Becoming: The Story of First Year Teachers' Student Teaching in Times of Uncertainty and its Impact on their Future Teaching

Nisreen Daoud, Bradley Conrad, and Hoyun Cho
Capital University

Abstract: Teaching in the past year and a half has been unpredictable, uncertain, and nerve wracking for many seasoned teachers. For novice teachers, whose student teaching experience drastically changed, this already difficult first year of teaching was made even more challenging. In this study, we utilized narrative inquiry to tell and retell the story of two first-year teachers who did not get a complete student teaching experience due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We highlight their student teaching adventure, their relationship with the triad, and their first year of teaching. What we find is that the complexities of teaching, especially now, requires specific and targeted continued mentorship to support the demands of teaching.

Keywords: teaching in COVID-19, triad, clinical experiences

NAPDS Nine Essentials Addressed:

- Essential 6: Articulation Agreements – A PDS requires intentionally evolving written articulated agreement(s) that delineate the commitments, expectations, roles, and responsibilities of all involved.
- Essential 8: Boundary-Spanning Roles – A PDS creates space for, advocates for, and supports college/university and P-12 faculty to operate in well-defined, boundary-spanning roles that transcend institutional settings.

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Student teaching can be considered the most pivotal time in a novice teacher's career, allowing for the smooth connection of theory to practice (Zeichner, 2014). However, in one of the most unpredictable times in education in the last few decades, teacher candidates in the spring of 2020 were abruptly halted from their experience and cast into an unknown scenario. These same teachers, who were unable to complete a typical student teaching experience, faced their first year of teaching in the middle of still uncharted territory. In the midst of what can be classified as the hardest year of any teacher's career, the odds are further stacked against this group of novice teachers; teaching their first year while not completing a proper student teaching experience in the middle of a virtual or hybrid teaching year.

In this study, novice teachers were given the space and voice to share how the shortened student teaching experience impacted their first-year of teaching. More specifically, these teachers shed light on the clinical experience (Dennis et al., 2017), the relationship of the triad (comprised of the teacher candidate, the university supervisor, and the school-based cooperating teacher) (ATE, 2000, CAEP, 2015) during the uncertain time, and how each affected their first-year teaching. Drawing on Connelly and Clandinin (1990), we employed a narrative inquiry approach to examine these teachers' experiences through their stories of teaching during such an unprecedented time.

Literature Review

Complexities of Education Preparation Programs

With the underlying unpredictability and ambiguity in teaching (Duffy 2005; Fairbanks et al., 2010; Putnam & Borko, 2000), teachers already feel pressure balancing the many hats they must wear. The multifaceted nature of the classroom necessitates the desire for teachers who are highly equipped to meet the demands of today's complex world (Duffy 2005; Fairbanks et al., 2010). With the continued influx of English Language Learners and special education students, teachers need to be prepared to work with even more diverse learners and help close the achievement gap (AATCE, 2011; The Education Schools Project, 2006; Zeichner, 2014). Even more so, anxiety, depression, and suicide rates are at an all-time high among children (CAHMI, 2017; Jennings, 2018), making social-emotional learning a high priority (Elias et al., 1997). Education preparation programs, EPPs, are charged with supporting the development of teachers who are prepared to take on these many tasks, along with implementing that academic rigor (Dillon et al., 2011).

Current trends show that over 200,000 teacher candidates graduate from an EPP yearly (NCTQ, 2013). Education preparation programs continue to grapple with how they can best prepare teacher candidates for the complexities that come along with teaching (Ball & Forzani, 2010). More specifically, developing structures, curriculum, coursework, and experiences are highly questioned in the field (Duffy et al., 2009; Fairbanks et al., 2010), as researchers continue to search for the best practices for EPPs. What is known, however, is that conceptual and pedagogical knowledge develops over a continuum and no program can ever truly provide enough context to prepare teachers for what they will encounter when they begin their careers (Scales et al., 2014).

