

Zoomed Out Teacher Fatigue in the Age of Distance Learning and COVID-19

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Presenter

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Introduction

K-12 educators are super-human, being able to scale all life throws at them daily in the classroom. Challenges can happen anytime during a school day from students who are not feeling well, unexpected fire drills to a dogged parent who is unrelenting in contacting teachers about their student's grades. The role of an educator is to support student learning regardless of the obstacles.

But what happens when COVID-19 strikes, the school shuts down, and distance learning is implemented?

Problem and Purpose



Teachers are not being provided the supports needed to teach in a distance learning environment.

Since educators do not have the resources available to them to adequately react to unforeseen situations, there is the feeling of 'building the plane while flying'.

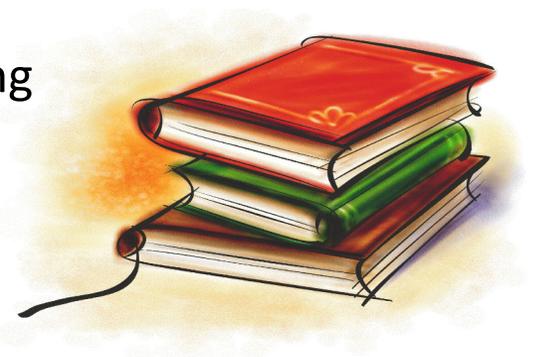
The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences, challenges, and stressors teachers were feeling early on in the COVID-19 pandemic and how they were able to pivot at a moment's notice.

Background and Literature Review

Schools were not equipped with facilities and training to support distance learning at their school sites to support student learning. The adaptability of teachers to move to online learning was shown as a direct correlation to the number of years of teaching (Alea et al., 2020).

Teachers were called on to pivot quickly to a different learning modality to support students and their parents who had taken on the role of ad hoc teachers (Castelo, 2020)

Teachers were left to their own devices to find resources and support groups to augment training in order to teach. Some districts supported teachers with outside training in how to become more adept in using platforms to engage student learning (Lambert & Marquez Rosales, 2020)



Research Questions

How do teachers pivot and adapt to endless Zoom meetings to acquire the skills needed to learn and employ a new platform, deliver curriculum and content, hold students accountable for their learning, teach parents how to log into the learning platform and support student learning at home, hold office hours, and attend online meetings including IEP/504, department, school, and district-wide?



Method

The intent of this narrative analysis is to describe and understand the experiences and insights of K-12 educators who are experiencing teacher fatigue during this time of COVID-19 induced distance learning.



Population and Data Collection

Population consisted of 8 teachers from Northern California public schools

1 elementary

2 middle school

5 high school

3 to 15 years Teaching experience

Teachers worked in urban and suburban school districts

Data collection: Individual Interviews and Journal Reflection Prompts

Data collection took place from the announcement of school closures beginning March 13th through the end of the school year, June 12th



Data Evaluation

The findings suggest insights to how K-12 educators apply personal strategies, creativity, and professional values as they attempt to bring normalcy to their classrooms during this unusual time sometimes at the detriment of their personal well-being

Themes:

Self-Reliance and Patience

Creativity and Flexibility

Professionalism

Mental Health and Well-Being



Findings: Self-Reliance and Patience

Having regular interactive class meetings actually keep them honest and provide some structure, continuity and accountability. I will work on assembling all of that and will announce the changes/meeting hours over Google classroom.

Before school closed down, I informed the students that we would be interacting regularly and that I would be holding "office hours" throughout the week for them to ask questions. I just didn't know exactly the format, as the administration continued to say that they were working on rolling out a comprehensive plan soon and that all teachers would need to be in compliance with their standardized format. I decided not to wait for them.

I think the unnatural social interaction of Zoom has students who would not be noticed upfront on screen. I find myself in a one-dimensional communication socially is a significant change for the students and me as the instructor. Use a lot fewer prompts, so the cohorts take a lot more time because it seems like I am going over concepts repeatedly even if it's not needed or also if the whole group understands it. I will continue working with zoom and web X as an online platform curriculum.



