Learning and Leading Through COVID-19: Surprising Findings from a Year of Disrupted Field Experience

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Abstract

When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the closure of Kindergarten-Grade 12 schools in Alberta, the authors, who are the Directors of Field Experience, at this local university saw this disruption as both a challenge and an opportunity (Danyluk, 2022). Over 400 preservice teachers were scheduled to begin their in-school practicum two days after the announcement of school closures. While most Bachelor of Education programs in Canada halted or postponed their field experience programs, the authors decided to move forward with an online practicum course. This chapter describes how we used collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) to restructure field experience in response to the pandemic and the impact it had on student and field instructor learning. A community of practice was initiated by the Directors of Field Experience to support the instructors in the implementation of the online course and to come together as a community of learners in support of one another during this complex time. Survey and anecdotal data will be shared to illuminate the positive influence the pivot to the online field course had on students and instructors as well as the challenges we encountered as we navigated these uncharted waters as educational leaders.

*Keywords***:** leadership, preservice teachers, online learning, practicum, pandemic

Introduction

The closure of Kindergarten–Grade 12 schools in response to the emergence of the novel coronavirus in 2020, halting face-to-face (F-2-F) instruction, was keenly felt in Canadian Bachelor of Education (BEd) experiential, practicum-based courses, as they rely on field experiences to prepare preservice teachers for their professional work in classrooms (Burns et al., 2020; Danyluk, 2022). In March 2020, many teacher education programs were able to shift to online practica, whereas others decided to wait until schools reopened to continue in a traditional manner (Morin & Peters, 2022; Morrison et al., 2022). Depending on the number of weeks of practicum already completed, the decision to postpone was potentially risky for preservice teachers because they might not have had enough practicum weeks to receive certification in their jurisdiction, thereby jeopardizing their ability to acquire a teaching position the following school year.

As members of the leadership team responsible for developing the pandemic response in our teacher education program, and we quickly realized we would need to find alternatives to a traditional practicum (Burns et al., 2020; Danyluk, 2022). Leadership through times of crisis and uncertainty requires a strong commitment to collaboration and humility that places the needs of students above individual interests. The purpose of this book chapter is to discuss how we used collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) to respond quickly and thoughtfully to a real crisis in teacher education through the restructuring of field experience to ensure that preservice teachers' educational progress would not be negatively impacted by the pandemic measures while ensuring that they were adequately prepared to graduate and teach in turbulent and uncertain K–12 classrooms.

The Challenge and the Opportunity: Pivoting in March 2020

In March 2020, our large, urban education faculty in Alberta had over 400 final-year preservice teachers already in schools completing their last field experience course and over 400 first-year preservice teachers about to begin their second practicum course (Burns et al., 2020; Danyluk, 2022). In our university program, we have four field experience courses that, cumulatively, meet the provincially mandated practical instructional hours for teacher certification. Fortunately, because of the program structure, our final-year students had completed enough mandated hours to graduate, so when the local school districts told us that our students were no longer able to work with their partner teachers, these preservice teachers were still able to be fully certified.

Our first-year students, however, had completed only a short, two-week observation in schools during the fall 2019 school term, and they faced the real possibility that they might not graduate on time if school closures were extended. Some BEd programs in Canada halted or postponed their field experience programs assuming that the school closures would be temporary and that schools would reopen to preservice teachers after the initially announced 2-week closures (Morrison et al., 2022). Our leadership team decided to design an online practicum course to ensure that our preservice teachers completed their mandatory course requirements rather than waiting to see what the provincial government decided about F-2-F instruction. This decision turned out to be crucial, as the schools in Alberta remained online until the end of June, 2020, and the school districts vehemently stated that preservice teachers would not be included in their online teaching that term. Had we not created an online field experience course, our first-year education students would have had a full year delay to their practicum courses.

The resulting four-week "pandemic practicum" (Burns et al., 2020) was thoughtfully designed with an experiential focus, prioritizing differentiation, incorporating Indigenous

perspectives, and building awareness of wellness, areas, and topics that previous preservice teachers had described as challenging during their F-2-F practica (Danyluk et al., 2021). Adding to the complexity of the course implementation was that 26 field experience instructors had already accepted sessional contracts to teach the F-2-F field experience course, and their levels of knowledge about and experience with the theories and practices used for effective online pedagogy varied widely (Danyluk, 2022). As we developed the online practicum course, we realized that in addition to creating a course, we needed to act as instructional leaders (Robinson, 2011) for the field instructors to ensure a successful implementation of the course. We initiated a community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) to support the instructors to come together as a community of learners to support one another and our preservice teachers during that complex time.

In this chapter, we examine the leadership decisions that were made using findings from a two-year study framed using Hargreaves and O'Connor's (2018) collaborative professionalism for educational leaders. Drawing from data collected through student surveys and interviews as well as discussions with students in our job roles, we describe how we drew upon the findings to make programmatic changes and leadership decisions as preservice teachers returned to in-person practica the following year. We also elaborate on one of the surprising findings: a large gap in preservice teacher training with regard to digital instruction. In an earlier article, we defined digital instructional literacy as having the motivation, confidence, and competence to instruct students in a blended or online environment (Burns et al., 2020). Although preservice and in-service teachers are largely using technology as tools to instruct their in-person courses, little training is provided into how to design and deliver online instruction that promote K–12 student success. This gap inspired inquiry into the concept of digital instructional literacy, preservice teacher experiences

within the online practicum, and their transition to in-person placements for their third and final practicum.

