

Chapter 2

Teaching and Learning During a Pandemic: Perspectives From a Teacher, Administrator, and College Professor

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ABSTRACT

This chapter encompasses the lived experiences of a high school teacher, high school administrator, and college professor. Each worked through the trials and tribulations of teaching and learning in a pandemic. The authors' narratives provide a vivid account of the initial shock of the pandemic announcements and the life changes that ensued. Written through an equity lens, this chapter explains how instruction is delivered in remote and hybrid settings; the importance of building communication with students, families, and staff; access to technology for learning; and the importance of building relationships with the students and families. This chapter aims to contextualize inequities that existed before the pandemic, how they were exacerbated as schools closed down, and how students' well-being became the necessary focus. The chapter's discussion frames how we can redefine our roles and responsibilities as educators to encourage student agency and the potential of trauma-sensitive schools as a means to help students heal from the wounds caused by this pandemic.

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INTRODUCTION

Without question, teaching and learning during a global pandemic created a new set of challenges for educators worldwide. As a result of COVID-19, many schools shuttered their doors and transitioned from traditional methods of instruction into a completely online learning environment. This sudden change in educational practices brought inequities to the surface, many of which may not have been examined to a great extent previously. At times, the inequities have been framed largely around internet access or a digital divide (Journell, 2007); however, we aim to provide an approach that addresses the complexities of equity issues during pandemic times. Specifically, we center collective trauma as a framework to better understand the inequities faced by students and families. We believe when schools neglect to adopt a trauma-based framework during the pandemic, inequities are more likely to be further perpetuated.

Within this chapter, we will first provide a brief overview of trauma, trauma-informed practice, and ways the pandemic represents collective trauma. Secondly, we utilize auto-ethnographic traumatic storytelling to provide insight into how educators and administrators experienced the collective trauma of the pandemic at the individual level. Specifically, we explore and shed light on how the pandemic has been a source of collective trauma for the students and families that we serve, for ourselves, and for our colleagues, along with the ways this has influenced or should influence educational decision-making. Thus, by weaving together the narratives of a high school teacher, a high school administrator, and a college professor, we examine how secondary and higher education spaces, as well as pedagogical assumptions as we knew them, were upended by this pandemic making more visible educational and societal inequities.

The Pandemic as Collective Trauma

When we examine the context and effects of the pandemic, it is easy to imagine that we have been experiencing a type of collective trauma. Perhaps this is most consequential for students when their realities during this pandemic are understood to constitute an adverse experience of their childhood, during the most formative years of their life. Anda et al. (2006) describe adverse childhood experiences as traumas such as psychological abuse, physical abuse, neglect, and mental illness. However, this work has recently expanded to include living in poverty and homelessness (Anda et al., 2010). The past year has included record unemployment rates in the U.S., the highest since the data was first recorded in 1948 (Falk et al., 2021). By December 2020, the U.S. unemployment rate had declined but was still double the December 2019 rate. With these statistics, it is logical to assume that many children and families have experienced unprecedented levels of housing and food insecurity. Furthermore, 11 months into the pandemic, the number of deaths has reached 440,843 (Johns Hopkins University & Medicine, 2021). This total is more than U.S. battle deaths from five wars combined, with over 26 million people in the country having fallen ill from the virus to date. As these statistics reveal, we have had an unparalleled level of students, families, and staff members dealing with the grief from the loss or serious illness of loved ones. In addition to COVID-19 related deaths, the Advocacy Resource Center (2020) reported that 40 states have seen a substantial spike in deaths due to overdose and suicide. This data suggests students and families are experiencing drug addiction, alcoholism, and raised levels of depression and anxiety within their homes while isolated from support networks. Furthermore, losing a family member to overdose or suicide can result in complicated grief, which often requires more than typical supports in the grieving process.

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