Clinical Experience

Many researchers believe that knowledge is socially constructed, with experiential learning at the forefront (Putnam & Borko, 2000). The opportunities afforded to teacher candidates that allow them to practice the skills in which they are learning can support their continued development (Ball & Forzani, 2009). In fact, these experiences allow for candidates to connect theory to practice (CAEP, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2014, NCATE, 2010). "Clinical practice is central to high quality teacher preparation" (AACTE, 2018, p. 13). Clinical experiences, which are critical for the success of teacher candidates, have allowed for a shift to bringing learning closer to practice (Zeichner, 2014). As suggested, these clinical experiences allow for guided practice and engagement, which strengthen intellectual interpretation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005) reflectively teacher adaptability (Duffy, 2004).

Darling-Hammond (2014) suggests that strong programs include three key components: tight coherence and integration of clinical work, extensive and intensely supervised clinical work, and strong relationships with schools. Candidate's understandings are often clouded by their apprenticeship of observation or the reliance on their own schooling experience. This can often be a hindrance to candidates' understanding of effective pedagogy (Zeichner, 2005). Through clinical experiences, EPPs can challenge those and provide candidates a reflective space to consider alternate research-based approaches (Leland, 2012).

Targeted clinical experiences, especially in the case of student teaching, are most impactful on teacher candidate development (CAEP, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2014). Student teaching is the time for candidates to apply all of their learning and knowledge and make in-the-moment decisions (Lantolf, 2000). This time becomes a reference point for students during their first year of teaching and allows them to further connect theory into practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). Clinical experiences such as student teaching are situated as the heart of the overall experience, allowing for pedagogy and content to build from that (AACTE, 2018). The mentorship that stems from that experience is unparalleled throughout a teacher candidate's time in the program (Duffy, 2005; Lantolf, 2000).

Triad

In most contexts, the stakeholders involved in the success of the candidate include the teacher candidate, the university supervisor, and the school-based cooperating teacher (ATE, 2000). Often known as the triad, it is imperative that all three stakeholders view the partnership as mutually beneficial, multidimensional, and evolving as the experience progresses (Rust & Clift, 2015).

The school-based cooperating teacher, practitioner, or mentor (Rust & Clift, 2015; Zeichner & Bier, 2015) works with the teacher candidate on a day-to-day basis. During these interactions, this stakeholder's role is to ensure they support the teacher candidate, provide opportunities for learning and experimentation, and communicate with the teacher in training (Linton & Gordon, 2015). Similarly, while the exact role of the university supervisor may differ among EPPs (Burns & Badiali, 2016), they are also expected to support teacher candidates throughout the experience while concurrently communicating with the cooperating teacher to provide critical feedback on the teacher candidate's performance. During this time, the university supervisor often provides in the moment feedback for the candidate and makes themselves readily available to the candidate (Slick, 1998). Both the university supervisor and the school-based cooperating teacher are integral parts of the learning experience for the teacher candidate.

First Year Teaching and COVID-19

The first year of teaching is a learning curve for all teachers. Many teachers suffer reality shock when they began teaching and did not feel fully prepared for all the details and demands of teaching (Freeman and Knopf, 2007; Buckley, Schneider, & Shang, 2005; Veenman, 1984). For most first-year teachers, it is the first time to have complete control of a classroom without the supervision or guidance of a cooperating teacher (Womack-Wynne et al., 2011). The most common struggles that first-year teachers have identified are classified into four categories: (1) instructional challenges such as classroom management, planning and implementing instruction, managing curriculum expectations, evaluations, preparing students for high-stakes tests, and demonstrating student achievement; (2) relational challenges such as in relations with parents, administrators, colleagues; (3) adaptation challenges such as in adapting to the school, environment, profession and; (4) challenges in physical infrastructure and facilities of the school such as insufficient social facilities and absence of the necessary teaching materials (Chelsey & Jordan, 2012; Ergunay & Adiguzel, 2019; Freiberg, 2002; Houston, 1993; Smeaton & Waters, 2013; Wodlinger, 1986; Womack-Wynne et al., 2011). In addition, first year teachers often lack training in effectively implementing technology in their classrooms (Batane & Ngwako, 2017; McKinney et al., 1999).

In March of 2020, most K-12 schools in the US had to close their doors due to coronavirus (COVID-19), and their classrooms shifted to remote learning. Some districts brought students back into buildings in fall 2020 while others remained online. For the first-year teachers as well as experienced teachers, the pandemic has added more stress to an already high-stress profession. Concurrently, challenges such as new teaching formats, students lacking access to technology, and stringent COVID-19 safety protocols have further added to the typical first year teaching struggles.

