

## **The Untold Stories from Covid-19: The Calamity of Implementing Curriculum During a Pandemic**

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*In March 2020, the Covid-19 Pandemic wreaked havoc on our nation's educational system. Students, teachers, and administrators were forced to engage in a new remote learning model, which was unfamiliar. This narrative study draws on the lived experiences of six K-12 teachers in Southwest Ohio urban school districts. The data analysis was examined through the lens of the Science of Learning and Development framework (SoLD). Findings highlight the impact of Covid-19 on curriculum implementation. Results show that unprepared teachers could not pivot to online learning effectively, which may intensify the educational gaps and inequities among students in six urban schools in Southwest Ohio.*

*Keywords:* Curriculum, Social-Emotional, Instruction, Covid-19, Narrative Inquiry

### **Introduction**

On March 12, 2020, Ohio Governor Mike Dewine announced his order to close all schools on Monday, March 16, at the school day's close, through Friday, April 3, 2020, to stem the spread of Covid-19 (Office of Governor Media, 2020). Similar orders and recommendations reverberated across the Midwest as state and local governments began to contend with the impending global pandemic, which forced school districts to shut down abruptly, sending administrators, teachers, students, and parents into chaos. Recent studies reported that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) children in urban schools lost access to academic and basic needs that schools provide due to school closures (Dorn et al., 2020). In the wake of these orders and recommendations, schools, BIPOC children, and families embarked into uncharted territory. Stories and life experiences about how individuals navigated their situations during the pandemic are critical in understanding the impacts on curriculum implementation.

This paper aims to provide higher education teacher educator programs insight into the lived experiences of K-12 urban school classroom teachers as they implemented curriculum during the Covid-19 Pandemic of 2020. We illuminated the professionals' narratives—their initial reactions as teachers and the impact on curriculum—to understand curriculum delivery in our educational system in emergency times. Two frameworks guided our study: the theory of experience, which supports the power and importance of teacher stories, and the principles of Science of Learning and Development (SoLD). We use the methodology of narrative inquiry to conduct the research as well as describe data collection, analysis, and results. In this paper, we addressed the following research questions:

1. What do teachers' narratives about their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 reveal about curriculum implementation and instructional practices at six Southwest Ohio schools?
2. What do teachers' narratives about their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 reveal about the social and emotional needs of students in urban schools in Southwest Ohio?
3. What did the teachers' lived experiences reveal about the impact on equitable student learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in six Southwest Ohio schools?

The research questions were framed based on Maxwell's (2013) work on qualitative research. The conclusion provides a discussion of the results and implications, which imparts insight and guidance to current educational stakeholders.

## Literature Review

### Racial Inequalities in Schools

*Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* made a concerted effort to address racial inequality among school children by forcibly desegregating public schools. Scholars have argued that the *Brown* decision has fallen short in an effort to create desegregated and equal schools for children, regardless of race, color, and creed (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Public school data in 2000-2001 revealed that White students are 61% of the U.S. student population but attend schools that are 80% White. On the other hand, Black and Latinx students will attend schools where only 30% of their classmates are White (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003, p. 171). Unfortunately, not much has changed as far as student segregation in public schools is concerned.

Recently, the National Center of Educational Statistics stated that BIPOC children attended schools where 75% of the total enrollment were students of color, and 47% of White students attended schools where 75% of the total student population was White (Irwin, et al., 2021). This study provides insight into the fact that states across this country have made concerted efforts through consent decrees and other means to desegregate schools with insufficient success. Furthermore, educators have argued that racial segregation among public school students has created systemic challenges resulting in a myriad of funding inequities leading to negative outcomes of BIPOC students (Fitzgerald, 2015). State governments across the U.S. have experienced litigation by educational reformists that have challenged the school funding disparities between students of color and White children with minimal success. Therefore, the Covid-19 Pandemic illuminated and heightened the insufficient resources that plague schools serving Black and Latinx children. The close tie between the level of school funding, racial inequality, and inadequate academic outcomes among BIPOC children were exposed during this pandemic (Pier, et al., 2021).

Recent studies have forecasted that the Covid-19 Pandemic will create a higher level of negative academic outcomes. Bailey et al. (2021) predicted that Covid-19 will increase achievement gaps in reading and mathematics that were already prevalent among BIPOC and low-income children. It is difficult to fathom that BIPOC children, who have endured hardships for years by attending mostly racially segregated schools, may experience additional challenges created by an

educational system that was ill-equipped to service students during a pandemic. For example, scholars claimed that low-income families attended public schools that did not provide professional development on virtual instructional strategies, lack internet and technology resources, and are unlikely to have the financial means to pay for tutoring or a private education (Bailey et al., 2021; Rothstein, 2020). Undoubtedly, when schools closed their doors, BIPOC children and families were left with few educational options which exacerbated negative academic learning outcomes. Dorn et al. (2020) contended that BIPOC students' learning loss in mathematics was about three to five months compared to White students (p. 4). The disparities among BIPOC and White students have contributed to the finding that 60% of BIPOC children started the school year in a virtual setting and many continue to be removed from brick-and-mortar classrooms due to Covid-19. Not only did BIPOC students and families have to contend with the loss of academics, but scholars declared that Covid-19 has negatively impacted their access to food which is provided through the National Food Lunch and School Breakfast Programs (Dorn et al., 2020). Consequently, Covid-19 was disruptive for many families with school-aged children, but it was catastrophic for BIPOC students.

### **Teacher Stories and a Theory of Experience**

Teachers' stories have long been "key devices in understanding the complex nature of a classroom" (Kim, 2016, p. 18), while providing a window into their teaching experiences, their "teacher lives" (Ayers, 2020). In the words of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009), "Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize" (17:20). In this vein, "a compelling [teacher] story connects personal experience to public narratives, allowing society to 'speak itself' through each individual" (Berger & Quinney, 2005, p. 10), thus empowering and humanizing the personal and professional experiences of teachers. This connection to the larger narratives of our society allows both the teller and the listener to understand more fully the micro-level complexities of classroom and school life as it exists in the macro-level complexities of society at large.