Literature Review

Leadership Practicum Decisions at Canadian Universities

The field experience practicum is the most valued experiential aspect of most teacher education programs and something preservice teachers describe as the most important part of their preservice program (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Flores, 2016; Kitchen & Petrarca, 2016; White & Forgasz, 2016) that they look forward to with great anticipation. Although virtual or online practica in the United States has received some attention, up until the pandemic there had been very little research that focused on Canadian experiences (Compton et al., 2010; Kennedy & Archambault, 2011). In their examination of virtual field experiences for in-service teachers, Jackson and Jones (2019) found that authenticity and a sense of community were two components essential to positive perceptions of a virtual field experience. A sense of community in the course was enhanced by peer feedback and group problem-solving was present when students reflected on their facilitation and had time to make improvements (Jackson & Jones, 2019).

When schools across Canada closed in March 2020, education programs scrambled to find alternatives for the F-2-F practicum. In designing alternative practica, all practicum leaders were facing the same problem: How do you provide students with practice teaching experiences in the absence of K–12 students and the usual school environment? In the period following lockdowns and school closures, most programs were forced to implement emergency remote teaching (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). During this intense work period, faculty redesigned courses and learned how to teach online. Both students and faculty found themselves reorganizing domestic

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spaces and routines in order to work from home (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Learning from home brought new concerns including equity issues around access to technology and intrusion into private spaces (Kidd & Murray, 2020), which for some students necessitated logging in from their bedrooms.
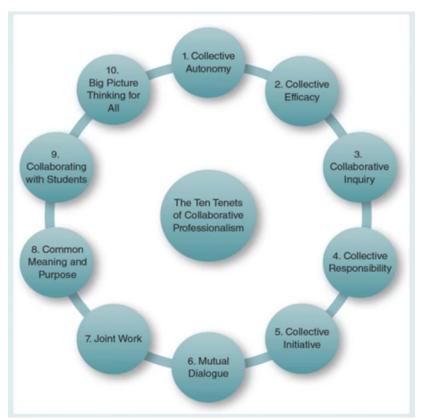
In designing alternatives to the traditional in-school practicum, BEd programs across Canada had to take into consideration the impact of alternative practica design on teaching certification in their province. When school closures began, Western University already had self-directed experiential learning options through its Alternative Field Experience (AFE; Ott et al., 2022). The AFE program permits preservice teachers to propose learning opportunities that can range from literacy coaching online to developing curriculum for a community organization. St. Mary's University in Calgary developed a series of online modules for its preservice teachers focused on meeting competency standards. Each module was designed using case studies incorporating reflection and reflexivity to replicate in-school experiences (Hill et al., 2022). Similarly, the University of Alberta created an Introduction to Field Experience course that began in March 2020 (Baril et al., 2022). The University of Manitoba made the decision to delay its practicum until November with hope that students would be back in schools (Morin & Peters, 2022). In the interim, it provided online courses focusing on preparation for the practicum and health and wellness. Ontario Tech found that once schools had reopened, many mentor teachers were willing to continue to host practicum students in their class; however, others were not comfortable in doing so (Morrison et al., 2022). For those students, they created several alternatives including spring/summer practica and working in the virtual Maker Lab, where preservice teachers provided workshops for in-service teachers and K–12 students.

From Emergency Design to Digital Instructional Literacy Through Collaborative Professionalism

Our leadership response can be framed according to the 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism (see Figure 1). Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) defined this model of working together as follows:

Collaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together who work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning, purpose, and success. It is organized in an evidence-informed, but not data-driven, way through rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry. (p. 4)

Figure 1
Collaborative Professionalism

Note. Reprinted with permission from *Collaborative professionalism: When teaching together means learning for all*, by A. Hargreaves & M. T. O'Connor (2018, p. 110). Copyright (2018) by Corwin.

Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) suggested that to understand the influence of using collaborative professionalism, a design analysis should include attention to the four B's: before, betwixt, beyond, and beside (p. 121). To demonstrate how collaborative professionalism can look in practice, the remainder of this chapter presents how, as a leadership team, we not only responded to the immediate crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but also used what was learned through a two-year research project to transform field experience in one university program.

Before: The Situation Before the Collaboration

Before refers to understanding the nature of the situation before the collaboration (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Prior to the discovery of the novel coronavirus in Alberta, we mainly worked independently of one another. Patricia Danyluk was completing her term as the community-based field experience director and preparing for a year's research leave. Astrid Kendrick was a sessional instructor who had just been hired to transition into the field director role. Theodora Kapoyannis was entering her second year as the on-campus field experience director. Because the two pathways (community-based and on-campus) ran concurrently, but had different students, timelines, and priorities, interactions between us were largely transactional, with minimal collaboration except on areas of programmatic overlap.

Therefore, our journey to collaborative professionalism has a beginning date: March 13, 2020, as this date marked the day that we received notice that our preservice teachers may not be able to begin their field experience as planned the following Monday. We learned that all schools in Alberta were being directed by the provincial government to go online for at least two weeks and F-2-F practicum placements were subsequently cancelled by all school districts (Burns et al., 2020). Additionally, school districts made it clear that in-service teachers would not be mentoring preservice teachers as the former were also learning how to teach in digital environments.

Before the emergency remote design of the pandemic practicum, our faculty of education did not have, and had not even considered offering, any online practicum placements. All student practicum placements were F-2-F, and minimal attention was paid to teaching and learning through digital tools in any comprehensive manner. Across Canada, online teaching and learning were largely driven by just-in-time professional learning, with individual instructors being responsible for learning and integrating digital technologies into their classes (Hodges et al., 2020). Teacher education programs in Canada reevaluated and re-envisioned their programs to focus on key ideas and how to best communicate them in the online environment (Fitzgerald et al., 2022).