These difficulties and frustrations have impacted teacher attrition in the US (Darling-Hammond, 2014b; Dilbert et al., 2021). Ingersoll et al. (2018) studied nearly three decades of federal data on teachers from 1987 to 2016 to explore what changes have taken place over time. One of their key findings is 40-50% of new teachers leave the profession within their first five years of teaching (Ingersoll et al., 2018). According to a study of 113 first year teachers, Womack-Wynne et al (2011) found that 43% felt like they had made the wrong career choice after four months in the classroom, and 63% said that they did not see themselves teaching in 10 years. Dilbert et al. (2021) reported that:

> Although it is too early to say whether the overall number of teachers leavers will go up because of COVID-19, early signs indicate that it will, which will put additional strain on the already daunting prospects for the 2021–2022 school year…. The teacher leavers in our survey left for both COVID-19–specific reasons and because of longer standing structural problems with the profession that the pandemic has exacerbated. (p. 15)

These past studies and recent reports have provided general pictures of the trends and struggles that first-year teachers face. As such, it is clear that providing a space for first-year teachers to share their stories, experiences, and perceptions is imperative.

Methods

Hearing these stories from the teachers themselves gives us a clearer understanding of just how valuable clinical experiences may be (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Hyden, 2010). Congruently, the research on teacher attrition makes it clear that first-year teachers need more

intensive, targeted mentoring to better support them in their inaugural year in the profession. For this study we sought to provide those supports in the way of a yearlong, first-year teaching mentorship that included regular meetings with university teacher education faculty, reflective blogging, journaling, and swift access to a university mentor. After collecting data along the way, we sought to more deeply understand how their clinical experiences during the pandemic affected their first year of teaching.

To share the stories of the participants, we employed a narrative inquiry approach. Narrative inquiry gives space for the telling and retelling of stories (Clandinin et al., 2011), which allows for the teachers to share their journey in such an unprecedented time. In what follows, the teachers are able to shed light on their own experiences (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Ming & Kwok, 2011) and share their personal perspectives of their first-year teaching in spite of a proper student teaching experience.

According to Clandinin and Huber (2010), "Narrative inquiry follows a recursive, reflexive process of moving from field (with starting points in telling or living of stories) to field texts (data) to interim and final research texts" (p. 1). We allow the voices of the candidates to tell their story and share the feelings and thoughts they had throughout their first-year of teaching. Simply put, narrative inquiry is the process of meaning making (Bruner, 1996). Through the lived experiences of the teacher candidates, we get a better understanding of the trials and tribulations of first year teachers attempting to begin their careers in the midst of a challenging time in US history (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Narrative inquiry does not necessarily ask questions, but looks at a research puzzle or dilemma (Clandinin, 1989). Our inquiry focuses heavily on the idea of teaching during COVID-19 (Craig, 2011). This approach allowed us to collaborate with the first-year teachers to better understand their lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). To guide this study and to help us in our meaning making process, we examined the following questions:

1. What impact did the change in student teaching have on the relationship of the triad?
2. How did the abrupt stoppage of student teaching impact the first year of teaching?

Participants

The cohort of beginning teachers we worked with initially included seven first-year teachers, all of whom had graduated from a small university in the Midwest. Three faculty from that university served as mentors and facilitators, each of whom had worked with the members of the cohort in various capacities while they were in the teacher education program at that university. The participants were hand selected by the three mentors with no specific criteria, with the notion that they aspired to have a cohort with some grade level, geographic, and content area diversity so as to have a broader sampling of teachers. The cohort met with the mentors virtually once every month in the evening for an hour to an hour and a half to check in, discuss issues or successes, and to preview upcoming blog post topics they would write for the Tales from the Classroom blog's "Tales from the First Year" series. Members of the cohort often referred to these meetings as "teacher therapy sessions," illustrating their belief that they were getting something that they needed from this group that they were not getting elsewhere. Because of differing circumstances not related to this project, two first-year teachers ultimately left the project, leaving the cohort with five members, two of whom are highlighted in this study.

