“What the Hell Just Happened?”: a Phenomenological Case Study of Teaching in the Covid Era

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“WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED?”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY
OF TEACHING IN THE COVID ERA

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A DISSERTATION
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
(in Educational Leadership)

The Graduate School
The University of Maine
May 2023

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“WHAT THE HELL JUST HAPPENED?”: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY
OF TEACHING IN THE COVID ERA

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Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Ian Mette

An Abstract of the Dissertation Presented
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May 2023

This is a phenomenological case study of teachers at an independent high school in New England
during the COVID era. It includes analysis of their recollections of their experiences during the
emergency remote shutdown in 2020, and also of their experiences during the 2020-2021 school year,
in which they worked under a difficult and complicated hybrid model. It examines their experiences
adapting to the pandemic and their perspectives on how it has changed them and their teaching
practices. Through interviews with teachers and analysis of documents, this study uncovers positive and
negative effects of the school’s organizational responses to pandemic guidelines. The differential
experiences of faculty members caused fractures in the school’s sense of community that teachers were
hopeful would heal in the post-pandemic era. This study also includes the impact on the administrator
who led the school (and conducted the study). The study reveals the importance of communication
between administrators and teachers. It also has important implications for research methods for
scholarly practitioners.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the phenomenal faculty and staff at John Bapst Memorial High School. Before the pandemic, they could always be counted on to “make it work” – to rise to any challenge, to be creative, to work hard, and to find a way to continue serving students, regardless of the challenges they faced. The pandemic was a set of challenges like no other. The faculty and staff at John Bapst rose to this set of challenges like no other school. Despite innumerable hardships and difficulties, they made it work. Their dedication to our students continues to this day. I could not be more proud to serve this community.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I could not have completed this project without the help of people who believed in me and supported me in my efforts to study my own school and to work to make it better. I am deeply grateful to all those who helped me start and finish this important work.

Josh Tripp – Thank you for taking me up on my off the wall suggestion that we swap schools to collect data. I could not have learned all these truths without your help.

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Susan Bennett-Armistead – We have been best friends for 45 years and married for 37 of those. You have always believed in me and have always seen potential in me that I couldn’t see. I cannot imagine where or what I would be without you. Thank you so much for taking me on this roller coaster ride and for helping me enjoy the ride!
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The novel coronavirus (COVID) pandemic that began in Asia and Europe reached the United States in the winter of 2020. By the start of spring, schools worldwide were closed and moved to various forms of distance education. Teachers often were given 24-72 hours to convert their practice into an entirely new online format (Midcalf, 2020). In the United States, the COVID pandemic persisted through the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years. Schools that had closed for the end of the 2019-2020 year often reopened in the fall of 2020 online or in a hybrid mode of instruction (part online and part in-person concurrently). In the state of Maine, in order to reopen in the fall of the 2020-2021 school year, schools were required to have plans for fully in-person, fully remote, and hybrid (combination of in-person and remote) instruction (Maine, 2020). At all levels; global, national, and local, schools and teachers’ practices were affected in profound ways. Some of those changes can be seen in the experience of John Bapst Memorial High School, the independent school that is the focus of this study.

School Context

John Bapst Memorial High School is a small, independent day and boarding school in Bangor, Maine (population approximately 35,000), the only private, secular school in the immediate vicinity. The area around Bangor contains a number of towns that do not have high schools. This is important to note because under Maine law, towns that do not have high schools pay tuition for their high-school-aged students to attend public or secular private schools. John Bapst is an independent, non-public school. Students from Maine and around the world choose to attend John Bapst. For students from Maine, that choice means their town pays their tuition. For
students from overseas, their families pay their tuition. The governance of this school is different from public schools. While public schools in Maine usually have a school board that plays a role in decision-making about major changes, John Bapst’s Board of Trustees employs a Head of School who takes sole responsibility for nearly all decisions involved in the daily operation of the school. The board supports the Head of School, but expects that they take responsibility for all operational decisions. Approximately 80% of John Bapst students are from surrounding towns that do not have high schools. About 15% of the students at John Bapst are classified as international students. Many of them are from China, though more than 12 different countries are represented in the student population. International students pay tuition to the school and mostly live in dorms, which are houses in the neighborhood around the school. Finally, 5% of the students are locally based but pay tuition directly because they live in towns that have high schools (John Bapst School Profile, 2019).

The John Bapst School community has been fairly tightly knit. Being together, and within close physical proximity to one another, has been an important characteristic of the school throughout my tenure at the school. In my experience, prior to the COVID pandemic, students typically arrived at school 30 minutes before school started and remained about an hour after school was over. In that time, they socialized with each other and saw their teachers for social and/or academic reasons. In my role as Associate Head of School, I met most of the people who came to visit the school. Often, people who were new to the school described it to me as a friendly and welcoming community. Teachers had friends on staff and there were periodic social gatherings of faculty members. All-school assemblies were a regular feature of the school schedule. They occurred about weekly (technically, every sixth day of a seven day schedule rotation). The assemblies were important gatherings in maintaining the culture of the school. I
began teaching at Bapst in 2006. From 2008 through 2021, I was the Principal & Academic Dean. In those roles, I was responsible for assemblies, for faculty supervision, and for supervising the community generally. As the most senior administrator aside from the Head of School, I played a key role in the school’s response to the pandemic.

Because many of the international students came from China, the school was dealing with the COVID pandemic as early as January, 2020. Several of the Chinese students were from Wuhan province and very concerned about family members back home. The Chinese club organized a fundraiser in early February to raise money to purchase personal protective equipment (mostly masks) to send to Wuhan. This fundraiser was a focal point of one of the assemblies. Students and faculty alike were very supportive of the effort, raising more than $500 to send masks to Wuhan.

Between January and early March of 2020, administrators at Bapst studied the pandemic with growing concern. In early March, administrators began planning contingencies for a possible closure. On March 12, a special faculty meeting was called to discuss the rising number of COVID cases in the US. At that time a special in-service day was planned for March 17 to practice using distance learning education tools (ZOOM in particular), in preparation for a possible closure. The evening of March 12, the school held its annual Seniors vs. Faculty basketball game, which was attended by about 300 students, staff, and family members. On Sunday, March 15, the governor of Maine declared a state of emergency and ordered public schools closed (Maine Office of the Governor, 2020). Teachers reported in person to the in-service on March 17. There were multiple training sessions - all in person, with the exception of the training on Zoom, which was conducted remotely (using Zoom).
The change to fully remote teaching was very sudden. Teachers had an ordinary school day with all of their students on Friday, March 13. Over the weekend it was announced that the school would be closed to all students on Monday, March 16 and Tuesday, March 17. Teachers at the March 17 in-service were told that it was expected that their live online sessions with students should begin no later than Friday, March 20. Most of them had live online classes by the next day. To reduce the number of transitions for students and teachers, the school’s daily schedule was revamped from 7 forty-three minute periods per day to only 3 or 4 periods per morning, for 50 minutes each. As in many schools, a new emphasis was placed on students’ mental health, often at the expense of the normal pace of curricular progress. Expectations for attendance, for grading, for curricular goals and more were all modified. No students came to school for classes. Teachers were allowed to teach from the school, but most chose to teach from home. They were uniformly online with all students. These adaptations resulted in vast increases in emails between students and teachers as well as among staff. To help ease the communication burden, as well as to support each other and have a venue for communicating, I created and managed a private Facebook group entitled “John Bapst Quarantine Staff Lounge,” which was opened on March 22, 2020. Out of a staff of forty, thirty-three teachers joined that group. Posts on that group show vigorous activity throughout the spring 2020 shutdown and also in the following school year. It also showed people posting in the summer months, when administrators and teacher committees were planning for the reopening of school in the 2020-2021 school year.

At the beginning of the summer, Bapst began preparing for the coming school year. Under the guidance of a team of faculty and administrators, the school adopted Schoology as a uniform learning management system. The school had been using Google Classroom for remote teaching for the spring of 2020. Our students from China returned home in June, but expected to
return, either in person or via remote learning, in the fall. Google and its apps are banned in China, so it was necessary to find a uniform learning management system that would be accessible in the event students in China would have to learn remotely. After adopting Schoology, we learned that there was an overwhelming demand for this product in schools due to the pandemic. The staff at Schoology informed me that there was no live training available for teachers due to this overwhelming demand (at least not before school started). The only option they could provide were self-paced online tutorials. The tutorials were a Schoology-based class, but no live trainer would be available to answer questions. Teachers knew they had a new tool that they were required to use, but no one to answer questions on how it is used. They could train themselves with the tutorial, but would be unable to get clarification if they got stuck - unless that clarification came from other teachers within the school. Eventually, we were able to obtain live training specific to just using assessments within Schoology for the opening in-service in August, one week before school.

Additionally, over the summer of 2020, administrators at the school worked with some faculty representatives and consultants from the local hospital to prepare a reopening plan. That plan included a hybrid schedule, one in which only half of the students would be present on any given day, the other half would use Zoom to attend class remotely. All classes then would have 50% of the section in person and 50% online simultaneously. Teachers were given the option of teaching 100% remotely or teaching in person at the school. Teachers who worked remotely had all students attend via Zoom. In those classrooms, half of the students were physically present in the school, half were online, but all of them used laptops to access the teacher who zoomed in. Teachers who worked in the school had some students in person and some on Zoom simultaneously. There was also a new block schedule rotation which facilitated the hybrid
learning model and reduced the numbers of students in the halls. There were no assemblies and limited gatherings of students and teachers to comply with state mandates on group size. The reopening plan changed rules for passing in the halls, for lunch, for gatherings in the building, attendance, class size, extracurricular activities, and more.

The 2020-2021 school year brought a situation of near constant change. Two teachers left the school over the summer. Three new teachers joined the community to replace them. Teachers were expected to use Schoology every day, but due to the overwhelming demand had had little substantive training in it prior to the start of school. Some teachers worked remotely, and so were absent from the building, yet their students were present in the classrooms. The school hired substitute teachers to monitor classrooms of remote teachers (each sub covered multiple rooms). Teachers who worked in the building had to learn how to teach in-person and remote students simultaneously, managing multiple new technologies on the fly.

Rules and procedures were all different; one way halls, longer class periods, different expectations for lunch, for masks, and ever evolving expectations for online students - “Should cameras be on or off?” “If a student is supposed to be in school, but attends remotely, are they absent?” “If a student has all teachers who are remote, can they just go home?” “dress code for Zoom meetings?” . In short, except for the building itself, the entire teaching context changed for everyone in the community. Despite the multiple changes, teachers kept working and kept adapting. They asked questions; they pointed out flaws that needed correction, but despite massive difficulties, they kept working. I was promoted to Head of School in the fall of 2020 (to begin the following summer). To understand the effect of the pandemic on the school and to help plan a recovery for emerging from it, I undertook to study the teachers’ experiences as educators navigating this unusual set of circumstances.
Problem of Practice

A pandemic, by definition, affects a wide swath of human work and activities. In the case of COVID in the US, it has affected all workers and all activities. The pandemic has generated its own form of stress: COVID Stress Syndrome (Taylor, et al., 2020). Prior to the pandemic teachers’ feelings of efficacy and their perception of workplace culture have been tied to a shared sense of purpose, teacher empowerment, and teacher participation in decision-making (Childs et al., 2013; Busher & Blease, 2000).

