of necessity and pushing us forward toward new ideas, greater awareness, and inspiration to solve longstanding problems that the global pandemic has forced us to see in a stronger light.

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