Being cognizant that one of the most consistent concerns expressed by online educators was the difficulty of establishing a sense of community in an online environment (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2021; Wilkens et al., 2014), we designed the four-week pandemic practicum to balance content delivery through a combination of daily synchronous classes through Zoom with multimodal asynchronous content including written articles, podcasts, webinars, and social media posts (Burns et al., 2020; Danyluk, 2022). Further, we knew that preservice teachers and faculty alike were experiencing high levels of uncertainty and stress, so the first week of the course focused on evidence-based information to promote workplace and educator wellness. Knowing that a core element of F-2-F field experience was creating, reflecting on, and receiving feedback about lesson plans, we focused the second week on lesson planning, small group instruction, and peer feedback. To align with one of the requirements of Alberta Education's (2020) *Teaching Quality Standard* and our commitment to reconciliation and Indigenization, the third week of the course focused on Indigenous perspectives and resources, and preservice teachers were tasked with integrating Indigenous knowledge into their lesson design. This part of the course introduced a mandatory Indigenous education course all students would take in their final year of the program.

In the final week of the course, preservice teachers were tasked with exploring ways to incorporate differentiated instruction into their lesson plans and delivery.

As we developed and implemented the pandemic practicum and interacted with the instructors, school partners, and preservice teachers, we realized that we had an ideal opportunity to understand the longer-term influence of introducing online instruction and well-being on preservice teachers through field experience. Initially, we designed a mixed methods study in April of 2020 to investigate the influence of the pandemic practicum on the preservice teachers' instructional practices and perceptions of online learning. Upon analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data from this survey (Danyluk et al., 2021), we realized that a larger mixed methods research project was needed to understand the gaps created during the pandemic period of March 2020–January 2022 for preservice teachers' emerging teaching practice and to explore the mental and emotional influence of learning to teach through the pandemic on preservice teachers.

Methodology

Following Creswell's (2012) suggestions for mixed methods research, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in our study to address our research questions and inform our next steps within the field experience program as we responded to the COVID-19 challenges posed to online and F-2-F practicum courses. Using mixed methods for this study enabled us to gain a wider scope of insights (American Psychological Association, 2020) into the experiences of students involved in online teaching and learning during COVID-19. As is common in mixed methods with an explanatory sequential design, we had three phases of data collection and analysis that consisted of two quantitative surveys to find out the scope of our research problem, followed by qualitative interviews that provided us with the nuanced experiences of participants who encountered the research problem (Ivankova et al., 2006). We

administered two separate online surveys over two school years, with follow-up qualitative individual interviews, to investigate the students' perceptions and experiences during the online practicum as well as to gain more insight into the central phenomenon of digital instructional literacy. The purpose of this study was to inquire into the following research questions:

1. In what ways did the pandemic practicum online field experience course impact preservice teachers' practice during their final two field courses (Field Experience III and Field Experience IV)?

2. How did the students experience the transition from F-2-F to online learning during Field Experience III and Field Experience IV due to COVID-19?

3. What do preservice teachers perceive as the essential digital instructional literacy competencies needed in order to teach K–12 students online?

Data analysis was completed during each phase of this research study, and the findings from each phase informed the questions and actions taken in the next phase. A combination of descriptive statistics, namely, simple percentages of responses (Trochim, 2022), and thematic analysis was used to summarize the data of the open-ended responses from the two surveys. Information gathered from the Phase 1 survey informed the Phase 2 survey, and those data in turn provided a basis for the individual interview questions and future programmatic decisions. The data were triangulated through examination of surveys, interviews, and community of practice discussions.

Phase 1 of this study ran from April 2020 to September 2020, immediately following the completion of the pandemic practicum. We collected quantitative and qualitative data through an online, Likert-style survey consisting of 16 questions related to the experiences of the preservice teachers with completing their field experience course online (see Appendix A). To recruit

participants, we sent a direct email containing an anonymous survey link from the field experience office to students who had completed the pandemic practicum. This survey inquired into the experiences of the preservice teachers during the online practicum, solicited their perceptions of online teaching and learning, and helped to inform future design decisions by the leadership team as students moved back to F-2-F experiences for their third practicum. The Phase 1 survey was completed by 228 of 435 preservice teachers enrolled in the pandemic practicum, representing a 52% response rate.

In the second phase, a quantitative survey consisting of 12 Likert-style and open-ended questions was distributed by the field experience office between January 14 and February 25, 2021, after the preservice teachers had received their final credit for Field Experience III, which ran from September 2020 to December 2021. The second set of survey questions was designed to explore the extent to which the preservice teachers had used the skills and competencies gained in the online Field Experience II course. The survey (see Appendix B) also asked questions related to the preservice teachers' experiences with moving from F-2-F to online learning environments during Field Experience III and provided a framework for a thematic analysis related to the research questions. This survey was completed by 179 of the target population of 435 preservice teachers, representing a response rate of 41%.

The third phase of the study consisted of semistructured, qualitative interviews with 10 preservice teachers who had participated in the pandemic practicum, completed Field Experience III between September and December 2020, and volunteered to be interviewed about their experiences. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were distributed to all 435 preservice teachers in their final year of their Bachelor of Education program (Winter, 2021). We transcribed the interview data using Trint software (https://trint.com/) and coded them using constant

comparison thematic analysis (Merriam, 2009). The interviews provided further insight into the experiences of the students during their Field Experience III practicum to elaborate on the digital instructional literacy competencies required to instruct K–12 students in blended or online environments, the challenges students faced as they transitioned from F-2-F to online teaching, and the impact that transition had on their occupational well-being.