Because decisions were made suddenly and largely guided by outside (mostly government) authorities, including guidance from the United States Centers for Disease Control (CDC), and from the state government, that autonomy was lost during the pandemic. Teachers were not given a choice about instructional media: everything had to be online or remote in some way (Konig et al., 2020; Kovacs et al., 2021). There was little or no guidance for teachers to adapt to the unique challenges of reaching students with a wide range of individual needs (Hamilton et al., 2020). In an autoethnography of his own experiences as a teacher moving from in-person to remote teaching, Berry (2020) described the series of compromises he had to undergo as he responded to the pandemic. This included; a sense of disconnection from students compared to his relationships prior to the pandemic, a need to settle for “surface level” teaching, or an inability to go deeper into content, an endemic feeling of uncertainty and change, and finally a heightened sense of resourcefulness, as he was improvising as he went.

The COVID pandemic has had a profound impact on teachers and teaching, their feelings about teaching, and their frame of mind as they contemplate their future work as educators. The school’s reopening plan for 2020-2021 was shaped by administrators and teachers on different reopening committees. Over the course of two months, the school’s educational model was entirely re-conceived. Though the people who participated in the decision-making bodies may
have had the best intentions, it was not possible for them to know in advance what the impact of those decisions would be. The school’s response to the pandemic and the teacher’s recollection of how that year affected them, represents important information for future decision-making, as well as a record of how the school responded. Therefore, this study sought to examine teachers’ lived experiences working through the first 12 months of the pandemic; specifically their feelings about the sudden move to technology-based media, their perceptions about possible changes in the community of teachers, and their perceptions of themselves as educators within a pandemic. I examined their perceptions of their experience and their work over the 12 months from the initial response in March of 2020 to when interviews were conducted in March and April of 2021. A major reason for my own work in this area is so I could understand how best to help these teachers and this school community emerge from the pandemic.

**Purpose of the Study**

The COVID pandemic has brought global changes to all economic, political, and social activity. Some of those changes promise to be long lasting. An important part of the history of this pandemic will be the changes, both short and long-term, on the work and lives of teachers. Teachers at John Bapst experienced multiple changes in their work through the past two years. They had been teaching fully in person up until March of 2020. By the time the study was conducted, they experienced the fully remote model in the spring and also the much different hybrid schooling model that was the school’s response during the 2020-2021 school year.

As the lead administrator in this school, I care deeply about these teachers and this institution. I have witnessed the responses and played a leadership role in all of the changes they experienced. The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to examine and document teachers’ lived experiences of teaching, of school culture, of their impression of the impact of
COVID, school structural changes in response to COVID, and their school’s response to the COVID pandemic. It is to see how teachers have made meaning of this entire experience.

This study will serve as a history of this moment and can also inform school administrators in the event of future crises that threaten school culture. School leaders have a direct impact on school climate and the ability of teachers to be flexible and innovative (Vermeulen et. al., 2022). The school’s response to the crisis, the decisions made, and the rationale and process that governed those decisions, can inform me and others about the impact of decisions on schools, on teachers, on the school community and on administrators. This will be helpful in navigating future crises as well as emerging out of current and future crises.

Effective building leaders embrace an ethic of care in their practice (Warin, 2017). That care may mean knowing the impact of decisions on teachers and on the climate of the school. As a leader who was a participant in this crisis, and a leader who has had to navigate a way out of it, I needed to understand what happened. In the words of one of my mentors, I sought “to inquire through interaction and a genuine search for questions and answers, to take responsibility for oneself but not for the thoughts and feelings of others or the forces over which one has no control, and to confront and use authority as the ultimate expression of caring are all signals of real leadership” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004).
Research Questions

This study was centered on the perspective of teachers. It sought to answer the following questions, from the teachers’ perspective:

1) “How did the new tools and new technological media, and their implementation change teachers’ feelings about their practice?”

2) “How did teachers’ perceptions of the culture of the school and nature of its community change as a result of the logistical and pedagogical changes brought on by the COVID pandemic?”

3) “How, if at all, did this experience change the way teachers feel about their work currently and for the future?”

Methodology

I created an interview protocol to engage teachers and assess their feelings about the transition to fully remote teaching, and then their further transition into a blended hybrid model in the 2020-2021 school year. The interviews were conducted in two parts. The first interview focused on the transition to fully remote teaching during the spring of the 2019-2020 school year. Because the school’s response to the pandemic in the 2020-2021 school year was so different from the previous year, a second interview was conducted. Those interviews focused on teachers’ perceptions and responses to their experiences and recollections of that transition.

First and second interviews were conducted in March and April of 2021. Because I was the immediate supervisor of the teachers at the school, I employed an associate interviewer (another EdD student in my cohort who was principal at a neighboring school) to recruit volunteers and conduct interviews. He conducted and transcribed the interviews and removed all personally identifying information before sending the transcripts to me.
I coded the transcripts for themes in NVivo. In the first cycle of coding, I used structural coding (Saldaña, 2016) and used codes derived from my conceptual framework: Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2000). Those codes included things like “tools”, “community”, and so on. Within those codes, I used attribute coding (Saldaña, 2016) to refine the initial categories into themes. Several themes emerged from that work.

I also analyzed documents that were created contemporaneously during the full shut down in the spring of 2020, throughout the summer of 2020, and during the year of hybrid instruction (2020-2021). I used the same codes derived from the interview transcripts to code the documents. Those documents included emails that I had sent to faculty, the school’s reopening plan, posts on a social media site that was created expressly for mutual support during the pandemic, and agendas and minutes of meetings during that era.

**Positionality**

I have spent over 16 years teaching at John Bapst Memorial High School. I have been an administrator at the building since 2008. Many of the potential interview participants would have been people that I had hired as teachers. Additionally, my administrative role at the school was as a direct supervisor for the entire teaching faculty. There are always ethical considerations in research, these are more pronounced in my role as a scholarly practitioner and as a researcher collecting data from people over whom I supervise. In this work, I was guided by a deep-seated care for the school and its faculty, juxtaposed with a need to know the truth of their experiences. Over the course of the research work I was promoted to Head of School.

There was a very high risk that, if I conducted the interviews, teachers would feel intimidated or pressured to comply. I also felt it very likely that, if I conducted the interviews, some teachers would feel that they could not be completely honest in their answers for fear of
retaliation at work. To avoid this possible respondent bias, I employed a disinterested third party (another principal in the cohort who works at a different school and does not have a close personal relationship with me). I provided him with the necessary demographic data on each teacher, with the thought that, once he solicited volunteers, he could select teachers from a range of disciplines and years of experience. As it happens, he had eight volunteers. He interviewed all of them.

I had been at the school for 15 years at the time the data were collected. I had been a leader in that school for nearly all of those years. I was proud of what I believed was a strong community that I felt I had helped build. I was on the verge of becoming the Head of School and presiding over that same community. It was unavoidable that my history with the school would affect my impressions and my judgment in conducting this research. Using a PAR allowed me to obtain true feelings from faculty, without fear that my presence in the interview would color their responses. I needed to address my own bias in my coding and interpretation of all the data.

As I was coding the data and refining my findings, I consulted frequently with people at the school who I could count on for more frank impressions. It was helpful that my sister-in-law (whom I have known for 45 years) was willing to assist in that role. She had been the original beta test on the interview protocol and had taught in the school through the pandemic. Her insights on my conclusions were invaluable. I also consulted with other researchers to read my impressions and the original data to fact check my own impressions.

**Considerations for Scholarly Practitioners**

This study reveals some important considerations for scholarly practitioners. By definition, scholarly practitioners are still workers within their educational environments and their scholarly research work may sometimes reach to their own workplaces. Faculty and staff
are the receivers of many administrative decisions and are key players in implementation of any new initiatives. Understanding faculty members’ responses to administrative decisions can be a key factor in evaluating the impact of those decisions. Workers are more productive and creative when the organizational leader is empathetic and understands their experience (Kock, 2019).

Collecting data on one’s own workplace without compromising relationships with colleagues can be an extremely important endeavor. The need to know the truth is paramount – especially in areas that affect morale. The power relationship between administrators and staff compromises the ability of any administrator to know what the staff really feels. A trusted neutral third party is an important ally in opening doors to teachers’ feelings about administrative decisions. Utilizing an associate interviewer as a trusted partner can help find critical data that would otherwise be obscured or compromised.

In the best of circumstances, institutional change can happen with thoughtful input from all stakeholders. When change is planned and time allows, institutions can provide support and training for the planned change. But what happens when time does not allow and training is impossible? In these emergency situations administrators must act quickly. In the case of the COVID pandemic, schools, districts, and states responded in a variety of ways, but they were all sudden.

This study centers on a set of decisions that were made over a very short period of time under very difficult circumstances. Those decisions collectively had a profound impact on this educational institution. It is hard to tell when the next global pandemic may arrive, but understanding the impact of administrative decisions on the faculty at this school can highlight the potential of other administrative decisions that affect other places at other times. Both the decisions themselves and the process under which decisions were made and implemented
affected all educational institutions. The few difficult years of this crisis can inform future research questions (both pandemic-related and not). Virtually all schools will find themselves recovering from this crisis. That new research can help schools either avoid disastrous missteps or make wise decisions for students and faculty.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The pandemic affected education from the macro perspective down to the smallest details of teaching. The purpose of this study is to examine the totality of the changes brought about by the COVID pandemic on the work and especially on the perceptions of teachers about their work in light of all those changes. Phenomena that were already present prior to the pandemic; technology integration, teachers’ classroom practices, teachers’ feelings of efficacy in the classroom, school culture, and so on, were altered substantially as a result of the changes that the pandemic brought to schools. A review of the literature reveals that the effect of the pandemic was world-wide and comprehensive, that it had profound effects on the work of teachers. Cultural-Historical Activity (Engeström, 2000) theory provides a sound basis for conducting a phenomenological study of those changes.

Structural Effects of COVID

The COVID pandemic of 2020 interrupted the schooling of 900 million learners worldwide (Nicola et al., 2020). All states in the US ordered schools closed in the spring (Reich et al., 2020). This state of emergency was initially assumed to be of a short duration. The initial state of emergency in Maine was limited to 30 days (Maine COVID Response Timeline, 2020). In March of 2020, all states in the US had complete or partial school shutdowns (Education Week, March 6, 2020), nationally the conversation was that these shutdowns were necessary to “flatten the curve” and reduce the spread of the virus as a way to defeat it. Both the New York Times – “Which Country Has Flattened the Curve for the Coronavirus?” (Lai & Collins, 2020), and CNBC - “Flattening the coronavirus curve: What this means and why it matters” (Meredith, March 20, 2020) highlighted the focus of the effort at that time - that remote work and schooling
was meant to be a temporary means of slowing or stopping the spread of the virus. Schools nationwide confronted these initial spring closures in a variety of ways. Those included sending packets of work home, packets of work accompanied by online access to help, and direct instruction via video conferencing (Harris et al., 2020). In the state of Maine, the governor ordered schools to close their buildings and convert to remote education models in March. As the pandemic progressed, the state of emergency continued. Schools remained closed, with various forms of distance education practiced through the end of that school year (Maine Office of the Governor Coronavirus Timeline, 2020).

The US CDC recommended schools adopt virus mitigation measures over the summer. Those measures included; universal indoor masking, social distancing of 6’ between people, limiting in-person interactions between people, and improved ventilation. (US CDC, 2020). In the fall of 2020, the continued pandemic required schools to adopt various forms of hybrid teaching (Bartlett, 2022). At that time, there was some debate about the potential negative impacts of social distancing on school functioning (Christakis, 2020; Clemens et. al., 2020).