Teachers' stories have come in a variety of genres. Often teachers' stories chronicle their experiences in schools and with children (Ayers, 2001; Christenbury, 2007; Doran, 1999; Kohl, 1967; Michie, 2009; Milne, 1999; Poetter, 2012). Some teacher stories are from the perspectives of researchers or observers, an effort to "honor teaching and learning as complex and developmental in nature, seeking connections and continuous engagement in reflection and deliberation" (Kim, 2016, p. 18). Jonathan Kozol (1967, 1972, 1991, 2007, 2012) worked to weave storytelling and social commentary together as he spent time in classrooms as early as 1967, spanning to the 2012 publication of *Fire in the Ashes*. Curriculum scholars have long narrated their experiences in schools and with curriculum, providing a glimpse into classroom life (Jackson, 1968/1990; Laura, 2014; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983; Meier, 1995; Sizer, 1984, 1992, 1996).

Narrative researchers hope to "expand our knowledge and understanding of what it means to be human through stories of human experiences" (Kim, 2016, pp. 69-70). A theory of experience is essential in expanding this knowledge in a way that "permits better understanding of educational life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2). Dewey's Theory of Experience says:

Experience is both personal and social. Both the personal and the social are always present. People are individuals and need to be understood as such, but they cannot be understood as only individuals. They are always in relation, always in a social context. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 2)

Clandinin & Connelly (2000) give this explanation to the term *experience*: “The term *experience* helps us think through such matters as an individual child’s learning while also understanding that learning takes place with other children, with a teacher, in a classroom, in a community, and so on” (p. 2). Using Dewey’s Theory of Experience, teachers’ stories can be shared and examined for both the nuances of the micro complexities that occurred in their lives, both personal and professional, and the macro complexities of schools, school systems, communities, and the greater society.

### **Curriculum Implementation and the Science of Learning and Development**

Historically, the explicit curriculum, i.e., standards, pacing guides, even classroom guidelines or rules, were typically created to be implemented in-person, in brick-and-mortar school buildings and classrooms. Even the implicit curriculum, that which is implemented often through unconscious body language, environmental attributes, or emphasis/de-emphasis placed on an entity, is environment-based (Eisner, 2002). Studies show that teaching the “whole child” (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020, p. 98), implementing a curriculum that nurtures “children’s development and learning” (p. 97), depends not only on learning opportunities and relationships, but also on those environmental factors. Recent studies about how best to “promote children’s well-being, healthy development, and transferable learning” (p. 97) rely on an “integrated and dynamic developmental system” that combines the four principles of the Science of Learning and Development (SoLD): supportive environment, productive instructional strategies, a system of support, and social and emotional development (p. 98).

By using SoLD as a framework for positive curriculum implementation, we can examine classroom practices that are the most beneficial for children. The first principle of SoLD, supportive environment, says that “students need a sense of physical and psychological safety for learning to occur, since fear and anxiety undermine cognitive capacity and short circuit the learning process” (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020, p. 102). This emphasizes the necessity of building a strong community through the cultivation of relationships between teachers and students, and teachers and families. Charlot et al. (2020) says that a supportive environment helps students build a strong sense of identity through self-understanding, a sense of belonging, and the navigation of identity threats (pp. 9-10). From a curriculum standpoint, this means that environments should “offer safe, personalized settings” (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020, p. 106) for learning, supporting “learners in expressing and living into their identities” (Charlot et al., 2020, p. 48). Structures that allow for effective caring and building classroom learning communities, that further connect teachers and families, can most contribute to a supportive environment.

The second principle of SoLD, productive instructional strategies, builds on the tenets of a supportive environment. It seeks to leverage “curriculum designs, instructional approaches, and assessment practices” (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020, p. 109) to inform pedagogy that

engages students and supports deep learning, connecting their experiences to the classroom. Of productive instructional strategies, Darling-Hammond, Flook et al. (2020) asserts:

The science of learning indicates that humans learn more effectively when they are not anxious, fearful, or distracted by other pressing concerns; when the learning is connected to their prior knowledge and experience; when they are actively engaged; and when they have a reason to care about the content they are learning and can use it to deepen their understanding and to solve real questions or problems. (pp. 109-110)

Productive instructional strategies call for student-centered instruction that emphasizes methods that prioritize conceptual understanding and student motivation. It must also include strategies for meta-cognition, i.e., students “learning how to learn” (p. 132).

The third principle of SoLD is social and emotional development. This element “promotes the skills, habits, and mindsets that enable self-regulation, interpersonal skills, perseverance, and resilience” (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020, p. 98). The developmental need for social and emotional learning complements cognitive learning and can lead to “school and life success” (p. 125) for students. By integrating social emotional skills alongside the development of habits and mindsets, students can learn to persist and persevere academically, all while being supported through restorative approaches to behavior and an overall inclusive learning environment.

The final principle of SoLD is addressing children’s needs with a system of support. Once a supportive environment is established, that environment needs to be bolstered with support systems that “meet students’ needs and address learning barriers both in and out of the classroom” (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020, p. 130), while also integrating various services that support emotional, cognitive, physical, and learning needs of children. Support systems include interventions that are determined by individual children’s needs and should be tiered and integrated into the students’ environment. Extending the system of supports to before and after school programs, summer programs, and tutoring contributes to the effectiveness of educating the whole child (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020).

### **Method**

The purpose of this narrative qualitative research study is to provide an inside look and convey the lived experiences of teachers, expressed in the lived and told vignettes during the school shut down in March 2020, continuing to the fall of 2020. This narrative research is a collection of events gathered through two extended interviews (Creswell, 2007). The hope is that this narrative research will increase the understanding of issues that occurred during the climax of the Covid-19 pandemic when schools were closed and in the fall when schools were attempting to re-open. Teachers' retelling of their stories related to teaching and learning gave insight into the challenges and obstacles they faced during this period of education.