Phase 1: Student Perceptions and Leadership Implications

Upon analysis, several key findings emerged from the Phase 1 survey. First, the survey respondents indicated that in response to the question, "What was your initial response to discovering that Field II was transformed into an online course," a majority indicated displeasure, with 27.4% selecting *unhappy* and 36.3% selecting *very unhappy*, representing 63.7% of total responses. By the end of the course, 81% of the respondents indicated that their perceptions on online teaching had shifted towards being more positive (Danyluk et al., 2021; Danyluk, 2022). Yet, despite a shift to a more positive view, our analysis of the qualitative, open-ended responses found a clear undertone of anger, with many respondents indicating they did not understand (a) why their practicum had been moved online and (b) why they could not work with their partner teachers and students online. An illustrative response of this anger was expressed by a survey respondent who noted, "[Field experience] needs to be in a classroom, period. You can't produce competent teachers in practicums online".

From the results of the survey, we learned that preservice teachers in the online course appreciated learning how to teach online and enjoyed receiving feedback from peers. The survey also indicated that preservice teachers wished they had been given more lesson planning assignments that more closely replicated the real classroom where they would be designing lessons every day. As field experience directors, we were required to develop an online practicum

alternative, one that included no option for interacting with Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, under a very short timeline. In response to the question, "Do you think this course prepared you for your future in teaching?", 125 respondents (55%) referred to the lack of interaction with children and youth as being a limiting factor for the usefulness of the pandemic practicum. As a result, we determined that all future course practicum course designs, regardless of whether they were F-2-F or online, had to include opportunities for the preservice teachers to engage directly with K–12 students and partner teachers.

Betwixt: Alongside the Collaboration

In an examination of the impacts of COVID-19 on work placements of postsecondary students in Canada, Wall (2020) found that 40% of education students had their placement canceled or delayed due to the pandemic. A survey by Environics Institute for Survey Research et al. (2021) reported that the pandemic had the greatest impact on Canadians aged 18–24. One in three students in this age group changed their plans for postsecondary education, with one in four postponing or stopping postsecondary studies. Further, the pandemic negatively impacted mental health among youth, with women in this age group reporting the greatest decline in their mental health (Environics Institute for Survey Research et al., 2021).

To address the ongoing disruptions to field experience due to the pandemic, we relied on two other tenets of collaborative professionalism, collective autonomy and joint work, to ensure that we could be responsive to the needs of the preservice teachers (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Collective autonomy refers to reducing the amount of management from a top-down authority while increasing team interdependence. Several key managerial elements were quickly set in place as we began our field experience redesign. First, we had strong relational trust (Robinson, 2011) with our direct supervisor, the associate dean, who relied on our collective

expertise to choose learning objectives, design the 4-week course, train the field instructors, select authentic assessments of learning, and then proceed with using the knowledge we had gained from developing the pandemic practicum to ensure a useful and responsive field experience program in subsequent terms. Rather than delegating responsibilities and working apart, we worked together as a team to ensure that our knowledge was applied interdependently to the course and programmatic design.

Further, our joint work depended on a shared responsibility to first design a field experience course that would be acceptable for certification while adhering to public health orders (Burns et al., 2020) and then to ensure that our preservice teachers could continue in their program with the needed supports in the following field experience courses. Aligning to these expectations and responsibilities required constant and open dialogue—more than simply working together to create one course, we were required to think through and design for the longer-term consequences to our preservice teachers' professional growth knowing they had completed an online practicum that did not involve children or youth. Further, we needed to align our work with the pandemic practicum and subsequent field experience instructors, who needed to be able to support and assess the preservice teachers who had an atypical Field Experience II course. As a result, we commenced Phase 2 of our study in September 2020 to understand the experiences of the preservice teachers who completed the emergency online practicum through their next F-2-F field experience and to explore the professional needs of the field instructors who would guide them through a highly disrupted and uncertain Field Experience III and IV.

Phase 2: Uncertainty in the Field and Leadership Implications

In August and September of 2020, the provincial government and school districts enacted heightened public COVID-19 health measures, including mandatory isolation periods, masking,

and social distancing requirements. As a leadership team, we were expected to prepare our field instructors and preservice teachers to comply with the districts' public health measures, even as these measures changed rapidly, particularly in late October 2020, which was the beginning of a new wave of COVID-19 infections. Once again, we were faced with a rapidly changing landscape within practicum experience that needed to be addressed quickly.

From November to December 2020, the preservice teachers were expected to complete their third practicum (Field Experience III) within their education program. Normally, the objective of this practicum is to teach 50%–75% of their partner teacher's instructional load by the end of the 6 weeks. It is the preservice teachers' first real immersion into nearly full-time classroom teaching.

As previously noted, Phase 1 survey analysis indicated that the preservice teachers who had completed the pandemic practicum were nervous about entering their third practicum having lacked an opportunity to work directly with K–12 students. Many expressed concerns about the teaching expectations that were required and were worried about their physical health and capacity to respond effectively in the school environment. Anecdotally, they also expressed concerns about making sudden transitions from F-2-F to online teaching due to students and teachers needing to isolate as close contacts or from testing positive for COVID-19.