Over the summer of 2020, the Maine Department of Education released a plan that required schools and school districts to each create three separate plans for reopening schools in August; fully remote, hybrid remote/in-person, and fully in-person (Maine DOE, 2020).

Schools worldwide made changes to their practice to mitigate the spread of the virus. Nearly all schools experienced closure in the spring of 2020 and new hybrid forms of education in the fall of 2020 (Faden, 2020). While approaches varied widely, one universal goal was an effort to have students physically in school, but also physically separated from one another. This paradox led many schools to adopt various hybrid forms of schooling; combining in-person education with remote education (Lo Moro et. al., 2020; Zierer, 2021; Zimmerman et. al., 2022).
As such, there were monumental shifts in how teachers had to conceptualize providing instruction to students, including: teaching online (regardless of prior experience, training or motivation) (Chaddha, 2020), maintaining a distance from those students one has in-person (Clemens et. al, 2020), and ordinary collaboration with fellow educators (Johnson et. al., 2020). Additionally, students and families had huge structural disruptions, including learning from home or getting help from a parent for work they did not understand (Connor et. al., 2022). In the US, the pandemic affected nearly everything involved in teaching practice (Hamilton et. al., 2020).

**Changing Teaching Conditions Under COVID**

Teachers worldwide had to respond quickly to school closures in the spring of 2020. The vast majority of those teachers who were called to begin remote teaching had no training in the practice (Chadda, 2020). Working online only posted technological and pedagogical difficulties. Teachers learned to use digital tools but felt that teacher student interaction was compromised. Teachers suffered a loss of quality interaction with students as well as with peers (Kovacs, 2021). Managing the transition to teaching from home during lockdown was stressful for all teachers. For those who were also parents, working through that stress in the same house with their school age children – who were also now learning online – became doubly stressful (Connor, 2022).

As the pandemic moved into a second year, schools struggled to balance the need and desire for in-person instruction with the demand to distance students from one another. States nationwide demanded a return to in-person teaching with a continued dependence on virus mitigation strategies like social distancing. To confront this dilemma, schools adopted various hybrid forms of teaching students (Goldhaber et. al., 2022; Singh, 2021). Some schools separated
into permanent online or in-person cohorts, in which some teachers were solely online and a
cohort of students was completely online (Goldhaber et. al., 2022). Others adopted alternating
day and in-person options, in which different student cohorts would attend in-person select days
per week (Darling-Aduana, 2022).

Perhaps the most complicated hybrid model included simultaneous zoom/in-person
instruction, in which some students attended class in-person and others attended via video
conferencing simultaneously. Under this model, a teacher would have some students attending in
the classroom in person. Other students would attend the same class via videoconferencing. This
meant that a teacher was managing a lesson plan and interactions with students in real time in
both a virtual and in-person environment. Visual inputs for students in both were limited to what
the camera could catch and what the microphone could hear. Teachers who were usually just
learning technological media, were learning and struggling in full view of students online as well
as in the classroom. Additionally, because students online had control over their microphones
and cameras, teachers had to wrestle with student engagement in different ways with their in-
person and with their online students. This form was so complex and difficult that other schools
often abandoned it as unsustainable (Bartlett, 2022).

Working conditions, including health concerns and increasingly demanding workloads
exacerbated an already short supply of teachers. The teacher labor market fell by 9 percent
during the pandemic and has not recovered (Bleiberg & Kraft 2022). Half of all teachers who left
the profession in 2020 cited the pandemic as the cause (Diliberti et. al., 2021). Open
communication and flexible, empathic leadership were keys to teachers’ continued resilience in
the face of this crisis amid changing working conditions (Kraft et. al., 2020).
Technological Change and Teacher Practice

Online learning changes communication and the sense of community among participants. From simple things like turn-taking, to more complex issues like the construction of a unique online persona, online community and communication is distinctly different from in-person classroom work (Pickering, 2009). Prior to the pandemic, teachers demonstrated a range of attitudes toward adopting technology in their teaching, from relatively easy adoption to strongly concerned (Liu & Szabo, 2009). Teachers new to online learning environments reported that they experienced a sense of disconnect from their students and their peers as a result of the technological medium through which their interactions occurred (Hawkis et al., 2012).

Teachers are generally more likely to experience confidence in new technological models when they are trained together and they share the experience adapting with each other (Ertmer et al., 2007). Teacher collaboration is important in teachers’ feelings of success, especially when dealing with change (Ning & Lee, 2015). A community of practice, even an online one, can reduce feelings of isolation that teachers experience when adapting to new electronic pedagogies (Gray, 2004).

Prior to the COVID pandemic, teachers’ adoption of new technology was more often voluntary or in response to purely local demands. In a large-scale meta-analysis of school data and school websites, Harris et al. (2020) found that, when schools were closed due to the pandemic, these technological changes were sudden, more complete, and teachers were required to change regardless of their comfort with technology. In a quantitative survey of close to 900 instructors at over 600 institutions, virtually all teachers, those who were previously more comfortable with technology and those who were not, reported using new methods as a result of the changes associated with the pandemic (Johnson et al., 2020). When teachers could work together to share ideas and support one another during hybrid teaching, they felt higher job...
satisfaction and a stronger sense of resilience. This was especially important when the hybrid experience was equally shared (Reichenberg, 2022).

**Stress and School Cultural Change and COVID**

COVID as a global pandemic increased aggregate stress levels among people in general (Holingue et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2020). The demands of school work under new restrictions related to the pandemic further increased stress for school workers. Principals (Reid, 2022) and teachers alike suffered increased stress under the demands of an ever evolving pandemic (Kim & Asbury, 2020; Matiz et. al., 2020; Reid 2022; Talidong & Toquero, 2020; Xiong et. al., 2020; Zhang and Ma, 2020).

The suddenness of the pandemic shutdown and rapid change to distance learning increased stress for teachers, who felt a loss of spontaneity and autonomy in working with students (Kim & Asbury, 2020; Niemi & Kousa, 2020;) as well as disconnection from students, a loss of curricular rigor, and adapting to an environment of constant change (Berry, 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020). Teachers felt a loss of their own sense of success as educators (Kraft et al., 2020; Matiz et. al., 2020). The combination of sudden, completely novel ways of teaching required, with health concerns and separation from colleagues caused stress levels in teachers to skyrocket.

The resultant stress on teachers increased their sense of burnout and caused many to question remaining in the profession (Panisoara et al., 2020; Shoulders et. al., 2021). In dealing with crises, peers become crucial in helping people cope (Freeman & Carson 2006). Peoples’ social networks and personal behavior have changed as a result of COVID (Moya et al., 2020).

In an ethnography of a Toronto drama class, Gallagher et. al (2020) found that the change from in-person to online teaching altered students’ and teachers’ relationships with digital media as far as their relevance to classes and teaching. During remote pandemic-era teaching, students
and teachers were expected to incorporate their digital presence into a more public view in a virtual class setting. In an autoethnography of his experience and describing the impact of the pandemic, Berry (2020) said:

I emerge from writing this essay thinking, yet again, about my dream to be a teacher. None of my lived experience with identifying, cultivating, and performing my dream prepared me to understand how meaningful teaching would be for me. I could not fully grasp the fuller significance of teaching, I suspect, until teaching as I knew it and wanted it to be, and the usual anchors that shaped how I engage with my dream, went away. (p. 486)

Teachers found themselves doing work they valued, but were unprepared for, and doing it in isolation. The world of teaching that they knew was, for the moment, gone.

**Teacher Workplace Morale**

There is a high correlation between teachers’ job satisfaction and teachers’ morale. In effect, teachers who feel that they are effective at their job, and that they are making a difference in the lives of their students also have high morale (Lüleci & Çoruk, 2018). At John Bapst, the COVID pandemic was a true existential crisis. The virus meant that students, families, and teachers' health were threatened. Because John Bapst is an independent school, and enrollment is based on student choice, the existence of the school was under threat. If students and families became dissatisfied with the school’s approach to the pandemic, we were worried about dramatic declines in enrollment. Morale and job satisfaction could not then be the primary consideration in this emergency. Some important contributors to teachers’ job satisfaction; proximity to students, to colleagues, and the nature of the work itself had to be abandoned because of public health concerns. When a district undergoes massive change, teachers’ morale is affected
negatively, but that can be mitigated with distributed leadership models and with supportive and collaborative professional development (Lane et. al., 2019).

A collaborative workplace culture is associated with high teacher morale (Vernadine, 1997). A collaborative school culture is one in which teachers feel heard, respected, and experience a shared pedagogical climate. It is also built into the in-person environment of schools before the pandemic. But that experience is compromised when teachers’ experience is no longer shared equally (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). Little (2002) found that under ordinary circumstances, professional learning communities work if teachers meet regularly together in person, with a shared sense of experience and a shared sense of purpose. She further found that teachers’ sense of community is often organic and tied to casual contact and conversation within the shared spaces of the school and during the work day. Phenomena that divides teachers into different camps pose a direct threat to their sense of community (Grossman et. al., 2001). The school’s response to the pandemic, especially in the 2020-2021 year in which the hybrid schedule and the decisions to allow teachers to choose a remote option at will, created conditions that could divide the faculty into different camps. When COVID disrupted the collaborative culture of schools in the US, teachers felt a sharp shift in the way they were able to connect with one another and accomplish the work they were trained to do.

Schools’ responses to the pandemic, by virtue of the sudden and evolving nature of the pandemic, resulted in an environment of fairly constant change in teachers’ work lives (Nerlino, 2022), the pandemic and its associated changes to teachers’ work, as well as its attendant health concerns, were devastating to teacher morale. Teachers felt a loss of efficacy and a sense of disconnect from their work and their work community (Fray et. al., 2022). Successful administrators recognized the pandemic as a cultural challenge as well as a logistical one.
Schools that managed better were responsive to teachers’ needs and who responded to teacher feedback (Rebman, 2022). During the pandemic, being open to faculty input and an inviting culture (listening to teachers’ needs and responding accordingly) assisted schools and faculties’ resilience (Brione, 2021).

**Conceptual Framework**

**Cultural-Historical Activity Theory**

Building on the original Activity Theory of Vygotsky, Engeström (2000) described Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). CHAT sees the “historically evolving activity system” (Engeström, 2000, p. 255) as a unit of analysis. In other words, its focus is the entire milieu in which activity happens. Because this system is dynamic and evolving, it includes contradictions and tensions that provide opportunities for new growth directions, especially in those areas where existing practice or recently past practices are challenged. The COVID pandemic has done exactly that. The pandemic, the rapidity with which change happened, the endemic uncertainty of why different practices are necessary or not (masks or not, how much distance is safe or not, some schools close, some remain open, and so on) have all provided an environment rich in uncertainty, but also in demands on teachers’ efforts. In short, it is the perfect situation to be seen through a CHAT lens. CHAT has proved useful as a framework for understanding sociotechnical interaction network and building/maintaining community in an electronic milieu (Barab, et al., 2004; Goodnough, 2018). Tensions arise when people move into a technological realm and activity theory helps understand that. Darwin (2011) defends CHAT as a useful method to understand the complexities of social activity and social learning.