Studies have indicated that narrative research provides substantial benefits in education (Gay, et al., 2009). "Narrative research can serve as a vehicle to increase understanding of central issues related to the teaching and learning process by telling and retelling teachers’ stories" (Mertler, 2019). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) say that “it is impossible (or if not impossible, then

deliberately self-deceptive) as a researcher to stay silent or to present a kind of perfect idealized, inquiring, moralizing self” (p. 62), so while we, the researchers, worked to be reflexive and cognizant of bias—to bracket ourselves—during all interviews, it must be acknowledged that the subject of this study, teachers’ lives during the Covid-19 pandemic, was also something the researchers were experiencing in real-time. “Narrative research is deeply rooted in who we are as human because the narrative is the most fundamental means by which we human beings understand who we are” (Kim, 2016, p. 297). In this way, while the research was personal, the researchers “continuously check[ed]... whether our understanding of the essence of [the] phenomenon [was] tainted by our own preconceptions” (p. 56).

This research study focuses on the personal and professional experiences of teachers related to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. Teachers' lives are often shared as a collection of stories that chronicle their experiences with students, with curriculum, with various stakeholders, and how their personal lives are inevitably weaved together with that of their "teaching lives" (Ayers, 2020). "Teachers' stories of their personal and professional experiences along with stories of young children have become critical devices in understanding the complex nature of a classroom" (Kim, 2016, p. 18); the complexities of teaching and learning during this time of crisis were examined through the lens of teachers' experiences. The research questions examined were the following:

- 1) What do teachers' narratives about their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 reveal about curriculum implementation and instructional practices at six Southwest Ohio schools?
- 2) What do teachers' narratives about their experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 reveal about the social and emotional needs of students in urban schools in Southwest Ohio?
- 3) What did the teachers’ lived experiences reveal about the impact on equitable student learning during the Covid-19 pandemic in six Southwest Ohio schools?

Teachers from four Southwest Ohio, urban, public school districts were selected for the study. There were six different schools represented by six teachers: two high school teachers, teaching science and English; one teacher was upper-elementary social studies and language arts teacher; three teachers were lower elementary teachers. This purposeful sampling was composed contrastively; the schools differed in size, student achievement, and demographics; teachers have various years of experience from 1 to 41 years, teaching various levels in K-12. All participants held Master's degree in education, provided online teaching during the period of data collection, and identify as White and female.

The research data was collected in two in-depth interviews and recorded using Zoom Video Communication after participants granted and signed consent. The first interview included eight demographic questions, followed by six open-ended questions to engage participants to share their lived experiences as teachers when schools closed in the spring of 2020 (Glesne, 2016). The second interview had three open-ended questions designed to have teachers tell their stories of the fall of 2020. The two interviews were within a couple of weeks of each other and focused on teaching and learning. All schools were remote in the spring and fall of 2020. The interviews were transcribed, and the names of institutions and interviewees were anonymized. Also, the

school demographics were collected from each district’s school report card website. Member checking was utilized to ensure validity—where the response heard was restated with the six participants. Validity in qualitative research can be achieved in member checking (Creswell and Miller, 2000), ensuring how the participants understood their experience as a teacher and their perspectives as they were implementing curriculum during the Covid-19 pandemic. This technique is critical in establishing credibility in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

DeDoose, a research coding software, was used to organize and code the transcribed interviews of qualitative data through a triangulation review process. The three researchers then used the method of code application to identify the frequency of sub-themes, taking only the themes with 10 or more frequency rates, and then examining the transcriptions to construct narratives that illuminate the teachers’ experiences within the context of the two key themes. In this triangulation, the researchers independently utilized inductive coding to highlight themes and commonalities on DeDoose, which allowed emerging themes and hypotheses: *anxiety, feelings of hopelessness, limited technology, low student participation, no direction with curriculum, lacking online teaching skills, concerns of student safety, student social and emotional concerns, students losing academic knowledge, technology challenges, and uncharted territory*. Through the DeDoose software, the three researchers were able to build and maintain inter-rater reliability for both codes (the application of codes to excerpts) and code weighting/rating (the application of specified weighting/rating scales associated with code application) (Lieber & Weisner, 2010). This process proved to be particularly inspiring for the analysis in that it provided three different perspectives from the data and allowed them to mitigate personal bias, preconceptions, and beliefs in this study. Afterward, the researcher met and organized the emergent themes, aligning them with SoLD to bring knowledge and understanding of nuances that developed among the data in an Excel spreadsheet. The SoLD framework created a structure for examining the data, which allowed it to be categorized into these two themes: Curriculum/Instructional Practices and Social and Emotional Experiences.

Before initiating the data analysis, it is critical that we describe the researcher’s positionality. A researcher’s worldview “concerns ontological assumptions..., epistemological assumptions ..., and assumptions about human nature and agency,” all of which shape how we engage in research (Holmes, 2020, p.2). Acknowledging one’s positionality, Holmes (2020) states, can enhance a researcher’s awareness of their potential bias, assumptions, and point of development, but also the potential contribution to the field. All three researchers are in the early stage of their academic careers in a school of education. Their doctoral training was primarily in the field of leadership and curriculum. These researchers had the privilege of being K-12 educators for more than ten years before coming to higher education academia. Researcher # 1’s area of focus examines the intersectionality of curriculum development and cultural responsive pedagogy; Researcher #2’s area of concentration is educational administrative leadership; Researcher #3’s area of interest is teacher preparation, culturally responsive pedagogy, and curriculum. All of the researchers have varying levels of experience teaching educational methods and theory courses at both the undergraduate and graduate level.

## Stories

The participating teachers describe their schools as economically and racially diverse. Table 1 provides demographic information from the participants' school districts. Their students were primarily Hispanic, Black, and multiracial, and about one in five students in their school districts received services outlined in an Individualized Education Plan. In at least one of the school districts, one in four were English Language Learners. All of the teachers worked in districts whose students were overwhelmingly economically disadvantaged, ranging from 51.4% to 100% of their population.