Findings: Creativity and Flexibility

The district has decided that we need to change to a new platform. It is a bit irritating to have all of this come out weeks later after I published months worth of my materials on my class website and just announced to students our schedule of interaction this week. I'll roll with the changes.

I'm learning a lot more about how to do flipped lessons and gradually feeling more confident recording myself. I am also learning to make a website where I can post my lessons where my kids can have access to all the content.

Rather than one 45-minute class, I am doing three 15-minute courses with a third of the lesson each time. When instruction is delivered this way, the rate of student participation dramatically increases. Plus, groups can be designed to keep individual personalities apart. Invite some parents to join the class. The presence of an authoritative adult is sometimes enough to keep individual students engaged and attentive.



Findings: Professionalism



I feel like I'm racing to get everything in and keep my students busy. I need to stop myself from going overboard in planning/lesson prep because I have found that I will spend days on one lesson. I keep trying to figure out ways to make content accessible while still achieving the standards.

This week, I have strengthened my bond with my colleagues and am so grateful to have them to work with. We know we can get through this together, one way or another.

My number one goal for my kids at the moment is their social and emotional well being. Our district has emphasized that this should be our priority and the standards that we are supposed to meet should come second. I held office hours three times per grade last week and my 6th graders turned up! During each office hour, I had about 12 6th graders join us just because they wanted to connect with their peers.

Findings: Mental Health and Well-Being

I've been doing my best to manage the vast increase in workload.

I've struggled to manage stress and it impacted my mental health this week. I haven't been able to get good rest and experienced mania the last few days. I experienced the worst of it on Friday and it floored me for most the weekend.

I went on a walk in Joaquin Miller Park on Saturday morning and that helped. I need to work more time for exercise and being outdoors. I also need to be less of a perfectionist. I obsess about getting everything right and end up working way too many hours on things.

My mental health improved this week - I think being able to check in with my university supervisors, my students, and some friends really helped. I'm feeling proud of the class website I created, and students expressed appreciation.

It has been tough not knowing what next week will be like, let alone the rest of the year. I have struggled with not knowing if I will be able to finish my credential or even have a job next year due to this whole mess. I have come to the realization that I can only control what I can control, and the rest I shouldn't worry about. It has been rather freeing thinking that way.



Discussion

Many of the teachers found reliance on the district and administration for guidance as to how to move forward in distance learning was not apparent or timely. Instead, teachers had to rely on learning how to use platforms or develop distance learning curriculum at a moment's notice.

Unable to balance the demands of 24/7 teaching many teachers became fatigued, neglected their personal lives and well-being, putting their health at risk.

The mental health of classroom teachers is directly affected by the stress, exhaustion, and demands of their job, which may result in fatigue or burnout (Abraham-Cook, 2012; Gewertz, 2020), coupled with the responsibilities at home, especially if they have school-aged children.

Although teachers publicly, on Zoom or other platforms, may seem cheery, in private they are struggling. Fatigue has set in.



Significance and Recommendations

Teacher's awareness of school readiness for events such as COVID-19 and their ability to move to distance learning has not been fully studied.

The responsibility of placing such a burden to teachers is not acceptable, thus causing unwarranted stress which may affect how curriculum content is delivered in the classroom.

Further studies in the areas of school district readiness for possible disruption in traditional in person learning should be investigated.

Additional studies may investigate the level of distance learning readiness in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

Another topic of further research may address how teachers support their students when there is a digital divide or digital poverty

Conclusions

K-12 schools need to have plans in place for unforeseen incidents to support school communities.

During uncertainty, decisive decisions need to be made at the administrative level to keep teachers from scrambling and to remove the pressure to perform when not having the necessary tools.

Such tools include self care for teachers to combat fatigue and permission to flexible in lesson planning and execution.

The K-12 classroom of the future will not look the same as more students will opt for online learning. How schools and districts adapt to such changes to support their teachers will remain to be seen.





Questions

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