Because it arises from learning theory, CHAT is especially relevant to those who are adapting to a novel situation. It has been a particularly useful lens for examining teachers’
relationships in an online community (Barab et al., 2004). According to Engeström (2015), CHAT suggests that communal learning, in which subjects learn to use and work with tools toward an objective are going to be influenced by a foundation of rules (relevant to the work), their community (as it responds to the work), and a division of labor (which evolves in response to the work). Teachers’ identities, both personal and professional, are tied up within their work and their mastery of their tools and context (Grimalt-Álvaro & Ametller, 2021). Engeström’s (2015) original illustration for CHAT is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory as depicted by Engeström (2015)

When something interrupts the status quo of a school, especially something that changes the teachers’ relationship to their routines, tools, division of labor, or rules, it can cause identity stress for teachers (Grimalt-Álvaro & Ametller, 2021; Stets & Serpe, 2013). In the COVID era at John Bapst, the work of teachers was altered in profound ways. The tools of teaching had a
major revision - whiteboards, desks (for some), and even paper (as a medium for work) became nearly obsolete. Instead, teachers had to master the use of Zoom, Schoology, Google Docs, and more, often in a very short timeline with little direct training. At John Bapst, the tools that teachers used, and were required to use, and how they were used morphed over time as the pandemic progressed. The rules of engagement with students were similarly ever changing at the school. For example, if a student was required to be ‘on camera’ during class, we had to decide - does it count if the student is showing only their forehead?, or only their bedroom ceiling?

Teaching remotely changed expectations about attendance, student attention, student and teacher work, student and teacher time, and more. For example, teachers at John Bapst were told to be sensitive to students who were feeling anxiety, but also to require students to have their cameras on when attending remotely. The decision of how to manage a student who felt anxious about having a camera on was one of the many paradoxes that teachers had to navigate. The changing nature of teaching over the course of the pandemic is illustrated in the modified CHAT figure below.
Figure 2

CHAT as Experienced by Teachers in the COVID Era

- **Rules**: New work expectations in the new medium
- **Community**: Teachers’ relationships with each other
- **Division of Labor**: New responsibilities, different experts in the school
- **Object**: Teaching Classes in 2020
- **Outcome**: Perceptions on how the work of teaching has changed
- **New Tools**: Zoom, Schoology, Email

Subject: Teachers
The conceptual framework for this study is a modification of the CHAT model, illustrated in Figure 2 above. To account for the constantly changing nature of working conditions during the pandemic, the lines are dashed and wavy. The components of a work environment and activity are there and fixed, but the lines are wavy to represent the ever-changing environment that teachers were required to navigate and the ever-changing ways in which the components of the activity of teaching interacted with each other. In essence, because of the different options opened to teachers and students, each teacher ended up with a slightly different workplace in this case. Because those conditions (including the in-person attendance of students and colleagues) changed rapidly and frequently, teachers had workplaces that changed on a daily basis.

Before the pandemic came, a teacher learning to use a new tool to teach would have other parts of their work that would be predictable and fixed. They would have the same space to work in every day, there would be predictably in most of their work, with the exception of the one new thing they are working on learning. They would have colleagues to lean on to help adapt. Even in the case of a teacher who is new to the field, everything in their new setting would be new, but they would have colleagues in their workplace that had institutional knowledge and wisdom to share.

The COVID crisis was extraordinary. It affected nearly every school and every teacher (Nicola et al., 2020). There was no institutional knowledge for emergency remote teaching in most schools. Teachers respond to technological change best when they can work together (Ertmer et. al., 2007) and in this case they could not work together, at least not physically (Harris et al., 2020).
Engeström’s (2005) approach to studying an activity is valuable, but it assumes that at least some of the components of the activity are fixed and reliable. In the case of the COVID pandemic, the tools were new to nearly everyone (Chadda, 2020), the community was reset for all from an in-person collegial one to a virtual one (Reichenberg, 2022). The division of labor was evolving and unpredictable. All connections were reset. Teachers make meaning about themselves through their sense of agency working with their familiar tools and in their familiar contexts. (Stets & Serpe, 2013). Every component of school was challenged during the pandemic. Generally, CHAT is a valuable framework to understand teaching as an enterprise, especially where there is a change involved (Engeström, 2005). It is imminently useful in understanding a holistic environment of change as dynamic and global as the COVID pandemic has brought to schools and teachers.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD
Phenomenological research is used to study the way people make sense of and experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Phenomenological research has previously been used to study teachers making classroom curricular choices (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000), preservice teachers’ experiences with field placements in virtual schools (Kennedy et al., 2013), and reflecting on technology integration (Sullivan & Bhattacharya, 2017). Phenomenological research has been suggested as an especially appropriate way to assess teachers’ experiences with technology integration (Cilesiz, 2011). Phenomenological research attempts to find the underlying shared meaning of the object being studied. Typically, phenomenological studies are done through interviews with participants and analysis of artifacts associated with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Under CHAT, the unit of analysis is the full activity and the relationships between different elements (Engeström, 2015). To understand the lived COVID experience of educators required capturing teachers’ impressions of the relationships between the work, the community, and the outcomes required open-ended responses from teachers.

Setting and Context
John Bapst is an independent day and boarding school in the city of Bangor, Maine. About 15% of its students come from outside the US and live nearby in school-owned residences with house-parents. The remaining 85% of the students live within a 40 mile radius of the school. The school went fully remote in March of 2020, and remained so through the end of that school year. The 2020-2021 school year was extremely difficult for teachers and for administrators. While the move to fully remote teaching in the spring of 2020 was extremely sudden, it was done with the idea that there were only about 10 weeks left in the school year. Nearly all of the
international students returned home early to finish the year remotely (though some were stranded at the school for 2 years due to flight cancellations). All teachers worked remotely from their homes and all students attended remotely from their homes for the remainder of the year.

Over the course of the summer of 2020, school administrators and teachers worked to create and implement a reopening plan that included the following: options for fully remote teaching, required hybrid in-person/remote attendance for students 4 days per week, with one day (Wednesday) of fully remote teaching for all each week, new rules for social distancing, new rules and systems for lunch, new rules and systems for all extracurricular activities, and cancellation of all mass-attendance events. Some of the international students could not physically return to the US, so they attended all classes fully remotely from their homes (all in Asia). Some international students returned to the school, but attended all classes remotely from their dorm room. Some local students had health concerns and chose to attend all classes remotely. Most others attended in person two days per week and remotely 2 days per week.

The resulting schedule meant that teachers had some students physically present during the day and some attending via zoom. There was little predictability for who would attend in person or remotely on any given day, as some students who were expected to be in person elected to be remote at times. Due to the fact that all teachers were given the option of teaching fully remotely, there were classrooms monitored by substitutes that had some students physically present, others attending via zoom, with a teacher who was also zooming in. In other classrooms, teachers navigated working with simultaneous zoom and in-person attendees. The totality of the new rules and new ways of working seemed overwhelming and foreign to staff at the school. The 2020-2021 school year was marked by discord among faculty and staff, as well as fatigue with all things COVID. By March of 2021, vaccines had been announced and would become available
that April. Things seemed hopeful that the school would emerge from the pandemic by the fall of 2021.

**Research Questions**

This study was centered on the perspective of teachers as they navigated the first 12 months of the COVID pandemic. As a school leader who was imposing major changes to teachers’ work throughout this period, I wanted to answer the following questions, from the teachers’ perspective:

1) “How did the new tools and new technological media, and their implementation change teachers’ feelings about their practice?”

2) “How did teachers’ perceptions of the culture of the school and nature of its community change as a result of the logistical and pedagogical changes brought on by the COVID pandemic?”

3) “How did this experience change the way teachers feel about their work currently and for the future (if at all)?”

**Use of an Associate Interviewer**

I was the supervisor of all of the staff at John Bapst, and I also taught a course at the school, so I was both an administrator and a colleague working alongside the faculty. Within those relationships, there was a risk that interview subjects’ responses would be skewed in talking to me. I therefore asked another member of my EdD cohort to serve as an interviewer to collect my interview data. He and I met several times prior to actual data collection so he could understand the focus of my study and the kinds of responses I wanted him to solicit. At no time did I know which teachers volunteered to be interviewed.
The associate interviewer conducted a practice interview with a volunteer (with the volunteer’s permission that I would know who they were and could debrief with them about the process). I reviewed the recording of that practice interview, debriefed with that volunteer and provided feedback to him to refine the interview protocol. That teacher (my sister-in-law, who teaches English at the school and would not be eligible to be a participant) had already volunteered to be the practice subject. Additionally, the interviewer and I met (via Zoom) after the first two interviews to discuss how data collection was going, what kinds of information he was getting, and for me to hear a preliminary overview of the depth and breadth of responses, and provide (if necessary) further refinements to the protocol.

When the interviews were all completed, the interviewer sent them for transcription and, after they were transcribed, he reviewed the transcripts for identifiable markers. Those were changed to unidentifiable replacements. For example, if a teacher said something like “I really like working with Ms. Smith,” it would be replaced with “I really like working with [pseudonym].” This process allowed me to ensure participants’ anonymity and to collect more honest responses from them without inserting the existing power dynamic between supervisor and teacher into data collection.

**Participant Selection**

I informed the faculty (in advance) of my research design and purpose; that this interview study was to help me understand how they felt about the changes over the previous 12 months, and that this study would help me understand their experience so I could better help them as we transition out of the pandemic. I also told them that, should they volunteer for the study, their responses would be kept strictly confidential, even from me, as they will be interviewed by a disinterested third party. My associate interviewer solicited eight volunteers. To protect the
identities of participants, interview transcripts were scrubbed of identifying information. Original transcripts have been stored in the cloud and on a flash drive, both of which will be password protected by the associate interviewer. Transcripts that I received from the interviewer were scrubbed of identifying information, password protected, and stored in the cloud.

**Data Collection**

The interview questions align with my research questions (See Interview Protocol, Appendix A). Questions were designed to be specific enough to capture the categories of interest, but also open-ended enough for participants to expand into unexpected territory. Participants’ recollections and perspectives were collected via multiple semi-structured interviews with 8 faculty members.

These interviews took place in the spring of 2021, roughly one year after the pandemic first affected the school. The interviews were timed to align with an assumed (at the time) imminent end to the pandemic. The first US COVID vaccines were made available in December of 2020 with elderly and high risk people receiving first priority. It was announced nationally in January of 2021 that teachers would be among those in the next wave of vaccinations (Education Week, January 15, 2021). The questions were specific to teachers’ perceptions and experiences through the entirety of the pandemic: The early move to all online learning, learning new technologies and developing new techniques, opening school in a hybrid format, developments in that format over the course of the year, their relationships with and perceptions of other faculty members at the school, and their experiences with changing rules and expectations at work. They were also asked about their relationship with work expectations under the hybrid mode of instruction. Teachers were also asked about their impressions and expectations for work
life post-pandemic. These types of questions allowed me to see how these themes play out within the CHAT framework.

Because interviews covered events from the previous 12 months, and because it was possible that people would forget early pandemic events, I used other data sources to confirm impressions given by participants. To compile a complete picture of what happened in the work of teachers, data were collected from several other sources. To triangulate (Saldaña, 2016) data coming from interviews, I analyzed documents that were created contemporaneously with the changes at school in response to the pandemic. All communications at our school during the pandemic were electronic and a robust record of emails, agendas, plans, and minutes of meetings were available. Examples of items I used include in-service agendas, emails sent by the school to teachers, faculty meeting minutes, surveys sent over the summer planning for reopening, social media posts, and so on (see Appendix B for sample documents). This helped to triangulate the data from the interviews and to compare peoples’ memories with events through contemporaneous documents.