**Table 1**

*Participants School District Demographics*

ID	Pseudonym	Role	Hispanic	Black	Multiracial	Asian	White	Disability (IEP)	Economically Disadvantaged	English Learner
1	Mrs. Curtis	teacher	7.9%	61.6%	6.5%	1.5%	22.6%	19.5%	80.4%	7.8%
2	Mrs. Smith	teacher	2.2%	68.4%	7.4%	0%	20.5%	12.4%	99.1%	0%
3	Mrs. Dunn	teacher	4%	71%	9%	0%	16%	17%	84%	21%
4	Mrs. Conlan	teacher	14.6%	18.8%	12.5%	0%	53.6%	19%	100%	7.3%
5	Mrs. O'Leary	teacher	6.3%	69.6%	10.5%	1.5%	12.1%	23.4%	94.9%	5.1%
6	Mrs. Jones	teacher	21.5%	54.2%	7.8%	6.9%	9.5%	16.2%	73.3%	18%

Note: This table illustrates the demographic data collected from participants' districts. It is adapted from the Ohio Department of Education (2020). If enrollment was less than 10, the district did not calculate results in the district report card.

The following are the narratives of six teachers in Southwest Ohio as they navigated the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring and fall of 2020. These "narrative texts" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 155) are composed of narration and description, slices of the subjects' experiences, both professionally and personally, as shared in conversation with the researchers. All the teachers have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

### Curriculum Implementation and Instructional Practices

The abrupt closure of schools in mid-March due to Covid-19 impacted students, teachers, and administrators nationwide. This unprecedented disruption had notable effects on national/state curriculum implementation. Educational institutions across the United States were forced to rapidly shift to remodel student learning, utilize a new learning platform, and provide online learning (Jandrić & Hayes, 2020). Students in the inner cities faced then, and now, heightened challenges and disruptions in accessing quality and equitable education (García & Weiss, 2020). In our conversations with teachers about curriculum implementation, instructional technology was consistently referenced.



As school administrators disseminated the various state orders indicating school closures among their teaching staff, teachers began frantically preparing homework packets. There was confusion among teachers, and they were given little or no directions for remote learning initially. Teachers were instructed to contact students regularly to ensure that they were safe. Mrs. Curtis, an elementary teacher at a school where one in five students was on an IEP, stated:

Well, that was a crazy time, just a frustrating time ...on the 13th [of March]. ...we were told, no, you are not coming back on Monday, so if you didn't take anything with you, you had nothing, and you could not come back into the building.

Mrs. Dunn, another elementary teacher, shared,

We were not supposed to give them new material. ...supposedly it was all review. I could choose a paper packet, and the paper packets were red. They were made by the district, ... and one of their paper packets, the end just had to add two-digit numbers and there were still pictures..., but it was something you would expect for kindergarten or nursery.

Further complicating curriculum implementation expectations, in Mrs. Dunn's district, 21% of the student body were English Language Learners.

Initially, in one teacher's school, there was a scramble to distribute computers and tablets to students beginning with the older ones and working their way to the youngest. Mrs. Conlan, a high school teacher who worked in a school district whose students were 100% economically disadvantaged, described a system that was not prepared for remote learning. Mrs. Conlan disclosed that the "Systems of Supports" were not present to harmonize "Productive Instructional Strategies" (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020, p. 132):

They would [typically] come to my class and pick up a computer if I have them for homeroom, and then they would use them all day and bring them back and charge them in my room at night... They did not have them to take home, and one of the reasons we hadn't done that is because there is a lot to consider when you are living in a high poverty area because you don't want people stealing the computers and them not coming back or certain things like that.

Many students left school in March with homework packets but no computer or tablet to access online learning. Mrs. Jones, an upper elementary teacher, expressed the early plans of curriculum implementation and the inconsistency of delivery among her students, three out of four who did not receive computers or have internet access until mid-April. She described:

The kids did get packets... and that was supposed to last them the three weeks, and then towards the end of that three weeks our district passed out chrome books, so they did end up getting chrome books, and they were getting online more, but it wasn't very consistent—probably I would say ¼ of our class was turning things in.

In Mrs. Conlan's district, the younger elementary students were disproportionately not given the technology needed to access their remote learning. Mrs. Conlan, a high school teacher, talked about her school district:

...I think some of our elementary situations were pretty bad, and they could have 5 or 6 kids living in a house with not a computer, or only one computer... We had kids going and sitting in school parking lots to do work to use the school's Wi-Fi.

For some, the extended spring break gave the teachers a hiatus before they began remote learning. When the governors announced that school closures would be beyond April 1, many teachers started drafting their plans for meeting students online following the spring break. The critical elements of "habits and mindset" (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al., 2020, p. 132) were absent due to the students not having needed technology. Mrs. Smith, an elementary teacher, explained the situation after the extension of school being closed:

...So then what they did is they kind of gave us some loose guidelines on how to proceed. There wasn't anything really super specific at first, other than you need to check in with your class, at least I don't even remember. I have all these; I had all these papers I printed out.

Similarly, Mrs. Jones shared, "Well, we ended up mostly reviewing what we had already done that year... we didn't really introduce anything new..." There was no perceived expectation of teaching new skills; the perceived expectation was to review content taught previously in the classroom. Curriculum implementation was reduced to a simple review.

After the participants recognized that schools would not reconvene for the spring, some shared that their school districts began offering professional development on remote learning online. The teachers in this study used a variety of online platforms to deliver curriculum reviews. Among the top four utilized were Google Classroom, Schoology, Khan Academy, and Quizlet. Desperation led some of the teachers to social media to contact students that were absent and disengaged. Mrs. Conlan:

We did not have a way to communicate with them remotely. ...I used Snapchat to communicate with my kids... You know – the cell phone. Everybody has a cell phone, even if they live in poverty. That is a part of the culture that you are going to have a cell phone even if you don't have food. We did the best that we could... we are doing a much better job now.

Upon return in August, it was evident to the teachers that students had lost a tremendous amount of skill development in the grade level completed in the spring of 2020. Teachers expressed their fears and concerns about lost academic skills, which continued in fall 2020. Mrs. Curtis expressed:

Trying to build some of those skills that I know were lost or that we didn't get to. ...I really still try to spend enough time, ... during each session that they feel like... we are a

family, we are a community...And math has been to me that's been easier to do virtually, um, than reading. Reading is very challenging to do virtually.