The two participants in this study both identify as white women. One of them was a traditional undergraduate student while the other was a second career professional with extensive

postgraduate career experience in a non-education related field. Both of them received early elementary school licenses in grades PK-5. Carrie Wright is a 4th grade elementary school teacher in a public school who was hired as a yearlong substitute teacher of one particular class. Similarly, Brooklyn Shea is a 2nd grade elementary school teacher in a private religious school. Both teachers took their first-year positions in schools that were not their student teaching placement school.

Of the three faculty mentors, all three are tenure line teacher education faculty with extensive experience teaching, coaching, and leading in K-12 settings. One is an elementary and literacy specialist, one is a mathematics education specialist, and the other is a curriculum specialist with a background in Language Arts teaching.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study were collected at a number of different points. To support the credibility of the findings, triangulation of the data (Baxter & Jackson, 2008) was used by collecting data in three forms: (1) blog posts; (2) journal entries; and (3) interviews. First, as described above, the teachers in the cohort were asked to write blogs on a consistent basis each month, which were posted publicly on the Tales from the Classroom blog. Those posts were used as the initial point for understanding the stories. Next, each teacher was asked to complete a journal entry specifically for the purposes of the study and not to be posted on any social media platform. This allowed for teachers to be honest, transparent, and share their thoughts in confidence. This entry included four questions:

1. How is your first year of teaching going?
2. What is challenging about your first year?
3. What is going well in your first year?
4. How are you feeling about teaching?

Teachers were not given any direction as to what this should look like or how to complete it. The purpose of the journal entries was to supplement the third data collection method, the interviews. All the semi-structured interviews (Stake, 1995) were conducted individually by one of the faculty mentor educators, to allow for consistency and openness for the teachers.

Analyzing and interpreting data in narrative inquiry has been a point of discussion for researchers for some time. The question of neutrality or objectivity in narrative inquiry has been a source of debate for some, to which we would explicitly state that we did not intend to be objective or neutral in the writing of this study. As we negotiated the data among the three researchers as well as with the two participants, it became clear that our individual perspectives, schema, histories, interpretations, etc. were salient to how we told and retold the story. Clandinin and Connelly (1988) explain this phenomenon this way: “Collaborative research constitutes a relationship. In everyday life, the idea of friendship implies a sharing, an interpretation of two or more persons’ spheres of experience” (p. 281). Further, Josselson (2006) reminds us that narrative research is inherently interpretative at every stage of the process, including data collection, data analysis, and writing the narrative. Riessman (2008) goes as far as to proclaim that researchers engaging in narrative inquiry are not merely neutral observers who tell objective stories of their participants. Rather than assuming a neutral stance, we embrace having our own perspectives, schema, histories, biases, etc., and explicitly sought to draw on our relationships with the participants to help us in telling and interpreting their stories.

To disseminate these stories, we drew on Connelly and Clandinin’s (1990) framework for narrative inquiry storytelling, which they refer to as restorying, the process of gathering stories

from participants, analyzing them, and then rewriting the story in the researchers' own form of narrative. Connelly and Clandinin's framework include: 1) broadening; 2) burrowing; and 3) restorying. Broadening refers to when researchers generalize about a participant or research site's character, way of life, context, etc. Connelly and Clandinin warn researchers to avoid making broad generalizations and as such, we heed their warning in this text. Burrowing refers to when the researcher digs into the narrative stories of the participants, or an event observed by the researcher to examine them more deeply. Finally, we aim to restory the participants' experiences by considering present and future implications of their experiences while exploring how they make meaning of those experiences now as well as how they think it might influence them in the future.

Findings

In the following section, we present the findings in a similar format as Connelly and Clandinin (1990). We provide the stories of the two participants. These two participant's stories are intentionally presented in order to allow the reader to get a deeper understanding of their experience and journey from their student teaching experience to their first year of teaching. We utilize an inductive approach, allowing the teachers to tell their story. Each story presented demonstrates the components of narrative inquiry analysis: broadening, burrowing, and restorytelling (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). We first present each participant's student teaching experience, then their experience working in the triad, and end with their first year of teaching.