**Data Analysis**

After being transcribed and scrubbed of identifying information, the interviewer sent the transcripts to me. The transcripts provided rich descriptions of teachers’ recollections and emotions surrounding the different phases of the response. I divided the transcripts into two categories; the first phase of the pandemic – representing the teachers’ responses and recollections about the full lockdown spring of 2020 and the second phase of the pandemic – representing the reopening plan, and hybrid teaching during the 2020-2021 school year, and expected emergence from the pandemic (presumed to be the 2021-2022 school year). The first
category covered less time in teachers’ past because it was longer away and it was a more shared experience.

The second phase of the school’s pandemic response was contemporaneous with the interviews. It was also more dynamic. Over the course of that year, there were fairly constant changes in the school’s response to the pandemic including contact tracing, changes to student and teacher attendance and the introduction of vaccines. The second interview was meant to capture teachers’ response to all those changes and also to look ahead to their expected emergence from pandemic conditions.

I used NVivo software to analyze the transcripts and code for themes. A theme is “an extended phrase or sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about and/or what it means” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 199). In the interview transcripts, I used structural coding in the first round to organize participants’ responses around categories within CHAT and within my research questions (Saldaña, 2016). I used key elements in Cultural Historical Activity Theory to look for and to develop themes within the data. There were strong associations between CHAT components and themes that organically came from the interviews. Things like ‘tools’ within CHAT were evident as new technologies like Zoom and Schoology. Community, Division of Labor, and Rules were also strongly represented within teachers’ responses.

Using the in vivo coding process (Saldaña, 2016), I conducted several rounds of further coding. In those rounds of coding, I looked for overarching themes that emerged from participants’ own language that would allow me to identify subthemes that could be clustered into larger themes. Those larger themes emerged after using simultaneous coding, as multiple passages had applications in multiple themes (Saldaña, 2016). From this process, there were multiple strong themes that emerged within the first round of interviews, as well as the second
round of interviews. Teachers had distinctively different responses to the two eras and those responses were evident in the themes.

I used the themes that emerged from the transcript analysis to develop tags to use in analyzing the documents. The documents had been created contemporaneously with experiences that interview participants were asked to recall from the previous 12 months. Because I had used an in vivo method with the interviews, I had to interpret documents through the lenses developed by teachers’ own language. That allowed me to glimpse how teachers may have interpreted those documents at the time, as well as how they remembered them.

The documents I analyzed served to verify and add nuance to teachers’ perceptions. Samples are included in Appendices B, C, and D. They included the school’s reopening plan, the Facebook group – John Bapst Quarantine Staff Lounge, and emails sent to faculty from administrators. The same themes that emerged from interviews played out in text in different ways in the subject documents, but they were still present. There was more humor in the Facebook page than in the interview responses, for example.

Because interview data were all collected in the spring of 2021, it was assumed that the pandemic would end soon. Vaccines had become available and over the course of that year more and more people became eligible for vaccines. Unfortunately, of course, the vaccines did not end the pandemic and the expected emergence from the pandemic did not happen for many more months.

**Study Timeline**

- **February, 2021**
  - Introductory email sent to faculty
  - Practice interview conducted with volunteer and adjustments made to protocol
March, 2021
- Recruitment email sent from associate interviewer to whole John Bapst faculty
- Most first round interviews conducted

April, 2021
- Remaining first round interviews conducted
- All second round interviews conducted
- All interviews transcribed and sent to interviewees for member-checking

May, 2021
- Transcriptions received
- Artifacts collected

May, 2021 – December, 2021
- Data analysis

March, 2022
- Follow up focus group interview with John Bapst teachers

**Positionality**
Because the participants of these interviews are faculty members in the school where I am their immediate supervisor, and most of whom I have hired, there were important ethical considerations for this study. I was guided by a deep-seated care for the school and its faculty, juxtaposed with a need to know the truth of their experiences. There was a risk that, if I conducted the interviews, teachers would feel intimidated or pressured to comply, or feel that they could not be completely honest in their answers for fear of retaliation at work. To address this issue, I employed a disinterested third party (another principal in the cohort who works at a different school and does not have a close personal relationship with me) to engage in a PAR
process. I provided him with the necessary demographic data on each teacher, with the thought that, once he solicited volunteers, he could select teachers from a range of disciplines and years of experience. As it happens, he had eight volunteers. He interviewed all of them.

I have been at this school for half of my career. I care very deeply for this faculty and, if my administrative actions harmed them during this pandemic, I needed to know their truth in order to help them. At the time the interviews were conducted, I had been named as the new Head of School – to start in July of 2021. A major reason for this research was my desire to help the school and faculty recover from those changes. I elected to use an associate interviewer to allow me to learn the truth, even when and where it might be painful to me, without exposing or harming the truth tellers.

**Validity/Trustworthiness**

Because this is a case study, it is bound within a specific setting (Creswell, 2003, p. 15). The data can be accurate, but must be understood as representing the experiences of a specific group of people at a specific institution during a specific time. This particular phenomenon, however, was more universal. The experiences of these teachers, at this school, dealing with COVID, hybrid schooling, and teaching under these circumstances still likely resonate with educators in independent schools and others who have quickly adapted to crises related to COVID or who have had to move quickly to new forms of teaching. A qualitative study can capture nuances that large quantitative studies cannot. I found repetition of themes throughout the interview transcripts to identify common themes. Due to the fact that interviews were conducted via Zoom, there is a risk that responses were different than they would have been if they were in person. Additionally, because the online medium is a key component of what
teachers will be asked to consider - contemplating the influence of video conferencing during a video conference naturally may have had an impact on the results.

To triangulate the teachers’ responses, I analyzed documents associated with the evolving changes in teaching over the period: weekly emails to teachers, in-service training agendas, past surveys of teachers regarding their preferences for teaching remotely or in-person. One final threat to this study’s trustworthiness is the fact that I teach and supervise teachers at this location. I shared this experience with these teachers and am implicated in all the decisions that affected their work lives. There may be, and likely is, bias in my interpretation of these events and these teachers’ comments. In the Post Script, I conducted a non-anonymous conversation with teachers a full year after the data were collected and found that teachers’ recollections matched my initial impressions from the coded transcripts.

Limitations

Because this study relies on participants’ self-report of their memories, it is likely that their recollections were inaccurate with regard to specific details. However, because the importance of the study lies in teachers’ feelings as they emerge from the pandemic, those feelings were recorded during the hybrid year and are representative of how they felt in the moment. It is, of course, possible that they misrepresented their feelings. Having extended interviews with eight to ten participants can help balance any misrepresentations by a single interviewee. Further, given the language in the transcripts, it seems safe to say that teachers were honest about how they felt.

One important limitation of the study is that I am the immediate supervisor of all of these people. It is likely that, had I conducted interviews, the power dynamic between me and my participants would skew their responses. Additionally, one limitation of a phenomenological
design is researcher bias (Creswell, 2013). Having a disinterested third party conduct the interviews helped address both of these limitations. The interviewer and I consulted on how to select interviewees, and also on the interview protocol, with standardized follow up questions. I recruited a teacher at the school (my sister-in-law is a teacher at John Bapst) who would be exempt from the study. My interviewer conducted a practice interview with her. I watched a recording of that practice interview and provided feedback to the interviewer on interview techniques so he could refine his practice. We consulted after that practice interview and again after the first two interviews to make sure things were going according to the research design.

After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, he also removed any identifying information from the text of the interviews and replaced it with language that does not identify any specific person. For example, replace a name with “teacher from a different department” or with a pseudonym. My positionality may have affected my response when I read the results. He sent transcripts to participants for review before sending them to me. To address possible bias in my interpretations, it’s possible that teachers will say things that could be hurtful to me - I would be surprised if they didn’t. They may also say things that I find flattering. I need to give objective weight to the importance of all their insights. To address this, I will have a different person, another student in my cohort, read behind me to see if they agree with my impressions.

At the time the interviews were conducted, participants were in the middle of a very difficult hybrid teaching year, but also were looking forward to a possible end to the pandemic ushered in by the new vaccines. Their memories of the previous spring, as well as their reflections on the 2020-2021 school year, were likely altered by that situation. Additionally, these were teachers in a private school. Workplace conditions for them are different than for
public school teachers. These data represent a snapshot of their feelings at that time - long before multiple COVID variants emerged and prolonged the pandemic another year.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Teachers were interviewed in March of 2021. At that time, multiple COVID vaccines had received Emergency Use Authorization. 93% of the teachers at John Bapst would be vaccinated one month later at a school-based clinic. On March 3, 2021, I posted a news article in the John Bapst Quarantine Staff Lounge that the governor of Maine announced a priority for teachers to receive vaccines. I sent this email on March 5.

    Hi Everyone,

    With deepest gratitude to our nursing staff and the staff at PCHC, I am happy to announce that we will be hosting an all staff vaccine clinic next week on Thursday, March 11. I know that many of you have already gotten an appointment for a vaccine. Anyone who has not will have a shot at it (pun very much intended!) on Thursday.

    Classes will be canceled that day, Wednesday will become a Purple Day and we will lose the online day. Friday will still be a White day. We will have breakfast available to anyone who wants to come and, of course, vaccines will be available. I will send a sign up form and other instructions in a separate email.

    Thanks!

    Dave

    That was followed by 20 enthusiastic responses. The teachers and I were optimistic that the end of the pandemic was imminent. The first interviews were conducted within three weeks of that announcement. They centered on teachers’ memories and experience of the spring 2020 lockdown when all schooling was fully remote. The second interviews were conducted in April,
close to the second vaccine clinic date. Those interviews centered on teachers’ experiences preparing for hybrid teaching and then teaching under hybrid conditions. Implicit within my research questions was the assumption that the pandemic would soon be over. All of the interviews were conducted in March and April of 2021. Headlines in that era reflected a sense that the pandemic was coming to an end: “Bikini waxes, lashes, and blowouts: it’s time to return to our pre-pandemic selves” (CNN March 19, 2021), “I need every American to do their part, says Biden, targeting the end of the pandemic” (CNN, March 12, 2021), “Mount Everest to reopen for first climbers post-pandemic” (CNN, March 12, 2021).

There was a sense of optimism that the pandemic was winding down and the next school year would bring an escape from the virus and all its associated restrictions - but new learnings would remain. This sense of optimism, and the fact that interviews were conducted close to the one year anniversary of the March 2020 shutdown may have affected teachers’ responses. Their responses do, however, reflect their feelings at that time.

In the first interview, teachers looked back at the earliest stages of the pandemic: March through June of 2020. There were a total of 16 interviews with 8 participants. I uploaded de-identified transcripts into NVIVO and read through all of them, coding them for recurrent themes. Themes from the first interviews emerged and revealed the depth and breadth of changes and emotions that teachers went through in those first months.

**Learning to Adjust as a Community**

One important theme that emerged from the interviews was the overall impact on the community and the need to adjust, continually, to the changing demands of the workplace. At the in-service on March 17, 2020, 2 days after the announcement that the school was transitioning to remote learning, all teachers were informed of the following: all classes would now be remote
and on zoom, the schedule was changing to a block schedule, all teachers would work from home, and expectations for grading, assignments, and attendance were to be eased (to help alleviate students’ anxiety). These changes were effective the next day with the expectation that all teachers would be zooming with all classes that week.