Mrs. Jones:

Just with my second year, I can see an obvious impact seeing what they came in with last year versus what they know this year. I mean, especially in their writing. I feel like that has been the biggest difference ... I mean, even writing a sentence is a struggle, or using capital letters, or using punctuation at the end. This year ... "don't forget capital letters at the beginning of your sentences. Don't forget punctuation points" ... And especially for those kids that aren't coming or they are coming and they are not doing the assignments. I think there will be an impact on them for sure. And potentially even the kids that are coming and doing the work.

Mrs. Jones continued:

I think it's all subjects... Even in math or I was helping a girl today with math who cannot remember some of her multiplication that I am sure she probably did know last year because she is bright. It's just she hasn't done it in so long it's not as quick as it was before.

Mrs. Dunn:

They don't have the background, like for math, for us to be following a second-grade curriculum. We're finding they've missed out on a whole bunch of skills, so they are not ready for second grade... First-grade skills are virtually difficult. Wow. They're far behind.

The teachers expressed that absenteeism was high among children not attending online sessions and being quarantined due to exposure to Covid-19. Also, the hybrid programs were inconsistent and continually changing to meet the demands of safety protocols. Mrs. Jones shared:

... [This is] the first year that they have used Echo. So the first couple of weeks, I mean still, I have kids that don't know how to submit assignments on Echo. ...it has been a struggle. Submitting assignments because they don't know-how. ...but Echo has been very difficult... Maybe they are not doing the work because they don't know how to get to it or how to submit it—things like that.

Mrs. Curtis:

They ... were trying to make sure that students were coming... have them to sign on to our district platform Schoology. ...a lot of kids still don't sign on to that. ... you can only do so much, you can post it, but you can't make them do it. So, um, that's been challenging because we have the requirement of taking attendance, and it's supposed to be based on that, but if they don't do it, you know, they come

to a meeting, I know they're there, but I can't make them sign in... but you can't really do them because it's based on what the families can do or choose to do.

The teachers' narratives provided a glimpse into the challenges and obstacles administrators, teachers, and students faced when contending with curriculum implementation and instructional technology during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Social and Emotional Experiences**

The school closure announcements came after days of uncertainty and confusion in communities across Ohio and beyond. It was an announcement that had been brewing but to some seemed apart from their reality, a surreal moment amidst an extraordinary time. Mrs. Smith expressed that many in her community felt insulated from the Covid-19 pandemic. When referring to mid-March, she said:

Oh, you know, it's not going to... you know how we always kind of feel like as a society... things that are happening around and won't necessarily affect us, you know? So I don't remember exactly what happened, but we had heard that there was someone sick ... And people started, there was a buzz, like starting midweek. So then by Friday I feel, I feel like we didn't know we were going... Oh, Whoa. Because I didn't know.

Mrs. Conlan had heard the rumblings for weeks; her administrator told her a week earlier to "Get prepared. You are not going to be in school for the rest of the year." Another high school teacher, Mrs. O'Leary, recalled hearing cheers from a classroom down the hall from hers. As she stepped into the hall, she asked another teacher about the noise and the teacher responded that "He [Dewine] just closed the schools for three weeks." The students were elated, but she was left in disbelief.

For the teachers in this study, the early days of the shutdown of schools in most of the Southwest Ohio, after the initial shock of the announcement, could be characterized by feelings of confusion, frustration, and hopelessness. As teachers shared their experiences in those early days, they overwhelmingly used words like "difficult," "stressful," "sad," "completely upside down and crazy," "exhausting," and "emotional." There was much confusion. Mrs. Smith said:

We didn't know going in [if] we were going to be allowed back in the building. ...They weren't letting us back in the building. And it was like, you had to have expressed permission from the superintendent at that point to even get back in the building. ...I don't think we knew; it was like really fast and I'm sorry. I don't remember...

Teachers talked about students who they were not in touch with, students who were "lost." Mrs. O'Leary "lost sleep, just worried about these kids." The teachers received messages from their students about their own emotions and struggles. Mrs. Smith received a message from her fourth-grader about "how he misses school and us and everything." Mrs. Curtis got to a point when she felt like, "I can't give anymore. I can't sleep at night because I am worried." She continued:

And just the tiredness that comes with, uh, you know, the emotional ups and downs of do we go back to school? Don't we go back to school? Yeah. We're going back. Oh, no, we're not going back... Um, so just that extra strain.

The spring was characterized, by teachers, as a practice in “trial and error,” “a lot of gray area,” “emotional ups and downs,” “a period of grieving.” There was a pervasive concern for both their own and students’ social and emotional well-being as they navigated remote learning.

As spring rolled into summer, much of the confusion remained. Mrs. Smith talked about preparing herself for the fall, “trying to get as calm as I could because I knew... it would be like constant changes.” The teachers worried about what model they would be practicing at their schools—remote, hybrid, or in-person. Most of their schools delayed the decision as long as possible. For some teachers, with the state testing mandate put back in place, their focus turned from the social and emotional well-being of their students to the impending state tests. Mrs. O’Leary lamented, “I have students that I don’t even know what they look like [but]... I feel responsible for them graduating or not. I’m still definitely concerned for my students, but I don’t know a lot about them.” Students’ online attendance and the completion rate were spotty for most of the teachers, and teachers reported that the virtual wall that online learning created was fraught with uncertainty and, admittedly, the strong notion of isolation.

There was also a profound disconnect in the time between March 2020 and October 2020 that was expressed by teachers. The disconnect could be seen at many levels—between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, and administrators and students. There was a disconnect between the communities surrounding schools and the communities in which teachers actually lived, between the ideas of what was important for students during remote learning and what was necessary for students to flourish. All of the teachers in this study identified as White, while their students were overwhelmingly Hispanic, Black, or multiracial (Table 1). The teachers and administrators lived in middle-class neighborhoods, while teaching in school districts that served a majority of students who were economically disadvantaged (Table 1). This pervasive disconnect could be seen in the teachers’ descriptions of their lives at home during the shutdown and in their perceptions of the lives of their students. Some teachers said that the spring felt like “a breath of fresh air” or “a blessing in disguise” as they re-established time with their families. Mrs. Dunn's personal experiences with her family highlighted the gaps in the social and cultural context in comparison with her students.