Listening to student voice is a fundamental aspect of collaborative professionalism, so we needed to ensure that we heard from as many students as possible to make responsive decisions. Surveys provide data from a single point in time, so we also sought input from students through conversations with them as directors, as a leadership collective cannot claim to hear student voice once and for all (Cook-Sather, 2006). Although anecdotal and informal, these discussions provided us with ongoing information about student experiences. These anecdotes combined with analysis

of the survey data prompted the leadership team to make preemptive modifications to the Field Experience III course outline in early October 2020, and to extend the community of practice with the field instructors to ensure that the preservice teachers and their instructors felt supported throughout the practicum. These modifications provided students with more time to observe in their classrooms, cultivate relationships with their students and partner teachers, and prepare for their lesson planning and delivery expectations.

Because the concerns about increased stress and distress were mainly anecdotal, we designed the Phase 2 survey to include questions about the sources of stress for preservice teachers and how they currently dealt with stress and distress at the workplace. Analysis of the Phase 2 survey data indicated a high level of uncertainty and stress that preservice teachers were feeling with minimal strategies on how to support their own occupational well-being. In response to the question, "To what degree did you feel stressed during Field Experience III?", 22.5% of respondents selected *far* above *average* and 36.2% selected *moderately above average*, representing 58.7% of the 139 respondents who completed this question. Further, in response to the question, "What do you do to cope with stress?", 35 of the 124 open-ended responses, or 28%, indicated that the respondents had no self-care strategies in place to deal with stress. Of the remaining responses, all the respondents chose self-directed or individual strategies, such as walking a dog or talking to a friend, that could not be used during the workday to relieve stress.

It also became clear that as educational leaders, we needed to expand our joint work by being flexible and adaptive in working with our school partners as we navigated the implications of COVID-19. With entire classes moving online and high staff absenteeism due to COVID-19 infection or isolation measures, we had to be flexible and open to doing things differently than what had worked in the past for field experience. This flexibility included online or hybrid teaching

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plans if preservice teachers were absent from their practica, or online instruction when their classes moved online due to COVID-19. Field instructors, for the first time in our institutional history, observed their student teachers through online observations and provided feedback through Zoom or phone calls rather than F-2-F conferences. The leadership team continued to have consistent check-ins with the field instructors through our community of practice meetings to ensure they were feeling supported by providing space to share stories, empathize, and collaborate as we progressed through the practicum.

Beyond: What Comes Next?

To fully understand the impact of the online field experience course, we had to collaborate with students (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), giving them voice to our next instructional decisions through their responses to the April and December 2020 surveys. A key finding from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 was that students were struggling with workplace-related stressors that emerged during pandemic teaching. As a result, we began Phase 3 of our research study, which focused on analyzing the interviews with participants who had been students throughout the entire research period, to understand the influence of pandemic and online teaching on their occupational well-being and emerging pedagogic practice.

This third phase, beginning in January 2021, captured the final arc related to the longer-term consequences of the pandemic practicum. Our collaborative professionalism shifted to what Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) labelled as "big picture thinking for all" (p. 118). How could we use what we had learned to build the digital instructional literacy (Danyluk et al., 2021) to ensure that preservice teachers would be adequately prepared for schools that relied more heavily on online instruction? How could we mitigate the lasting mental and emotional effects of a three-year pandemic?

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Phase 3: Reflection and Leadership Implications

The analysis of the interview data revealed insight into the impact of the online field course and the many unexpected changes to instruction experienced throughout online and F-2-F instruction from the perspective of preservice teachers who completed their degree program during the tumultuous COVID-19 pandemic period. As noted, the interview participants were recruited through opportunistic sampling (Creswell, 2012) and were interviewed and recorded with a research assistant via the Zoom platform. The research assistant anonymized and transcribed the interview data using the online platform Trint and provided the transcripts to us, the three researchers, who individually and manually analyzed the data.

Data were analyzed using constant comparison thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012). We individually coded four random interview transcripts sent to us from our research assistant, and then met to determine whether we had found common codes in our initial analysis. After agreeing on several key themes, each of us independently coded the remaining six interviews and met again to determine if our codes held up through the remaining interviews. We determined that the interview data revealed four common themes as the participants reflected on their experiences with their disrupted field experience:

1. In retrospect, the participants were generally positive about their online instructional field experiences and appreciated that their degree progress had not been impeded by the pandemic.
2. Participants felt that online instruction was more difficult than they had expected prior to the pandemic and expressed a greater appreciation for online instructors.
3. Participants provided examples of specific content and online tools that they believed were necessary to build the online instructional literacy of preservice teachers to

ensure that online instruction was well taught within a post-secondary education program.

4. Participants experienced extremely high levels of stress throughout their practicum experiences and used limited measures to reduce this stress. They expressed an emerging appreciation that mental and emotional well-being were an explicit priority within their education program.

The information provided by the participants in Phase 3 has been important to ensuring that the lessons learned through the pandemic practicum and disruption of field experience are carefully embedded into preservice teacher education as we move out of the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the research study itself, we needed to use the data we collected to react and respond quickly by changing instructional form, norms, and personnel capacity. As we reflect on this work, now is the time to look at how this information can inform our programming.

One significant outcome of this study, and our learning about the limited amount of preparation that preservice teachers have to learn the fundamentals of online instruction, has been the introduction of online practicum placements as one option for our Field Experience II students. Online schools and classrooms have been a part of the educational landscape for many years (Kentnor, 2015). Bachelor of Education programs have shied away from including online practicum placements, although they have been used in graduate education programs (Compton et al., 2010; Kennedy & Archambault, 2011). In the winter term of 2022, we added a pilot group of four students who were completing their four-week teaching practicum completely online with a well-regarded public school district. Prior to this study, no student in our program had ever completed their practicum in a digital environment. By including online instruction as a part of our

program, we can ensure that online instructional capacity is built through an evidence-based manner.