Later that spring, all staff announcements came out extending the remote period to the end of the school year, canceling final exams, allowing pass/fail grades or incompletes for all students, and drastically modified graduation ceremony and class night (students graduated in groups of 5 in the auditorium and walked through the halls as teachers – from 6 feet away – bade them good luck).

These were dramatic changes to the school’s ordinary function and to teachers’ ordinary practices. In their recollection of this time, teachers did not comment negatively on these changes at all. Rather, they noted with empathy how hard this was for everyone – administrators, students, parents, and teachers. As the crisis initially affected the whole school at the same time, faculty experienced a shared sense of shock, but also a sense of shared struggle. At least for that spring, working conditions had been hard, but they were hard in the same way for all teachers equally.

**The Overwhelming Sense of Newness**

After a Thursday, March 12, faculty meeting that suggested we have to begin thinking about remote teaching, I sent this email to faculty members - reflecting a decision that had been made on Saturday, March 14. It included completely new daily schedules and an agenda for the Tuesday in-service. Teachers were expected to begin teaching students via Zoom within that week.
Hi Everyone,

You should have received by now, or are about to receive, a notice that we are closed effective immediately and at least until April 27. I've been in conversations with area superintendents and it sounds like a similar decision is imminent for our regional public schools. We have a lot of work to do to adapt to this new normal.

Here are a few things to consider...

Please plan to come to work Monday. We realize that it might not be possible because of changing childcare and other issues, but if possible, please try to be here.

We have several important meetings (Academic Council, Admissions, Boarding Program administrators) that will happen that day.

We will continue with our scheduled in-service on Tuesday. The agenda is attached.

All teachers will be expected to have Google Classroom (or some way of mass communication) set up for each section.

All teachers will be expected to have a live, online, contact with each section at least weekly (I have a modified schedule that'll work for that).

We do have laptops that students can borrow, but we also have to be prepared for students who do not have good internet access.

We are expecting at least some of our students will be returning home overseas, so will need to be sure that we can be in contact with them in their home countries.

A schedule is attached for how online communications can work with kids.

We have a lot of work to do still, but we are in decent shape to be ready to do this.

Have a good weekend, I'll see you Monday,

Dave

On Thursday morning, it was presented as a hypothetical possibility. On Friday, teachers left thinking that it may happen, but went home for the weekend expecting to see their students in person again. Over the weekend they were told that their students would not be back for the
foreseeable future. A full year after those events, the most overwhelming first impression teachers shared from the beginning of the pandemic was a sense of shock and disbelief that this was happening. Even a year after the shutdown, teachers remembered vividly how suddenly everything happened and how shocked they were by the initial closure. Each teacher remarked on the suddenness and shock of that initial closure. The below quote captures that thinking.

It was a rugged 48 hours of trying to think about grabbing anything you could possibly use from your classroom. Trying to think about how, you know, like where are you going to teach and, you know, you know, how, how is this going to work? (Participant 1, March 2021)

All teachers commented on this sense of suddenness. Another said “It was like being thrown into a pool without knowing how to swim” (Participant 8, April 2021). The overwhelming change for teachers was accompanied by an overwhelming set of decisions by us administrators who had to answer the question “How do we continue to teach our students?” and “How do we gear up to do this immediately?”

The speed and degree to which teachers were expected to change cannot be overstated. Prior to March 17, learning technology to support one’s teaching was treated as an option, but not mandatory. Teachers had been free to use as much (or as little) technology as they liked. Most teachers had never used video conferencing before that week. Most teachers have never heard of Zoom until March 17. They were told to be using it by Friday, March 20. By the end of that week, they were all doing it from their homes. This was a shocking, sudden overhaul from teaching in person to completely via video communications. Every participant expressed vivid memories of the shock of the events of that week.
Even teachers who had been somewhat familiar with technology were shocked by the sudden complete reliance on technology for teaching. The following quote illustrates the feelings of this transition from seeing educational technology as a casual pedagogical transition into a sudden imperative “I had some familiarity, but I had never given an assignment nor received an assignment through Google classroom. So that was a kind of a crash course on Monday. I think we were online the next day” (Participant 4, March 2021). This teacher’s reflection is accurate in that classes were online the day after our “crash course”, which was a Tuesday. In less than a week, teachers had reinvented the way they work with students from completely in-person to completely online.

**Leaning on Each Other**

During that early spring, the school was closed, the schedule was altered to allow for fewer class periods and everything was over Zoom. The demands of the fully electronic teaching environment were new for all teachers. Teachers reported that the overwhelming amount of new learning and the sudden move to being entirely separated caused them to rely heavily on their colleagues for technological and moral support. Every participant talked about seeking help from other teachers and conveyed the importance of the shared community of educators to support one another with technical skill. Sometimes, those teachers who emerged as leaders were new to the school, as illustrated below.

I was very lucky. We have a young teacher in the science department who, she and I both teach biology and she kind of said, I've done this in another, my other school.... So let me help. And she did, she did anytime I had a problem. She's the one that bailed me out. So, well, I wouldn't say bail, but helped me out.(Participant 8, March 2021)
In the above case, the teacher who was helpful was one who was new to the school and had some experience with technology beforehand. Another teacher who was similarly helpful was new to the school and new to the profession. In all cases, teachers were grateful to receive help from colleagues.

Because the school was closed down and teachers were working from home, that help most often came through electronic media. No one could work physically side by side – teachers could not work side by side with students, nor could they work side by side with each other. The only possible way to connect with others was through video conferencing technology.

Teachers relied on a variety of methods to connect with each other, for both pedagogical and social reasons. They used video conferencing, email, and even social media to connect with one another. This teacher utilized zoom to connect with colleagues for support and to share ideas., “So I leaned really heavily on a couple of my coworkers and we would have lunch bunch Zoom. Okay. What are you guys doing? How are you going to make this work? I'll show you what I've tried to do. You show what you are trying to do” (Participant 4, April 2021).

The teacher below describes how teachers used all staff emails for ideas and support, in addition to a sense of esprit de corps about how teachers worked together in this time, such as “You know, you send an email out to the whole staff, this is what's going on, on my Zoom. How can I work around it? And people were helping each other. It was really good” (Participant 8, March 2021).

The remote nature of all communication caused email inboxes to fill rapidly. Students were emailing questions to teachers, teachers were emailing work to students, many faculty were emailing questions and suggestions to the entire staff, and of course administrators were emailing everyone with updates on the situation and renewed expectations for work.
I created a private Facebook group as a way to decrease some of the email traffic (teachers were getting emails from all their students, from parents, from the school, and from each other). The “Quarantine Staff Lounge” was created as a means of sharing ideas, frustrations, and support among all the staff. It also served as a way to reduce a massive increase in email communications. That group quickly became a source to share ideas, express feelings of both joy and frustration, and to support each other, as illustrated by this teacher, “they did start this online Facebook group for like they call the ‘quarantine staff lounge.’ I think maybe Dave started that last year. And that has been something that I have found is really helpful” (Participant 2, March 2021).

The quote below is from a teacher who shared that their prior experience with educational technology and their willingness to share ideas thrust them into a leadership and training role during the early stage of the pandemic.

I kind of took on that role of trying to help people manage their Google classrooms, that I had so many more interactions with people that I don't normally talk with. Just because, you know, they were reaching out to me for help and I would find some things and like (sic) record screen videos with Zoom. I'd like (sic) show what I was doing and send that out to everybody. So in some ways I would say the communication among at least myself and the rest of the staff and it intensified almost all the way up until the end.” (Participant 7, March 2021)

There were several teachers who emerged as leaders during that time. Two of them happened to be new to the school (one of whom was new to teaching entirely). The above comment illustrates the degree to which teachers learned to lean on each other for mutual support and technical assistance.
Teachers shared memes, jokes, technological pointers and support through this medium. These comments were posted in the Quarantine Staff Lounge in the first weeks of the pandemic shutdown (comments included here with permission). Sometimes the comments were simple requests for technical support or ideas, for example “Has anyone tried the Zoom breakout groups? I googled it, and found that you need Zoom Pro (I don't think this is what I have). Any help is appreciated.” (Quarantine Staff Lounge, posted March 26, 2020)

Other comments in this medium were to share moments of success and hope in the virtual classroom. The extended comment below highlights the emotional experience of coping and adapting during the total shutdown. This teacher commented on the role of care for students and also how they appreciated the support from other teachers during these months.

I know I'm late to the party on this one, but I just worked through a ZOOM with my class of 24 seniors in breakout rooms. If breakout rooms were a person, I would offer them an air high five and a hearty fist bump from 6+ feet away. That was incredible. Students who have a tough time contributing in the larger group were engaged and actively working on the discussion questions. Students who have been working their faces off for their family or as essential workers and had let me know ahead of time they hadn't quite finished the reading were able to contribute as the writer or reporter and still find value in their work. When we came back to the main room, we talked about what we COULD do and not what we couldn't. They were kind and patient with me as a breakout room newbie and were enthusiastic to try it again.

Thank you to many of you who have provided advice and tips about how best to use this feature. I hadn't had a day where I felt like I was actually helping the kids achieve in a
The above teacher illustrated care for students and what they are coping with at home, but also illustrated working through the many layers that teachers and students had to cope with just to get to learning. Those layers included mastering a new technology and a new way of seeing and interacting with each other. Teachers and students sought help from each other and found ways to work together to make progress despite these monumental challenges. Finally, it showed the resilience of teachers and students in that spring 2020 lockdown. They worked together to find ways to work together toward academic progress.

The Importance of Administrative Flexibility and Communication

As the administrator who served as the direct supervisor for the schedule and for all teachers, I was charged with implementing and facilitating most of these massive changes. The first day the school was closed was Monday, March 16. The training and preparation in-service was March 17. I told teachers that they were expected to meet their students online by the end of that week. I created and distributed a schedule of when periods would meet online. Within a week, teachers requested changes to that schedule to make the workload more manageable – specifically to make Wednesday a shorter class day to buy teachers some time to learn and to catch up on what they were doing. I made that change immediately.

I was teaching class as well during this time and I felt firsthand how difficult this work had become. There were almost constant changes during that spring – from extending the time during which we would be remote to changes in events like graduation & prom, and evolving expectations for how the grades at the end of the year were treated. I made it a goal to communicate as much as possible and to listen to teachers for input on how the school should
evolve to be more manageable under these conditions. It is important to remember that at this point in the pandemic, contracting the virus felt like a matter of life and death.

This email was sent to teachers on March 22, one week after the school was shut down. (“John” is a pseudonym). This is an example of the near constant email communications that went out in those first few weeks.

Hi Everyone,

By now, you've probably seen John's email. As this situation progresses, the potential that the governor will issue a shelter in place order gets higher. Last week, I told teachers to have a Plan B for just such a scenario. That scenario has gotten more likely. At least 5 states, including California and New York, have already done this. If the building has to completely close, there will be very little notice. If you need things from your office or classroom, I recommend getting your stuff today or Monday. Obviously, minimize your contact with others as you do.

Academic Departments should plan to meet weekly to stay in touch and take care of ongoing concerns with kids or instruction.

Academic Council should plan a weekly meeting - I'll send an email separately on that.

For everyone, I've created a private Facebook group - John Bapst Quarantine Staff Lounge. This is only open to employees of John Bapst. If you'd like to join, find your way to that page and ask permission. This is a place where we can support one another, share ideas and war stories and maintain our community. This will hopefully reduce our email load and also give us a place to stay in touch with photos, videos, and so on.
We've gotten off to a great start, but it looks like the start of a marathon rather than a sprint. I hope you are healthy and are managing to find peace these days.
We'll definitely get through this, we've got great resources in each other and in our students and families.