Carrie Wright

Student Teaching Experience

Prior to COVID-19, Carrie felt like she was having an exceptional student teaching experience. During her time in the school, she was gradually taking over many aspects of the instruction and implementation of curriculum. She felt as though she was collaborating not only with her mentor teachers, but also with other specialist teachers that came into the classroom to support students. Carrie discussed extensively that she was given the freedom and opportunity to develop her own lesson and unit plans. She was given the creative space to decide how she wanted to teach various content without too much interruption from her mentor teachers. In the moment, she often felt a bit alone with this freedom and craved more support. However, as she reflected on the experience post-student teaching, she now appreciates the freedom she had. For her, she sees that this was the way her mentor teachers were allowing her to practice becoming a teacher and allowed her to get out of her comfort zone.

Right before COVID-19 changed life as we knew it, Carrie had completely taken over all aspects of the classroom. Not only was she the sole instructor in the classroom, but she was also participating in all the other components of teaching, which included morning meetings, attendance, lunch counts, etc. She felt like a real teacher at that point. One of her mentor teachers was leaving the classroom most days and allowing her full control. With the ambiguity of COVID-19, things drastically changed for Carrie. What they thought would just be an extended spring break turned into online teaching for the remainder of the school year and her student teaching experience. Carrie no longer was in control of the classroom or the instruction. When she once felt like the teacher, she now felt like an outsider looking in. Or as she calls it, an observer.

Carrie's new role, in the COVID-19 teaching era, was to create word study activities, take attendance, and give feedback on writing assignments. Carrie deeply talked about her need to advocate for herself during this time and to continue to ask to do more. Secretly, she wanted more responsibility and instructional time. She felt as if she was so close to becoming that teacher and that COVID-19 greatly inhibited that process. She never felt like she gradually was able to give back the instructional power to her mentor teachers, but rather abruptly went from teaching it all to practically teaching nothing.

Experience with Triad

Carrie was uniquely positioned in a grade where teachers departmentalized their instruction. Two teachers would team up and switch their students halfway through the day and only teach two of the content areas. Carrie was able to stay with one classroom and just switch content areas she taught. She describes her mentor teachers as outstanding educators who included her in the planning process. She often felt valued for her opinions and her thoughts. She received plenty of quantitative and qualitative feedback from her mentors and enjoyed the relationship they had. While she sometimes struggled with their method of support, she now reflects on being grateful for them pushing her and having her struggle a bit in order to build her confidence and abilities. She appreciated that they allowed her to be part of all aspects of teaching and extended invitations to her for team meetings, lunches, and planning sessions.

When talking about her relationship with her mentor teachers post-COVID-19, Carrie often felt the need to preface her comments with the understanding that even they were navigating uncharted waters. Although she knew she wasn't, she felt like a burden to her mentor teachers during COVID-19 and no longer felt like she was part of the planning process. While they still met with her daily via online platforms, she commented that they would have already planned, and this was more of their way of touching base with her. She knew that they were still trying to be inclusive, but they recognized they weren't being fully available or supportive. She felt they no longer had extra energy to spend on her, but rather their energy was being spent learning how to navigate the new online teaching. She knew while they were great at providing her feedback pre-COVID-19, they would no longer have the bandwidth to do that. Communication dwindled a bit. Regardless, she still felt like she had a good relationship with her mentors.

Carrie talked about having a good relationship with her university supervisor. She felt valued by the supervisor and comfortable enough to bring any questions to them. She felt as though her supervisor was advocating for her and was supportive. Carrie felt as though her supervisor saw her as a teacher. Post-COVID-19 she continued to feel the same way about her university supervisor. While the communication between the triad became less of a focal point, Carrie still felt as though her university supervisor was there to support her and ensure she was successful. In her interview, she discussed that she continued to be in consistent contact with her supervisor and met with her to ensure she was still progressing as a teacher. More importantly, Carrie felt reassured by her supervisor that she would still complete the program, despite the lack of time in the student teaching placement.

First Year Teaching

Carrie deeply reflected on the important role her student teaching experience played in her first year of teaching. For Carrie, working online during her second half of student teaching allowed her to feel prepared to use technology tools. She already had practice and done the

experimenting before her first year so that it allowed her to feel more comfortable. The experiences she had pre-COVID-19, taking over the entire teaching load, allowed her to also feel confident doing those things her first year of teaching.