Of primary concern throughout this study was the intense stress and distress of preservice teachers during their field experience courses, and the lack of effective interventions they were using to manage this stress. Beginning in March 2021, we embedded instruction in the importance of positive workplace well-being and self-care planning into the field experience courses to address this problem. Further, by having preservice teachers focus on their self-care during practicum, investigate ways to recognize workplace stressors, build their resilience, and access the many supports available to them, our field experience programming is addressing the gap in knowledge about developing the workplace well-being of educators (Kendrick, 2021), an important big-picture outcome of the research study.

Beside: The Role of the System

As leaders within an educational institution that prepares preservice teachers to become professionals, we are responsible to ensure that the lessons learned from this research study are applied in meaningful ways to our current and future programming. We can use mutual dialogue (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) to have the difficult and honest conversations about the impact of the pandemic on the preservice teacher practicum, our responsibility to meet the future learning needs of children and youth in schools, and the possible designs for preservice teacher education as we complete and share our research data analysis.

During the research study period, leadership teams in higher education realized that developing courses for online delivery takes time, effort, and planning (Openo, 2020). In order to move beyond emergency remote learning, educators must address issues of interactivity, authenticity, and support, according to Openo (2020). Good online education is problem-centered

and dialogue-oriented through online discussions with peers, and promoting authenticity in online learning requires that faculty choose to care for students, recognizing the fine line between teaching and counselling (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

Although 2020–2022 was a chaotic period of panic and anxiety (la Velle et al., 2020), it was also one of great creativity and innovation in online learning. As leaders, we recognize the importance of examining the adaptations that were made during this time to inform future practice (Hodges et al., 2020). This reflection has never been truer than now, as we emerge into a new reality forged by the pandemic, when faculty who are already coping with their own sense of isolation need to demonstrate care for students and colleagues, and can find opportunities to share coping strategies.

Conclusions and Leadership Implications

"Collective efficacy is about the belief that, together, we can make a difference to the students we teach, no matter what" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 111).

The radical change needed to convert the highly traditional teacher education field experience to respond to the pandemic required a flexible and open mindset from the leadership team. Although the easy answer could have been to simply cancel or postpone the March 2020 field experience practicum, we decided that we could design an adapted field experience course because in the long term, our focus needed to remain on doing what was best for the preservice teachers in our program. Having the foresight to collect data as we moved through the changes that we made was crucial as we are now in the position to use what we have learned to better serve the teachers of tomorrow. Understanding each of our own strengths was a key way to address a problem of practice through our collective leadership while ensuring that our individual strengths were honoured and present in the solution we created.

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As individuals, each of us brought different strengths to our initial course design and leadership decisions, including expertise in online and digital pedagogies, Indigenization of the resources related to lesson planning, differentiation and inclusion with Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, and teacher and student well-being and wellness. Applying our knowledge collectively and collaboratively ensured that the ongoing program design was not only responsive to student needs, but also evidence based, current, and pedagogically sound. The decisions that we made ultimately came from pooling these individual strengths in a manner that best met the needs of the preservice teachers in the field experience program.

Based on these insights and our research findings, we draw four conclusions for educational leaders to consider: introduce Indigenous resources and lesson planning, prioritize preservice teacher well-being, form communities of practice, and—the surprise—build digital instructional literacy.

Introduce Indigenous Resources and Lesson Planning

As a leadership collaborative, we had detailed knowledge of findings from BEd graduate exit surveys that indicated that, even upon graduation, students felt a lack of confidence with finding and using Indigenous resources. Given our institutional knowledge, we decided it was important to introduce students to resources they could use to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their lesson planning. Recognizing that students have a mandatory course on Indigenous Education in the final semester of their program, we were careful not to overlap with the later course but also realized that the preservice teachers would not have the necessary foundational knowledge to fully evaluate the resources they found. Instead, students worked in small groups to share resources and consider how they might be incorporated into their lesson planning. Fifty percent of the preservice students responded to the Phase 1 survey and of those, 50% reported that

the exposure to the Indigenous resources had increased their foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. Thirteen percent of respondents expressed frustration at the limited lesson planning requirements in the course. Although we had decreased the lesson planning requirements in an attempt to lessen stress, respondents in the first survey indicated they would have preferred the course more closely replicate lesson planning requirements in an F-2-F course where they would have had to submit daily lesson plans.

Prioritize Preservice Teacher Well-Being

The ongoing dialogue afforded to us through the research study gave us the space to understand the changing needs of the preservice teachers over the two years of educational disruption from 2020–2022. From the first pandemic practicum survey responses, the data clearly showed us that the respondents were not okay, and that thoughtful intervention should be taken to ensure that we supported the students in our program. Fortunately, an individual on the leadership team had deep knowledge of compassion fatigue and burnout, recognized the preconditions, and realized that without intervention, emotional and mental health distress were possible for the preservice teachers.

The qualitative responses from the Phase 1 survey were highly reactive and angry, with the preservice teachers unable to understand why they were taking their treasured field experience course in a digital format without children. During the Phase 2 data analysis, we found that the research participants expressed a better understanding of the initial decision while still expressing frustrations with the limits an online practicum placed on their ability to teach in-person. The participants in the Phase 2 survey reflected more on their worries about being effective teachers in an uncertain and stressful time, as their classrooms were in constant flux between online and F-2-F instruction because of the COVID-19 protective protocols in schools in late 2020. They

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expressed feeling a lack of support and being unable to effectively manage their stress, express their concerns, or feel competent as emerging professionals. Upon analyzing the responses from the second survey in February 2021, we recognized that immediate intervention was required to protect the health and well-being of the students in our program.