Thanks,

Dave

In remembering this early phase of the pandemic, many teachers were appreciative of the administration’s flexibility and support for coping with change. Though work had gotten much harder, there was some empathy for what the administration had to do. Teachers also appreciated that administrators heard suggestions and made changes accordingly. The participants below showed appreciation for the administration’s responsiveness and communication.

So we started off with one schedule that was like how goodness it was like, it was like a half day schedule, just had classes in the mornings. It's like a period one through four and then period, or yeah, five, five through seven. And it, and it, it became very clear that that wasn't working for the students. So one thing I will very much appreciate about my administration and just the, the size of Bapst is we have the ability to be nimble in some of our decisions. So they, they took the feedback from that and came up with a new schedule a new schedule after that one that was you know, Monday, Tuesday rotation through our periods longer class periods and then a Thursday, Friday rotation through our periods. So everything was kind of more predictable.” (Participant 1, March 2021)

The above statement captures some of what it meant to manage the pandemic at an independent school. Decisions like changing the schedule were managed within the administrative offices, without need for consulting with a school board or other units. Decisions can be made instantly. The other side of that flexibility is that administrators bear the responsibility for making the
decisions, for hearing feedback in chaotic times, and for the impact of those decisions on faculty and staff. This teacher, and others, expressed a sense of empathy for administrators work in the spring 2020 shutdown part of the pandemic.

I was actually very impressed as to how quickly our administration kind of jumped on things and how responsive they were. There were just so many things. I’m putting myself in the position of someone like Dave, who had to answer, I'm sure thousands of emails over that span of time. And I mean, there was good communication at the time. People were really, there weren't always answers to go around, but there was always some kind of we'll get it. We'll get to that. We will figure it out. We'll, we'll make a note of that. I was at the time, I mean, I was, I was very encouraged,” (Participant 3, March 2021)

This empathy for my work and for administrators in general evaporated as the school moved into the hybrid year of 2020-2021, which will be noted later.

In this early phase of the pandemic, many of our choices were informed by a sense of “flattening the curve.” That if we stayed away from each other for a few weeks, the virus would die out and we could get back to business as usual. The virus was treated similarly to a storm that would pass and be over soon. As administrators, we were working with very little guidance from educational or health authorities. To continue to teach, but without being in the same place together, was the only specific mandate we had to follow and even that was self-imposed. In the absence of any guidance, we had to rely on our own judgment and the feedback from teachers on how it was going. We spoke with them from a shared sense of the value of continuing to teach despite the obvious limitation. In this era, administrative openness to feedback from teachers was necessary. As long as we could keep teaching, we were willing to hear what teachers had to say.
Teachers remember with some fondness that, in this part of the pandemic, their relationship with the administration was positive and, despite the difficult circumstances, helpful.

**A Growing, and then Evaporating, Sense of Empathy**

During the spring of 2020 shutdown, everyone was experiencing a shared shock. Overnight, the school went from a fairly ordinary year to one in which everything was different and new. Things that were ordinary parts of schooling two months earlier – being together, walking in the hallways, passing out papers – were now considered potentially dangerous. Everyone had the concern of contracting the virus and everyone had a massive change in how work was to be done. In that time, it is striking that participants noted great empathy for each other, for students and families, and for administrators. As the 2019-2020 school year came to a close and the school reopened for 2020-2021 with new policies for how to manage teaching in a pandemic that had not yet ended, things started to fracture. As the new 2020-2021 school year unfolded with new policies and new approaches to schooling, that empathy gave way to frustration and division.

**Empathy for Students**

This particular school is one that prides itself on its positive connections with students. Students at John Bapst come from 40 different towns in Maine and more than 10 other countries. The students and staff experienced a shared sense of the importance of education, as well as a shared sense of caring for one another. The school was typically busy an hour before and an hour after school – with students studying together and many students meeting with teachers to get extra help. The need to socially distance from one another so suddenly caused a sense of loss among teachers.
The change to fully remote status in a very short period of time was remarkably fast and involved a seemingly impossible overhaul of teaching methods with very little training. Despite this extra heavy work load and associated difficulties with learning and using technology, all teachers in the study expressed empathy for the impact of the shutdown on students. Teachers, who had been encouraged to build relationships with students, suddenly had to work remotely. International students who could get out booked flights home, and attended class remotely from 12 time zones away. American students had to study from home, often in homes with multiple siblings and were attending classes via video conferencing with limited wifi access. All spring events were canceled. Graduation was reduced to 5 students at a time, coming into the school to receive their diplomas and to see individual teachers (from 6 feet away). There were no hugs at graduation.

In remembering this period, every teacher expressed empathy for students during this period. Teachers, who had also been going through an immensely difficult transition of their own, remembered the care they felt for students and the worry that kids would be ok. In the data, this was universal. Every teacher expressed empathy for students and their loss of a “normal school year.” The following quote illustrates that feeling around one of the school's international students who returned home to China when things were shutting down. This student, and many others, continued to attend class via zoom and across 12 time zones.

“I had one young man who was a guy that we loved from China, but the title of his monologue, what, and he was, he was doing this monologue from China, obviously it was probably in the middle of the night, midnight or something because afternoon in Eastern Maine, midnight in China. And it, the title of his monologue was “My Escape from America.” That's just always stuck with me because it's like, my God, these kids have
been so traumatized. And this kid had spent thousands of dollars on some kind of
desperate plane ticket and had, had, had to go, who knows how many different legs just
to get home and to quarantine and all of this stuff. And I thought this is so much more
than, than I was asked to deal with when I was 17, 18 years old.” (Participant 3, March
2021)

This teacher expressed the empathy that showed in the remarks of all participants. Their
comments regarding the total shutdown in the spring of 2020 consistently showed empathy for
the changes to the experience of the students. In this particular school, those changes meant that
some students returned to their homes in other countries and they continued to attend classes
remotely, on US time.

Over the course of the spring 2020 portion of the pandemic, this empathy was mixed with
humor, as teachers shared stories of kids attending class from fishing boats, from moving
vehicles, from Asia. This empathy was not as evident in the second phase of the pandemic – the
2020-2021 school year. It was, however, universal in the early phase of the pandemic.

Changes and Divisions within the Community

In the spring, the school was completely closed and all teachers were required to work
remotely. Each participant noted that, in the early response, teachers supported each other
through learning and adaptation to the new milieu. The summer of 2020 brought a reopening
plan that featured new technologies and a new model for teaching that was not fully remote. Half
of the student body would be expected to attend in person on Monday and Tuesday, while the
other half would attend via zoom on those days, Wednesday was a fully remote day, followed by
Thursday and Friday in which the students who had been remote in the first half of the week
would be in-person and the other students would be remote. Google classroom was abandoned
and a new learning management system – Schoology – was adopted (because Google applications are banned in China, from where many of our international students would be attending remotely). Teachers had to, again, learn new techniques and new technologies. The mutual support that teachers expressed about the spring of 2020 lasted into the beginning of that second year, when teachers were learning a new learning management system, hybrid teaching, and other technologies. Due to overwhelming demand state-wide and nation-wide, training in hybrid teaching and in Schoology was simply not available during that summer. Schoology provided an online self-paced training, but there was no expert who could answer questions. At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, teachers expressed the same mutual support and shared positive outlook that they had had in the previous year. These contemporaneous posts from the Quarantine Staff Lounge illustrate that spirit. The first is an example of a simple request for help, the second exemplifies the teachers finding humor in the new classroom medium.

Does anyone here have an iPad that you can write on with a stylus?

I'd like to know if you can write on PDFs in Schoology with the Apple Pen. (posted in Quarantine Staff Lounge on September 21, 2020)

Zoom chat from a freshman boy this afternoon:

Can I go to the bathroom? Something I ate is NOT agreeing with me.

😂

He was also at home. Sure kid, do what you have to do!

Anyone else have kids regularly ask for permission to go to the bathroom? (posted in Quarantine Staff Lounge on October 2, 2020)
However in the summer reopening plan (See Appendix C), which was compiled by administrators working with a faculty team and outside experts, it was announced that teachers would be able to choose to work fully remotely for any reason. It allowed maximum flexibility for teachers with child care and health concerns. It also meant that some teachers would be physically present in the school with students, while other classrooms would have students with a teacher zooming in to provide video conference-based instruction. Students who were at school, but had remote teachers, were in classrooms while the teacher was there via Zoom. Substitute teachers patrolled multiple remote classrooms to monitor students who were watching their teacher on their laptops. Some teachers were remote for nearly the entire year, others were remote for shorter periods. At the lowest point, in January in the school year, there were fewer than 15 (out of 40) teachers physically present in the building.

This policy helped cause a sharp division within the community. Unlike the spring of 2020, when all teachers were working under similar conditions, this policy allowed teachers to work from home and teach in the way they had done the previous spring. Teachers who chose to physically come to the school every day had to teach remote and in-person students simultaneously and had a markedly more difficult work setting than those who were remote. Teachers who reported to school every day expressed resentment at those who did not. Every participant (which included teachers who had been fully remote and teachers who had remained in person that year) noted a fracture in the community as a result. The feelings of participants were quite strong on this point. All teachers noted this division. The following sentiment in the following appeared in the statements of every single participant “there's been this kind of chasm between those of us that are on campus and those who have not come back to campus at all.” (Participant 4, March 2021)
This was the most uniform finding in the data. Every participant mentioned this split in the community.

The choices to be remote were entirely personal to each teacher. However, members of departments that had more in-person teachers expressed this as departmental anger against other members of other departments. The decisions to be remote happened at different times and for different durations during the year. Some teachers were remote for the entire year for personal health or child care reasons, others worked remotely for shorter periods during the year because of waves of increased infections and changes in concern for their own health. By April of 2021, when the second round of interviews occurred, most (but not all) teachers had returned to in-person teaching. The resentment about teachers’ remote status that formed early in the year was still present by the fourth quarter. This participant noted that the community spirit was strong when the school was shut down in the spring of 2020 and all classes were remote, but in the hybrid year, things changed as evidenced by this teacher “last spring we were kind of all in it together….I think the big divide here, … has been this resentment with people who came on campus and people who didn't come on campus” (Participant 4, April 2021).

Whatever esprit de corps that may have existed school wide in the spring seemed to have been replaced by divisions that fell sometimes on departmental lines. Departments in which a majority of teachers worked in-person felt united in their anger at those teachers who worked remotely. In some departments, they developed an “us vs them” kind of attitude expressed here: “the people in my department, the state are very, you know, we're the ones that stayed and they're angry at everyone else.” (Participant 6, April 2021)

Others also illustrated this sense, but shared that the community was still hurting even after some of these teachers returned to in-person teaching.
We’ve had some teachers that were remote. They’ve come back. There’s, there’s no connection. I'm, I'm, I'm being very honest. There's a polarization that comes from this. There's a resentment. … this is what I've seen this year. I've learned the difference between an employee and a teacher, an employee is gathering a paycheck and a teacher is there for the kids. (Participant 8, April 2021)

All teachers were allowed to choose to be remote, with “no questions asked.” The “no questions” were from the administration. It was meant to allow that teachers who had health issues, health concerns, child care concerns, professional concerns, and more were all valid. Even though administrators were not asking questions, the remote decision did cause colleagues to question some teachers’ dedication, as evidenced above.