Well, honestly the abrupt change for me, for me and my daughter, it was a sort of blessing in disguise. And I hate to say that when people are dying and horrible, but, um, my daughter had a lot of psychological issues too, and things were coming to a head so that not having to be at school, kind of allowed the healing that needed to finish happening, that couldn't happen at school. So, um, and it allowed more time to get out and exercise for the two of us to communicate and build on that relationship for us mentally at home and school...it was a good thing.

The teachers simultaneously described their students’ home lives as “unsafe” and “chaotic,” and said that school was “the only place where you’ve got some routine and you’ve got something

you can count on.” Mrs. Conlan, whose students were 100% economically disadvantaged, confessed:

I’m kind of ashamed of this but I have this class that kept wanting to Zoom and kept wanting to Zoom so we did a Zoom and when we got on there it was mostly females from the class. A lot of the guys didn’t come or if they did they had cameras off. They didn’t talk a lot. And the girls—some of them—were so sad. And it was heavy. So like here I am living in a middle-class home in a nice neighborhood... You know what I mean? And I—my life is not really—I mean it is affected because I am not going to school. But I didn’t lose an income. I have all the food I need. I have a neighborhood I can walk it. You know it’s sunny outside. I don’t know if I kind of felt guilty for a while. And that was weird. And on that Zoom call, I had some girl start crying and she said that all she had been doing was eating cereal and watching TikTok. ...And I just remember thinking I got—I was kind of angry at that point because I was thinking we should have done more.

Mrs. Conlan added:

I talked to them about how to stay mentally healthy during these times and things they could do. So I started talking about how I had been walking around my neighborhood. And I was like then—you know—felt really stupid but then I was told there are drug deals on the corner. I can’t walk in my neighborhood. And then I have one girl she told us two things in that meeting. She said—if my dad, her dad or stepdad, comes out of the door, I will turn everything off. I just want you to know. Because he is a racist. And I don’t know what he will say if we are—if he sees me in zoom with other people. And I don’t like him and I don’t want to be around him, but I can’t control if he comes out on the porch. And then she said that if she was walking in her neighborhood, she always takes a shank because ... And so I was like blown away. I never did a zoom call the rest of the spring. I literally couldn’t do it.

Teachers found themselves in a challenging place. They wondered if they were producing “fluff” and “busy work.” Some teachers felt a lack of clarity of what their goals should be. Mrs. O’Leary struggled with her administration’s expectations of remote learning:

The expectation is that they are sitting there with their camera on. And I do have some students that will do it. But I have a lot that won’t. And I—what am I going to write them up? Give them detention? I mean like what are the ramifications other than me sitting here yelling at you over a computer screen. I actually was really disheartened last week and I started reading up on the whole camera—there’s actually a lot of articles about it and one guy said people are just, they don’t want you to see their house. They are embarrassed, or their dad is smoking a joint in the background, or I ... can hear others in the background talking. So they must be in a small house because they are in the same room doing their work. So then I am like that is going to be a distraction to him if her camera... So it’s—I’m continuing to fight the battle, but I am not.

Teachers felt like their focus should have been on “reaching kids,” on “try[ing] to get in touch and make sure everybody’s okay.”

In the fall of 2020, while administrators were focused heavily on logistics, teachers' stamina began to erode; they expressed that they felt devalued and demoralized. The demands of the curriculum in the fall, as compared to the spring, and the growing fatigue associated with Covid-19, caused teachers to feel as if they were "close to a breaking point." Mrs. Curtis said:

I think that all of the things that were asked to do, um, it's just, uh last week I was just at that point, if you asked me to do one more thing, I'm just going to say, no, I'm going to say goodbye because I can't do one more thing. And, uh, we were asked to do one more thing because we have students who were given the option of staying fully remote, um, and not coming back at all... but then we were told we had to post lessons and work for them. And I can't do that. And this. I don't have the time. I'm already at the end degree of time. Um, so many hours a day, I can't give anymore...

In addition to this metaphorical disconnect, there was also a literal disconnect. Teachers acknowledged that some students simply disappeared. There were students who never logged in, which affected the community of learning.

When asked about how she was coping emotionally with the current conditions in schools, Mrs. O'Leary expressed the sentiments of the teachers in a succinct way: "It's just not the same. It's really not. It's a completely different job... It's like the passion is gone. The joy has been sucked out of it." In October of 2020, the cloud of uncertainty and disconnect for administrators, teachers, and students alike remained, as a path through the pandemic had yet to be carved.

### **Discussion and Implications**

The combined narratives—"slices" of the teachers' experiences gleaned from 12 interviews of six K-12 teachers—were presented in the data section, revealing insights into the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on schools. These stories revealed two overarching themes: curriculum implementation and social-emotional experiences. Juxtaposed with the demographic data provided in Table 1, which showed that a significant proportion of the students of the teachers in this study were economically disadvantaged and/or students of color, what can be learned from the themes becomes even more essential. Although teachers encountered various difficulties with this unprecedented event, each had a slightly different lens through which they examined their journey during the pandemic.

#### **Curriculum Implementation Inadequacies and Inequities**

The implementation and delivery of curriculum came to a full halt in March, and the core elements of SoLD were absent in the remote, online learning model that soon ensued. Not all students had immediate access to curriculum review materials and many economically disadvantaged students had little or no long-term access to the remote curriculum due to many circumstances—no internet, no computer at home, moving from place to place for child care, and/or lower priority because parents had to work. Our school districts were unable to provide equitable remote learning; thus, it impeded students' opportunities on various levels. Beyond access to curriculum, this pandemic has uncovered some inadequacies and inequities in our

education systems—from the access to technology and the internet for online education, to the supportive environments students need for learning, to the misalignment of resources and needs of marginalized communities (OECD, 2020). Most importantly, it revealed that teachers were unable to pivot and provide effective practices to continue the vital practices of SoLD. Consequently, curriculum implementation suffered markedly.