Carrie often feels like her first year of teaching is a bit of a whirlwind. “One of the challenges about my first year is that there is no pause button. Everything is new - lesson planning, responding to parents, navigating all the behind-the-scenes tasks such as IEP meetings, class placements, planning class parties with my home room parent, and responding to emails.” She reflects often on the complexities of teaching and how much goes into teaching, beyond the instruction that is done. She began her first year of teaching in quarantine, due to close contact with someone who was exposed to COVID-19. She commented that her students went to school before she even did. She felt like she never got off on the right foot because of this.

Carrie did not mention much in terms of support from her school during her first year. While she relied on her grade level teammates for some support and to help her understand the school culture, she never commented on getting mentorship or guidance from members of the school. When thinking ahead to her second year, Carrie talked about feeling a bit of anger and resentment. To her, she feels as though she will have a second first year of teaching. Much of what she developed for this year may not transfer over, due to her designing much of her instruction for online and hybrid learning. She understands that her first year was “one in a million” and that she will hopefully have a more traditional first year during her second year of teaching.

Brooklyn Shea

Student Teaching Experience

Brooklyn Shea felt as though before COVID-19 hit she was having a wonderful student teaching experience. She had developed, what she imagined, as the perfect co-teaching model. While she never felt like she was getting to fully take over the classroom, she liked how co-teaching allowed her the ideal amount of time to practice her skills and also continue to learn from her mentor teacher. During her time, she enjoyed being in a classroom that had a “perfect” group of students with little behavior problems that allowed her to develop her instructional practices more readily. For her, the constant back and forth teaching with her mentor teacher allowed her to teach varying content areas and try out different programs the school had adopted. Being able to do read aloud daily allowed her to work on her read aloud abilities and get comfortable doing that with other adults in the room. She appreciated that both of them were able to teach mini lessons and pull small groups throughout the day.

When Brooklyn thinks about her experience after COVID-19 hit, she described it as exhausting. For her, she felt a weight and stress that she had not felt before. To sum up her experience student teaching after COVID-19, Brooklyn reflected, “My role during student teaching after COVID-19 was to take over for the first time during a pandemic remotely.” She explained how she felt as though she was leading the class after COVID-19 hit. She extensively discussed how she was spending all day recording videos, meeting with students, teaching lessons, and answering questions. She continued to pull small groups during this time, even if her mentor teacher was not. So for her, the exhaustion came from her feeling like she was fully taking over for the first time in the midst of a pandemic nobody knew how to handle.

Experience with Triad

Pre-COVID-19 Brooklyn reflected on her relationship with her mentor teacher as being one that was relatively good. Besides the challenge in her teacher to give up full control, Brooklyn knew that she was provided with great experiences and an excellent co-teaching experience. She felt as though she had an open relationship and was comfortable coming to her mentor teacher with any questions or concerns she had. Her teacher seemed to value her opinion and would ask for her input on instruction. During this time, her mentor regularly shared resources, allowed her to be part of conversations, and gave her as much feedback as she could.

When describing her relationship with her cooperating teacher post-COVID-19, she described their relationship as non-existent. More specifically, Brooklyn felt abandoned by her mentor teacher and felt as though she disappeared. She empathetically understood that her mentor was also just trying to deal with the pandemic and her own children being at home with her as well. However, she knew that she was putting in more effort than her teacher and felt as though she was doing the heavy lifting. In her eyes, her mentor teacher was doing the bare minimum and having her do all the work. From her perspective, she felt as though her mentor teacher was over reliant on her to carry on most of the teaching duties on account of not knowing how to make the adjustments required for teaching during the pandemic. In conjunction, Brooklyn felt as though all communication, which they had pre-COVID-19, was now gone. She never felt like her mentor teacher reached out to check on her, ask her how things were going, or ensure things were getting done. The only time she would hear from her mentor was when she would text her a question. In her eyes, it felt as though her mentor no longer cared for her.

Contrastingly, Brooklyn felt a strong connection with her university supervisor both pre-COVID-19 and post-COVID-19. For her, the university supervisor was her saving grace. She felt constantly cared for and valued by her university supervisor. Her supervisor checked in on her often, throughout both experiences, and offered valuable feedback. For Brooklyn, her supervisor reminded her of the realities of teaching and how sometimes teachers must do things they may not always agree with. She often appreciated the advice she received.

