

Chapter 103

The K–12 Teacher’s Perspective on Teaching and Learning During the COVID–19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

In the spring of 2020, during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the nation’s schools closed. Students were told to shelter in place at their homes and classroom teachers were charged with the challenge of educating over 50,000,000 K-12 students through online and virtual modalities. As this transition began in its early stages and then lingered for the remainder of the school year, attention and even scrutiny soon descended upon the actual preparation of teachers in executing such a transition, and the realistic success of doing so. Teachers began the new and unexpected process of teaching their students from home, and students, along with family support, began the practice of learning remotely. During this same time period, researchers were approved to conduct research focused exclusively on this educational phenomenon. One of the themes of this research was the K-12 teachers’ perceptions on the teacher readiness and the overall effectiveness of this sudden switch to K-12 online teaching and learning.

INTRODUCTION

Technology ushers in fundamental structural changes that can be integral to achieving significant improvements in productivity. ~(US Department of Education, 2019)

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Such was the manner in which the possible use of technology in the K-12 classroom was described by the United States Department of Education prior to the spring of 2020. Technology “could be” integral to achieving improvements in productivity through supplemental teaching resources, student virtual games or drills, and readily available classroom devices to extend school-based learning. Online learning was often seen as a viable option, but only if students were interested in credit recovery, facing a personal crisis or illness, or committed to a sports or work obligation that called for a more flexible schedule (Archambault et al., 2016). In the United States of America that existed prior to COVID-19, online teaching and learning at the K-12 level was available, but not necessarily prevalent. The average K-12 public school offered virtual courses, on an optional basis, to students primarily at the high school level and online resources were often used to supplement K-12 learning while students sat in traditional school-based classrooms. On the U.S. Department of Education’s website, online teaching and learning is described as such:

48 states and the District of Columbia currently support online learning opportunities that range from supplementing classroom instruction on an occasional basis to enrolling students in full-time programs. These opportunities include dual enrollment, credit recovery, and summer school programs, and can make courses such as Advanced Placement and honors, or remediation classes available to students. Both core subjects and electives can be taken online, many supported by online learning materials. While some online schools or programs are homegrown, many others contract with private providers or other states to provide online learning opportunities. (2020, p. 1)

Also, on this same website, those unusual online opportunities that may not have been known about, but were accessible were featured, such as The Florida Virtual School. In this school, as in many similar schools in various states, students could learn via online courses - full-time! What a novel thought!

In the spring of 2020, during the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the nation’s schools closed. In the words of one writer, the nation’s K-12 education system was “blindsided” as it scrambled to address the challenge of an unprecedented pandemic (Newton, 2020). Students were told to shelter in place at their homes and classroom teachers were charged with the challenge of educating over 50,000,000 K-12 students through online and virtual modalities. Educational technology, which had previously been more focused on the face-to-face classroom - and how it could be improved - was now required to provide virtual learning experiences outside of the schoolhouse doors.

During this same time, we began this research focusing exclusively on this educational phenomenon. One of the themes of this research was the K-12 teachers’ perceptions on teacher readiness and the overall effectiveness of this sudden switch to K-12 online teaching and learning. Questions surrounding how exactly teachers were prepared to make this sudden switch, how seriously students and families assumed this mode of learning, and how effective the overall impact of this transition ultimately was were questions that beg to be answered. The outline of that research, including its findings and conclusions, are highlighted in this chapter.

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