As a result, in March 2021, we embedded self-care and wellness planning into the field experience courses with the direct intent of not only providing more information about how to manage stress, but also knowing what to do to relieve stress and seek help when preservice teachers became overwhelmed at their workplace. We promoted daily self-care as a cornerstone of the field experience program with students, partner teachers, and their field instructors through their coursework and class activities.

The final series of interviews revealed that the participants, speaking about their field experience in hindsight, had begun to understand why the programmatic decisions were made and were more reflexive in their understanding of their practicum experiences. We, as a leadership team, realized that although future preservice teachers may not experience the whirlwind that started with the discovery of the coronavirus in early 2020, protecting the emotional and mental well-being of preservice teachers through instruction and practice in self-care and workplace well-being needed to become a permanent fixture within field experience programming.

Form Communities of Practice

Forming communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) has proven to be invaluable. An individual on the team had a strong background in creating communities of practice and saw the potential for developing one with the field instructors. The community of practice that we formed with our field experience instructors was critical in supporting our students with the challenges of

the pandemic. Time to reflect, address issues and concerns, and collaborate as a collective was essential in supporting our preservice teachers and instructors as the practica progressed. The three authors also met weekly to share updates and determine next steps. We presently continue to meet on a consistent basis with timely professional learning opportunities and space for instructors to express their perspectives and collaborate on relevant topics and priorities. The instructors have expressed gratitude for the opportunity and look forward to the discussion and sharing. Based on our individual strengths and experiences, we have been able to support one another, the field instructors, and our preservice teachers.

The Surprise: Build Digital Instructional Literacy

Although we expected students to be comfortable with teaching online, we learned through analyzing the research data that both the preservice teachers and the field instructors exhibited a wide variety of online instructional competence. We assumed that our younger students, sometimes called D-Gen (digital generation) or "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001, p. 1), who have been using computers extensively in their lifetimes, would be comfortable with online instruction. However, in the analysis of our data, few participants expressed confidence with teaching online. The interview participants, in reflecting on their pandemic practicum experience of having multiple opportunities to teach one another in small groups and to use the tools embedded in online learning platforms, realized that having direct instruction and practice with digital pedagogy during their field experience coursework was beneficial. Even more surprising given our Phase 1 data, during the interviews, participants suggested that learning how to use these digital tools without having K–12 students present was, in hindsight, helpful. When they were teaching during Field Experience III and Field Experience IV, they found that struggling with the unpredictability of internet connections and trying to figure out different online instructional strategies and tools while

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also trying to deal with young students was difficult, and it required a much different skill set than F-2-F instruction.

Surprising to the leadership team was that preservice teacher education needed to incorporate the foundations of digital instructional literacy, defined as the confidence, competence, and motivation to teach in digital and virtual environments (Burns et al., 2020) as a new component of teacher education. Online pedagogy has been a part of distance learning for many years, yet it has always sat at the periphery of education rather than being positioned as a critical component of what makes an effective teacher.

The research survey data and follow-up interviews indicated a distinct variance in digital instructional literacy competencies in preservice teachers and highlighted the need to further explore ways to support preservice teachers with the foundational elements of online pedagogy that they will need in K–12 classrooms. Although a full-scale movement to online learning will likely never replace F-2-F schooling as it did so suddenly in March 2020, we anticipate that digital and online instruction will take a larger role in education. The gap in preservice teachers' and field instructors' digital instructional literacy is a concept that will need further exploration within the field experience courses and more broadly within Bachelor of Education programs to ensure that future teachers have the skills and competencies required to be effective in online environments.

Leading in a time of uncertainty and crisis requires collaborative professionalism. More than simply working together on a project, we learned that true collaboration required us to use our collective knowledge and expertise, along with data and a commitment to listening to student voice, to ensure that our field experience programming was not only reactive, but creative and forward-thinking as we navigated a difficult period. We learned that as a collective force, we could

lead effectively, and that by reflecting on the context before, beside, betwixt, and beyond, our

innovation has the capacity to truly change teacher education.

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Appendix A: Phase 1 Survey Questions

1. Were you enrolled in the adapted online EDUC 465 course in Winter 2020?
   - Yes
   - No
2. How much did you enjoy this course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - A great deal
   - A lot
   - A moderate amount
   - A little
   - None at all
3. How useful did you find this course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - Extremely useful
   - Moderately useful
   - Slightly useful
   - Moderately useless
   - Extremely useless
4. How practical did you find this course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - Extremely practical
   - Very practical
   - Moderately practical
   - Slightly practical
   - Not practical at all
5. I used a variety of instructional strategies in my lesson delivery. [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
6. I feel more comfortable using Indigenous resources. [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
7. I learned about differentiated instruction. I integrated differentiated instruction into lesson planning. [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - Agree
   - Neither agree nor disagree
   - Disagree
8. Did your perception of online learning change through participation in this course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - Definitely yes
   - Probably yes
   - Might or might not
   - Possibly not
   - Definitely not
9. If yes, how did your perception change? If no, why didn't your perception change? [Qualtrics Text Box]

10. What was your initial response to discovering that Field [Experience] II was transformed into an online course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Extremely happy
    - Moderately happy
    - Slightly happy
    - Neither happy nor unhappy
    - Slightly unhappy
    - Moderately unhappy
    - Extremely unhappy
11. Do you think this course prepared you for your future teaching? If so, please elaborate. [Qualtrics text box]
12. What was your greatest learning during this course? [Qualtrics text box]
13. What skills did you develop during this course? [Qualtrics text box]
14. Which Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) competency do you feel you have improved on during this course? [Qualtrics check box]
    - Fostering Effective Relationships
    - Engaging in Career Long Learning
    - Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge
    - Establishing Inclusive Relationships
    - Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit
    - Adjusting to Legal Frameworks and Policies
15. What improvements would you suggest for this course if it runs again in the future (other than being in a physical K–12 classroom)? [Qualtrics text box]
16. Which skills will you need to develop to be successful in Field [Experience] III? [Qualtrics text box]

Appendix B: Phase 2 Survey

1. Did you take Field II experience online in March 2020?
   - Yes
   - No

   If yes, then proceed to Question 2.
   If no, skip to Question 7.