First Year Teaching

Brooklyn reflected on her first year of teaching openly and with what seemed like a bit of disappointment and angst. She commented, “I love teaching, and this is where God put me, but I am also like, ‘I know my worth and I know that God created me to be so much and I think the system prohibits that from happening.” Brooklyn struggled with thinking about her long-term goals of teaching, as she does not know how feasible this stress and workload could be when she eventually settles down to have children. For her, the burden that comes with teaching is more than any human should have to bear. She now has a better understanding of the idea of teacher burnout. She commented that she will need to figure out how to “develop a backbone” in order to better cope with the pressures of teaching.

She has felt overwhelmed from her first year of teaching and it has felt like nothing short of a roller coaster ride. While she understood going into teaching the flexibility needed to teach, she never expected this inconsistency and uncertainty that she dealt with this year. Brooklyn commented that she did not feel the school provided her much in terms of a first-year experience. While she worked with her grade level teammate to plan some of her lessons or get ideas, she often commented that her pedagogy did not align with her colleagues. For her, this further placed

her in a state of isolation feeling as though she did not have any resources or support at the school.

Despite her worries, Brooklyn still feels a great sense of pride and passion for teaching. She has learned so much, good and bad, from her first year of teaching. Her work this year has not only allowed her to find confidence in her abilities, but it has also helped her find her voice. Brooklyn spoke of being able to speak up for herself and share her thoughts with others. If nothing else, she is still steadfast in her desire to teach. She commented, "I knew even as a young teen that God called me to be a teacher and was preparing my heart for the challenges of teaching through some of the more challenging life events I faced." She very much understands there is a lot of judgement placed on teachers and that she will need to adjust to this and learn how to cope with the exhaustion that comes with the career.

Discussion

In both of the experiences shared, it was clear that the pandemic had a dramatic impact on both teacher candidates' clinical field work. First, the relationship between the teacher candidates and the cooperating teachers were drastically altered once instruction became exclusively remote. Given the critical nature of the teacher candidate-cooperating teacher relationship (Zeichner & Bier, 2015), Carrie and Brooklyn both felt as if they no longer were being mentored. This led to a bit of uncertainty for both novice teachers as to what to expect in their first year of teaching. There was an adverse effect on the level and nature of support provided to both teachers. In fact, both women felt as if they no longer were given day-to-day feedback, valuable experience working with a colleague, or even necessary communication (Linton & Gordon, 2015). As a result of an abruptly short student teaching mentorship experience, more intensive mentorship could have been helpful during the first year to combat the lack of experience afforded during this critical learning time (Ball & Forzani, 2009).

These feelings of abandonment from their cooperating teachers appeared to carry over into their first year of teaching where both felt overwhelmed, somewhat underprepared, and in desperate need of more support. As Putnam and Borko (2000) suggest, these ideals are imperative to address during student teaching in order to develop well-rounded teachers. Interestingly, despite feeling as though they were well supported and cared for by their university supervisors, each still felt a lack of emotional support from their cooperating teachers once the pandemic hit, though both shared that they understood their cooperating teachers felt overwhelmed as well. This emotional gap did not seem to be filled during their first year of teaching, as both still felt as though they were alone in their pursuit of effective teaching and instruction. There is an emotional gap (Elias et al., 1997) that may well be worth exploring in other teachers with similar pandemic clinical experiences, particularly if such gaps were already leading to attrition.

One other such shared implication of student teaching during COVID-19 is that both had a drastically altered teaching experience once schools went remote, leaving each devoid of many critical experiences beginning teachers need to be most successful (Darling-Hammond et al., 2005). In Carrie's case, she went from being in control of most things a classroom teacher would be charged with to being a passive observer in an online platform. The feedback she received from her cooperating teachers went from being rich and helpful to being nearly nonexistent. Conversely, Brooklyn was in a situation where she could try out various strategies, curricular approaches, and classroom management approaches to being put in charge of the online course creation and delivery with little to no support. Not only did she not get to experience the rich

conversations with her cooperating teacher that are so valuable to beginning educators, but she also missed out on developing her classroom curriculum, instruction, and classroom environment skills.