Based on empirical benchmarks by Thum & Kuhfeld (2020), it is estimated that the 2019–2020 school year was slashed by one-third of its standard length, based on the assumed linear growth over the year for math and reading subjects, suggesting a loss of at least 0.1 SD across the board and larger in earlier grades. These predictions are significant as we look at the various ways to improve curriculum delivery during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond for students (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). The recent Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) scores confirm some of these predictions, showing that reading scores seemed stable, while students' math achievement in 2020 dipped about 5 to 10 percentile points lower for the same-grade students than the prior year (Thum & Kuhfeld, 2020). Although schools have addressed most of the access issues by giving every child a device and some family hotspots, the continued interruptions and abbreviated class schedules this year are costing our students' academic growth and progress.

### **Social and Emotional Turmoil**

In social-emotional experiences, the findings unmasked an emotional "roller coaster" with teachers as they lived through the Covid-19 pandemic and the disparity among students, which still prevails today, twelve months later. This data correlates with other recent studies where teachers expressed confusion and stress because of a lack of direction and being unsure of their responsibilities (Aperribai et al., 2020). Table 1 illustrates the cultural complexity surrounding our educational system; all the participants in this study were White, middle-class teachers in districts where the majority of the student body was Hispanic or Black and/or economically disadvantaged. The teachers struggled to relate to their students to support their learning, exposing their lack of culture competency.

There was a sense of hopelessness that the teachers felt and shared. Their misguided perception of saving children was out of reach; their cape had been taken away. The "white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets...like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and blank checks" (McIntosh, 1998, p. 1) became useless. Suddenly their knapsacks seemed empty; teachers did not have the tools and could no longer resolve the issues that confronted them. They were incapable of bringing the integration of the social and emotional skills in their lessons.

There was no communication with some students, as some did not attend online learning. Some students had no access to technology, whether it was the computer or internet; students did not complete their assignments, and it was apparent in their experiences that the teachers realized the stark differences in their lives and in the lives of the students whom they serve. "A breath of air" was exclaimed by one and "a time to connect with my family," said another teacher, while listening to students share stories of their lives which were quite different in comparison.



Many teachers expressed their concerns for their students' well-being, but there was nothing they could do to change the situation. They felt helpless and vulnerable to their inadequacies to handle these new situations that were unfamiliar. The “System of Supports” (Darling-Hammond, Flook et al, 2020, p. 98) were not present to balance the whole child in this ecological framework of SoLD. Only small fragments of SoLD principle practices were visible in this online/remoting learning environment as indicated by the narrative data.

Upon “returning” to school in August, most students were equipped with the necessary technology to attend online learning; however, the anxiety and stress continued as teachers navigated the daily uncertainty of being in person or online with Covid-19 still looming in their lives. Even with tremendous support and guidance, switching from on and off remote learning platforms cultivated tension, chaos, and exasperation (Aperribai et al., 2020). Overwhelmingly, teacher devaluation and demoralization began to weigh on the participants, forcing some teachers to contemplate retiring early or leaving the field. School districts have made attempts to leverage technology as it “provides a means of connecting students and teachers and the curriculum process” (Bradley et al., 2018, p. 138), but the challenge remains in urban areas where teachers and students have inconsistent and oftentimes unavailable technology and internet resources at “home” (Quezada et al., 2020).

There was a perception among the six teachers that the archaic factory model of a century-old schoolhouse designed to enable mass education, disseminate information, and efficiently determine a student's professional outcome failed miserably. This system underpins disparities and entrenched divisions based on race and class while destabilizing personalized relationships and access to deeper learning (Blaisdell, 2014). The conventional school structure was abandoned and temporarily replaced with a new paradigm of virtual curriculum implementation. This finding forced us to consider rethinking, reimagining, and redesigning the implementation of curriculum.

## **Implications**

Stories from teachers around Southwest Ohio brought attestation to the disruption in implementing curriculum during this pandemic to life. They revealed their experiences during this traumatic time—how they were coping and the unforeseen challenges and successes. The data and findings in the previous section examined the critical aspects of these stories; “the research coda” gives meaning to this study's implications (Bruner, 2002). Through the lens of Clandinin et al. (2007), the researchers, narrative inquirers, seek to acknowledge three kinds of justification for this study: the personal, the practical, and the social, which will provide a clear structure to discuss the implications of this study.

The personal justification seeks to “situate [the researchers] in the study” (Kim, 2016, p. 231). It is indisputable that the three researchers conducting this study are personally invested in the investigation and findings, as they, too, lived in this pandemic through the connections of their communities and shared humanity. All three researchers are university assistant professors in a school of education with various experiences in K-12 education as teachers. The findings of the antiquated forms of curriculum implementation that were not able to withstand the provocation of shifting to a new paradigm, online learning, resulting in limited learning outcomes during the

spring of 2020 for these economically disadvantaged students in these six schools, have provoked these scholars to contemplate their roles in this matter. The elements of SoLD examined in this study were clearly absent in the online/remote learning which created havoc and reduced student learning at an alarming magnitude. This pandemic required teachers to be flexible in their concept of curriculum implementation and pivot to online learning. Instead, they found themselves forcing a “square peg in a round hole,” using old, antiquated methods in a new, digital world of technology.

Teacher candidate preparation in higher education is now confronted with the realities of the last year. As members of an institution that directly prepares teachers and administrators, and certifies them to work in the local schools, the reexamination of K-12 curriculum implementation is critically important at this time and must be at the forefront of our teacher preparation moving forward. How are we preparing teacher candidates for a paradigm shift of innovation and technology advancements in education? How can we ensure the development and growth towards this goal? We can no longer wait for the accreditation and government agencies to force our hand; instead, we must be the leaders in changing this curriculum model and prepare individuals to meet the new demands of our digital time.

The practical justification of our scholarship, which attends to “how the study is going to inform [our] own and others’ practices” (Kim, 2016, p. 230), seeks to disrupt the systemic issues in our structural school system and the ongoing equity crisis in American education. Our K-12 school structure still operates as the original factory model where the curriculum is delivered as individual subjects in their silos. During the pandemic, it became evident that the six teachers were stuck in the old structure and could not oscillate to “sustain effective teaching and learning during the shutdown and provide the safety net support that many children receive in” a robust education system (Garcia & Weiss, 2020, p. 3).