2. Did you teach online during your Field Experience III (November–December 2020)?
   - Yes
   - No

   If yes, to then proceed to Question 3.
   If no, skip to Question 7.

3. Did your participation in the online Field Experience II (EDUC 465) course help you to adapt to online teaching in Field experience III?
   - Yes
   - No

4. What skills, knowledge, or competencies do you wish you had learned or practiced in your online Field Experience II (EDUC 465)? [Qualtrics text box]

5. What knowledge or competency did you apply from your Field Experience II course to your Field Experience III? [Qualtrics text box]

6. Has your perception of online teaching changed now that you are in the classroom?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Please explain [Qualtrics text box]

7. What was your overall feeling during your Field Experience III? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - Extremely positive
   - Moderately positive
   - Slightly positive
   - Neither positive nor negative
   - Slightly negative
   - Moderately negative
   - Extremely negative

8. What was the main source of these feelings? [Qualtrics text box]

9. To what degree did you feel stressed during Field Experience III? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
   - Far above average
   - Moderately above average
   - Slightly above average
   - Average
   - Slightly below average
   - Moderately below average
   - Far below average

10. Which of the following symptoms of stress did your experience? [Checkbox]
    - Physical changes (such as sleeplessness, change of appetite, tension headache)
    - Emotional changes (such as increased irritability, reduced patience)
    - Mood changes (such as lack of motivation)

- Behavioural changes (such as increased substance use)
- Intellectual changes (such as brain fog, lack of creativity)
- None of the above

11. What do you do to cope with stress? [Qualtrics text box]
12. Which of the following supports and resources did you access during Field Experience III? [Qualtrics checkbox]
     - University of Calgary campus mental health resources
     - Alberta Health Services
     - Religious or spiritual support networks
     - Family
     - Friends
     - Other [Qualtrics text box]
     - None

Appendix C: Guiding Questions for Individual Interviews

1. Did you take Field Experience II online in March 2020?
   - Yes
   - No
2. What was your experience like during your Field Experience II online course?
3. Did you teach online during your Field Experience III/IV? Can you elaborate on these online experiences?
4. Did your participation in the online Field Experience II (EDUC 465) course help you to adapt to online teaching in Field Experience III/IV? In what ways did the Field Experience II online course help you to adapt to online teaching in Field Experience III/IV?
5. What skills, knowledge, or competencies do you wish you had learned or practiced in your online Field Experience II (EDUC 465) to support you in your practicums?
6. Has your perception of online teaching changed now that you have completed your education program?
7. What do you think preservice teachers should know and practice in their education program to support them in teaching online and/or in blended learning environments?
8. Where and when in the BEd program do you think this learning should occur (e.g., course work, professional learning opportunities, optional courses, workshops, conferences)?
9. What was your overall emotional experience during Field Experience III and IV?
   - What was the main source of these feelings?
   - What types of supports and resources did you access during Field Experience III/IV to help cope with your feelings?
   - What other supports and or resources would have been supportive during Field Experience III and IV?
10. What do you think is the future of online teaching and learning in K–12 settings?

Biographies

Dr. Theodora Kapoyannis – is the Director of Field Experience (On-Campus pathway) in the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary where she oversees the placement of 1100 preservice teachers and collaborates with over 50 Field Experience Instructors. Before taking on this role, Dr. Kapoyannis was a K-12 teacher for 17 years and served in several specialist and consulting roles. She worked closely with school leaders to support staff professional learning opportunities and further school development plans. Dr. Kapoyannis completed her PhD at the University of Calgary in 2018 where she specialized in Languages and Diversity. Her current research areas include field experience with a focus on teacher well-being, adult learning, multilingualism, and digital instructional literacy.

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Dr. Astrid Kendrick – Before taking on her current role of Director, Field Experience (Community-Based Pathway), at the Werklund School of Education, Dr. Astrid Kendrick was a K-12 classroom teacher for nineteen years specializing in Physical Education and English/Language Arts. Her current research focus is on compassion fatigue, burnout, and emotional labor in Alberta educational workers, and she is a co-producer of the podcast series, *Ed Students in Conversation*. As the co-chair of the Health Promoting Schools Collaborative for the southern Alberta region, she has been working closely with health champions from across Alberta's health and education sectors to support and promote workplace well-being. She is also a member of the Advisory Circle for the Women in Leadership Committee of the Alberta Teachers Association that promotes gender equity in educational leadership.

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Dr. Patricia Danyluk – is currently the chair of adult learning and the year two curriculum coordinator at the Werklund School of Education in Calgary. She is the former Director of Field Experience for the Community Based Pathway at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary. Patricia is a co-coordinator of Community Engagement: An Ethical Practice along with her colleague Dr. Elisa Vandenborn. She completed her B.Ed. at Nipissing University, her Master's at St. Francis Xavier University and her PhD at Laurentian University. In 202, she was the co-recipient of the Alan Blizzard award along with her colleague Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt for

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