Strengthening Partnerships and Supporting Novice Teachers

While engaging in a professional internship during a pandemic is certainly a unique occurrence, some critical lessons can be learned. University supervisors might first consider taking a more proactive role in advocating for teacher candidates when there is a breakdown in communication or the teacher candidates are feeling as though they are left to their own devices. Item number eight of the National Association for the Professional Development Schools (NAPDS) (2021) nine essentials suggests, all stakeholders in the partnership must take on “boundary-spanning roles.” With the current complexities facing teacher candidates and K-12 schools, university supervisors must be prepared for the advocacy that may be needed to ensure teacher candidates receive the most of their internship experiences. While working in this Third Space (Gutierrez, 2008; Kozleski, 2011), where teacher candidates begin to identify how their pedagogical thinking fits into the classroom context, we recommend that all stakeholders reevaluate their role, the structure of the experience, and how COVID-19 will continue to impact the student teaching experience.

More importantly, we urge partnerships to re-establish their shared work together to better meet the needs of all stakeholders in the current school context. For this, we recommend reviewing the articulated agreements and shared governance structures of the partnership as suggested by the nine essentials (NAPDS, 2021). Even more proactively, EPPs in conjunction with partnering schools and administrations, might reconsider the process of identifying cooperating teachers to ensure teacher candidates are having a rich experience when student teaching. More specifically, identifying cooperating teachers who are equipped to handle the current teaching climate and the responsibilities of building a successful student teaching experience. Developing partnerships that include a more select pool of teachers who can be better educated on the philosophies, beliefs, and practices of the EPP with whom they are working might prove beneficial. Concurrently, EPPs can come to better understand the school contexts in which they are sending their teacher candidates and seek to understand how their work can better serve their partnership school.

While re-evaluating and strengthening partnerships is essential (NAPDS, 2021), schools and EPPs must consider how novice teachers are being supported beyond their program. While we do not know the impact of COVID-19 on teacher turnover, early signs do indicate that the added pressure may cause more teachers to select to leave the profession (Dilbert et al., 2021). More effort must be placed on bridging the first few years between leaving the program and beginning to teach. EPP must consider ways to support their graduates beyond their programs. Similarly, school districts must re-evaluate the supports, resources, and mentorships they offer novice teachers in order to lower the ever-growing teacher attrition rate (Darling-Hammond, 2014b). Mentorship programs that seek to provide space for teachers to voice their concerns and receive appropriate mentorship would be beneficial (Daoud et al., 2021).

Conclusion

While we in no way seek to generalize the experiences of these two teachers, one would be hard pressed to deny that teacher candidates in their clinical experiences during the pandemic were lacking in the preparation they need to best set them up for success as teachers (AACTE,

2018; Darling-Hammond et al., 2005; Zeichner, 2005). Compounding this reality is that most if not all of these teachers had a tumultuous, inconsistent first-year experience where they were remote, hybrid, face-to-face with restrictions, and sometimes all of the above. As both participants astutely pointed out, these teachers will in essence be having a second first year where they are going to be developing skills that they would have been working on during a traditional student teaching experience (Ball & Forzani, 2009). It seems clear that these teachers will need (and did need) extra support to help foster their growth as educators. Concurrently, if the teacher attrition numbers continue in their downward trajectory, it would seem most essential to provide greater support to those who have been learning to teach during the pandemic. The level of stress from teaching that led so many to leave the profession before the pandemic was invariably magnified by teaching during a pandemic. As such, it would be wise for teacher educators, school administrators, professional developers, and policy makers to consider these realities when considering how to approach supporting new teachers going forward.

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Author Information

Nisreen Daoud, PhD (ndaoud@capital.edu) is an Assistant Professor of Education at Capital University. She teaches literacy and curriculum courses to undergraduate and supervises teacher candidates. Her research interests include clinical experiences and novice teacher support.

Bradley Conrad, PhD (bconrad2@capital.edu) is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at Capital University. Dr. Conrad is co-author of the book *Lesson Planning with Purpose: Five Approaches to Curriculum* Design. He serves as the team lead on the Tales from the Classroom Project.

Hoyun Cho, PhD (hcho1416@capital.edu) is an Associate Professor of education, specializing in mathematics education, in the School of Education at Capital University. His current research centers on the role of teacher and curriculum in mathematics instruction.