Although the impact cannot be measured at this time, the study's findings suggest that there were challenges in implementing lessons in an unfamiliar online learning fashion, which may have long term effects (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; OECD 2020; Quezada et al., 2020; Schleicher, 2020). The previous subject delivery structure marked by 45-60 minute periods throughout the day could not be executed effectively within the online learning model. The success of online learning relies heavily on teachers and students being well-trained and having the proper resources to support online instruction and engagement (Garcia et al., 2020). With online learning, teachers “can adapt the learning experience to suit students' personal learning styles with great granularity and precision,” but this requires a complete shift and elevation of their role (Schleicher, 2020, Digital Resources, para. 1). Their perceptions of imparting knowledge to students can no longer remain. Educators are compelled to alter their concepts of teaching and become “co-creators of knowledge, as coaches, as mentors, and as evaluators” in the new innovative technology-based education (OECD, 2019). Higher education teacher preparation programs need to consider the necessary modifications to establish these new outcomes among candidates that serve the urban schools today and be ready for any type of pandemic or natural disaster in the future.

The social justification of our scholarship uncovers implications that are disturbing. Covid-19 has exacerbated the crisis of equitable education for all students. The urban school students from

these six schools found themselves disproportionately disadvantaged during the pandemic with limited or no access to support for online instruction. In the social-emotional experiences, the teachers seemed to “dance around” or avoid the reality, the truth, of the inequalities of education. This willful ignorance of inequity comes as no surprise because our public schools have, and continue to deliver, disparate student learning outcomes among students of lower social class, of minority status, and/or with disabilities (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Putman, 2020; Weiss & Reville, 2019). The data analysis in this study informed us of the disparity of digital resources among the students, which exacerbated the existing inequities and has social implications.

Prior to the pandemic, school districts serving the largest proportions of Black, Latino/a, and Native American students already received about \$1,800 less per pupil than those serving the fewest students of color. Declines in state revenue and increased costs will disproportionately hit schools in communities with high proportions of students from low-income families and low property wealth, which rely more on state education funding from sales and income taxes than on more stable local property taxes, thus furthering the divide. (Darling-Hammond, Schachner et al., 2020, p. 98)

The United States educational structure dependency on local revenues has generated one of the most disparate school funding systems among all the industrialized countries. These circumstances generated the “perfect storm.” The Southwest Ohio schools examined in this study were ill-equipped to confront the complexity of a pandemic. Hence, this augmented the gap of unequal education among these six schools. Throughout this pandemic, our educational system continues to exploit children of the global majority; we are unable to implement curriculum effectively, and we blame them for their lack of resources.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

This study had some limitations. In examining the findings and conclusions in this study, it is essential to be seen as a “snapshot” of curriculum implementation during a pandemic and the ongoing inequity in education. Due to time limitations and trying to capture relevant experiences of a past event, the study was limited to only six teachers. Secondly, the nature of narrative interview as “practical production, the meaning of which is accomplished at the intersection of the interaction of interviewer and respondent” (Fontana & Frey, 2000), relies heavily on reflexive awareness to minimize bias. This element of the research process requires great attention.

Future research in this area may consider an in-depth examination of the following questions to bring greater understanding and knowledge about the impact of Covid-19 on teaching and learning among BIPOC students. What have we done to perpetuate inequality in curriculum implementation in our educational institutions? How did the Covid-19 pandemic shut down exacerbate the preexisting inequality of education in K-12?

We must act now, in a reformist manner, to reexamine, redesign, and restructure our educational system to meet the 21st-century demands of innovation and technology in these schools in Southwest Ohio and beyond. We are tasked with exploring new ways to establish a school structure that epitomizes collaboration and partnership among teachers and faculty, delivering a

curriculum that utilizes interdisciplinary studies of concepts, and dismantling institutional structure that obstructs the work of meeting the needs of a diverse population of students today. We are ultimately called to equip our teachers with the tools and skills to navigate a new educational system allowing for flexibility in curriculum implementation with all the principle practices of the SoLD framework.

### Conclusion

This study has given us a glimpse of the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on our educational system; perceptions and experiences among these six teachers gave insight into the underlying issues of curriculum implementation present during the onset of the pandemic, which continues to lay consequential impacts on student learning. It is time to alter and invent an educational system around a different time frame, physical space, educator expertise, curriculum, and instructional model. As higher education examines the impact of Covid-19 on the educational structure, they must guide pre-service teachers to rethink authentic learning principles for all students and continue a holistic education that disrupts the racial inequities in our urban schools under all circumstances, even during a pandemic.

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## Appendix

### Interview 1:

#### Demographic Questions

1. What is your title and role?
2. How many years teaching? What grade levels attend this school?
3. What is the enrollment size of this school?
4. What percentage of students attending this school have IEP's?
5. How many teachers are employed at this school?
6. What is your racial background:

#### Interview Questions

1. Can you describe your role as a teacher/administrator at \_\_\_ prior to March 2020?
2. Thinking back to mid-March 2020, can you tell me about your classroom experiences and what impact it had on your curriculum?
3. Tell me about the early days of remote learning for you and your students. Expand on how you might have been emotionally impacted. What were your primary concerns at this time? (Can you describe the process you used to manage this transition?)
4. Tell me about a particularly challenging experience and/or a particularly rewarding experience with remote learning in the spring of 2020.
5. Teacher: Can you describe how your personal/home life might have been affected and/or altered due to the abrupt change?
6. Teacher: Can you describe the process you have gone through to prepare for this school year? (Follow-up with appropriate probing.)

### Interview 2:

#### Interview Questions

1. What is the instructional plan your school/district has decided upon for the fall of 2020? Tell me about how you felt when you learned about the decision your school made for this instructional plan.
2. You said in the spring your primary concern was \_\_\_\_\_. Can you talk about your primary concerns now as you navigate the fall?
3. Can you describe how your instructional practices have been affected and/or altered due to remote learning, or the potential of moving to remote learning?
4. When you consider what and how you are teaching this fall, are there additional considerations that you have due to Covid19? Tell me about those considerations and what you feel the potential impact might be on student learning.