**Hard Transition to New Tools and New Rules**

In the emergency of the early pandemic, the school and teachers relied on Zoom and on Google Classroom to operate in a completely remote scenario. While Zoom was brand new to teachers, Google Classroom was familiar to the staff. Because a substantial number of John Bapst students are from Asia and returned home during the shutdown, and because Google and its associated apps are banned in China, over the summer the school adopted Schoology as an online learning management system. The decision was made by a committee of teachers (representing every department) and myself. Because it was expected that many students would be remote, Schoology was required of all teachers in all classes in the coming year. It was reviewed and chosen by consensus of the faculty team. However, after adopting it, the school learned that there would be a delay in installing it and additionally (because of overwhelming demand from new Schoology users nationwide) there would be no live training in its use before the start of the school year.
There was self-paced training available through a website, but no expertise from trainers was available for teachers before school began. As a result, teachers would be adopting a new technology without being able to be in a room learning with others, also without support from anyone who was knowledgeable in the platform. Additionally, the school opted to use a hybrid teaching model - in which half of the students will be physically present in school and half online every day. All teachers would be teaching simultaneously in-person and on Zoom in every class. That model was adopted in late July of 2020. Administrators at the school sought training for the hybrid model for teaching, and scheduled an in-service around that. No training in hybrid teaching was available, the best available training focused only on online techniques - not on the challenges of having students both in-person and online simultaneously.

The technology and the hybrid model of teaching were completely new for all teachers. They had made it through the shutdown of the spring and knew that the pandemic was not going away. The lack of available live training for both Schoology and for hybrid teaching caused a great deal of anxiety among the staff. In the early shutdown, there was one day of training on how to use Zoom and how to use Google classroom, and there was some expertise within the school for supporting teachers in both of those technologies. There was no expertise in the school on how to use Schoology or how to teach in a hybrid fashion.

The school planned 3 days of in-service training a full week before school started. Within that week, training was structured to bring teachers together to share ideas. As a lead administrator who designed that week, my intention was to capitalize on the sense of mutual support I had seen in the spring and to maximize the degree to which the community could share ideas and prepare for the year. That week was marked by stress over the continued uncertainty of how to teach under a hybrid model, compounded by disagreements among teachers about the
virtue of masks and also by the decisions of some teachers to work fully remotely. Many teachers felt anxious and lost as a result. The quote below captures the feelings teachers had with those circumstances.

And ooh, it started to unravel really quickly. And nobody was going to teach us how to do that. But I think we were all looking at each other, like who’s the trainer in, in almost every aspect of our teaching lives, how are we going to address the kids in the classroom, in the kids at home simultaneously? …How do we even? (Participant 4, April 2021)

The above quote was one of many that were hard for me to read. All of the teachers expressed these same feelings. Within the teachers’ words, I felt a sense of their despair and helplessness during that time. I was unaccustomed to hearing this from my faculty, whom over the years I had come to know as confident, positive, and exemplary educators. I felt I had put them in that situation and had been powerless to make it any better. I was left with a tremendous sense of guilt for hurting friends and esteemed professionals.

**The Challenges of Remaining Adaptive and Nimble**

A final theme that emerged in the interviews included responses to the demands on teachers and on the school to continue to adapt and be flexible in the face of ever evolving demands and workplace expectations. Flexibility and adaptability come at a cost, however. After a year of demanding flexibility, teachers were fatigued and ready for the pandemic to be over. The pandemic hadn’t ended. The curve never flattened. After 12 months of the pandemic, teachers were tired of being asked to be flexible.

Over the course of two years, the school had 4 different schedules. It also had 3 completely different modalities of engaging with students and curriculum; fully in-person, fully remote, and hybrid (which included some fully in person students, some fully remote, some fully
remote teachers, some fully in-person teachers and most students and teachers a combination of the two). Interviews showed the challenges of these changes and illustrated both the resilience of teachers and the fatigue with the pandemic and its attendant expectations.

**The Changing Nature of Teaching Under Hybrid Conditions**

The hybrid schedule that the school adopted for the 2020-2021 school year meant that teachers at the school would have half of their students online and half in person on Monday and Tuesday. On Thursday and Friday the roles were reversed – students who had been online would be in person and students who had been in person would be online. This was further complicated when parents were told they could excuse absences with no questions asked and other students were given permission to attend every day in person because of 504 or other accommodations. The result of these was that, for those teachers in the school building, it was never clear which students were expected to physically be in the building on any given day or which should be attending remotely.

Further, there was a great deal of attention paid to student anxiety issues during this era that caused difficulties in enforcing a rule for remote students to keep their cameras on. For those teachers that were physically present in the building, there was constant uncertainty about who or what to expect in class.

All participants commented on the changing nature of work. Some teachers were challenged by the new modality in 2020-2021 and felt uncomfortable with the electronic environment. Teachers had a variety of responses to the hybrid environment. No teacher talked about enjoying it or the challenge of teaching under those conditions. All teachers reported difficulties in different ways with this work environment.
The difficulty of teaching under these conditions sometimes appeared as being forced to use uncomfortable modalities in teaching. Hybrid teaching did not allow for some teachers to utilize their strengths as educators. This teacher explained some challenges with modifying their usual approach with the additional challenge of students attending remotely via zoom.  

My strength is my connection with the kids in the classroom. … but it's not the same when I'm wearing a mask, they're listening to me on this. I got my back, turned to them because I'm drawing something on the board and there, and they, and some of them are in China (attending via zoom) and they're just not getting it. (Participant 8, April 2021)  

The challenges that teachers faced in the hybrid environment included not simply that some students were online and some were in class (as if that weren’t enough), but some of those students online were attending from 12 time zones away. Ordinary class time in the Eastern US was late at night for those students, who are also English-language learners.  

The hybrid environment left doubts about how remote students were able to engage with classes and with the teacher. This environment was as new for students as it was for teachers. Old methods of soliciting feedback on whether or not students were understanding things were made more difficult or impossible. Students who were remote (especially if they kept their cameras off) did not have facial expressions or body language that teachers could use to visually assess understanding. Even those students who had cameras on appeared as very small rectangles on the teacher’s laptop at the front of the room, while the teacher was engaging with live students in the room. The loss of visual cues and the bifurcated student body in classes left teachers at a loss for feedback on how students were learning. Some teachers commented on the need for, and on asking for, feedback from students. The teacher below explained how it felt to seek feedback from students in the hybrid environment.
I wanted to know, can you hear me? Can you see me? Can you see the board? Like you know, what is better for you? What's your experience when you're at home? So I really, you know, I really tried to get that information from them about what, what was working best for them? Like what could I do better? What so that also helped sort of inform my decision. (Participant 2, April 2021)

The above illustrates the difficulty of checking in with students simultaneously in different media. It cannot be assumed that students who are zooming into a classroom can see the board. It also cannot be assumed that they are understanding what the teacher in the classroom is doing. All of this would be happening with in-person students in the classroom watching and sometimes assisting a teacher who is trying to connect with a combined class of students on zoom and students in person. Every teacher had to be a sort of Shrodinger’s teacher: simultaneously online and live.

Because the pandemic affected the entire nation, the demand for training was so high and supply was so low that it was virtually non-existent. Teachers were gratified when anyone could help them in any way. These challenging conditions created opportunities for some teachers to emerge as instructional leaders. Those teachers who had taught online before, or who learned more quickly became invaluable resources to others. Some teachers who had not been previously viewed as experts in technology before found themselves providing support and help to other teachers. This teacher was one that had offered to help others and had found that other teachers needed their help “I kind of … put it out there that people could ask me for help with things. I’ve done that and I think that’s been helpful.” (Participant 7, April 2021)
Hybrid Fatigue

Participants were interviewed in March and April after the first full year of the pandemic. They had been in a hybrid teaching mode for the entire school year to that point. All participants expressed fatigue with the challenges of the hybrid environment, with Zoom, and with the conditions of the pandemic. Because concerns about health were treated as paramount, students could call in remote for any reason. Similarly, concerns about student anxiety in a video-conferencing environment were important, so students eventually could keep their cameras off with no questions asked. There were no sanctions for students with multiple absences under these conditions. This situation contributed to intermittent attendance by students who were remote (either fully remote or on their hybrid remote days). The following quote illustrates the complications of working within the hybrid environment mandated by the school.

I don't know today how many kids are going to show up at my room tomorrow and I don't know on a given day. And so I have to make the plan that works for the most number of kids. And so a lot of the fun collaborative, you know, spontaneous, interactive, move it around that just, I can't do that anymore. It's just, so I spend a lot of mental energy thinking of all of the things that are going to go wrong during the day and how I can kind of anticipate and prevent a lot of those moves, but it's not how I ideally, like I run my classroom. (Participant 4, March 2021)

The above quote illustrated the theme of both fatigue and the sense of loss of teachers’ more familiar skills. Teachers simply could not be themselves under the hybrid or remote regimes.

Even after learning to manage the hybrid environment and utilizing available tools, there was still a physical, emotional, and pedagogical distance between teachers and students. There was a sense among teachers that, as the year had worn on, they had not necessarily gotten more
comfortable with teaching in a hybrid mode. Rather, they had grown tired of the seemingly insurmountable challenges created by the hybrid scenario. The empathy they expressed in the spring of 2020 was gone. A year of not seeing students’ faces, either online or in person, and a year of constant change in student and teacher population left teachers feeling burned out by March. It was simply never getting better or easier. One participant expressed this sense of fatigue and hopelessness with the zoom environment. “I definitely would say as the year has gone on and as we're getting towards the end of the year, I feel like I'm doing less of a good job of that” (Participant 2, April 2021).

**Moving On and Looking Ahead to Post-pandemic Teaching**

At the time of the interviews, teachers had known they would have the opportunity for COVID vaccines that spring. That news was met with great optimism and thoughts of “getting back to normal.”

When asked to think about the coming school year (2021-2022) teachers were optimistic about an end to COVID related changes they had had to endure. They all shared a sense of a real end to the pandemic. Not all the feelings were positive, however. Some raised traumatic memories about the threat of real danger and the raw emotions that the crisis had aroused. (“Shirley” is a pseudonym). The following quote illustrates the raw life and death kind of emotion that some teachers felt during that year.

She's in her seventies and literally said, ‘I'll be the canary in the coal mine going back to school’ with like getting COVID or something, …I'm like, Oh gosh, Shirley's gonna die. What are we doing? We can't go to school…we were so emotional and were talking about coming back to school and we didn't know what was going to happen. …It was awful. And I cried on camera, (Participant 4, April 2021)
This was one of many places where emotional pain showed through in teachers’ recollections. These were difficult and emotional times for all of us.

Other teachers reported being more ready to adapt if there were further technological changes on the horizon. Teachers uniformly had learned to use online tools (despite a training shortage). We had announced by then that Schoology would still be required in the 2021-2022 school year, that it was not going away (even if the pandemic might subside). This teacher expressed confidence that they had become confident and comfortable in using this technology going forward. “I'll give Schoology that you know, I'll give you credit for something. And that is something that will make my life easier next year” (Participant 8, April 2021).

Schoology may have been difficult early on, by April this participant had felt confident in its use. The announcement that Schoology and Zoom would remain was met with some relief. At least in this case there were no new changes expected. They would have a chance to further refine their use of those technologies without another change. After a year of fairly constant change, they could focus on improving their use of known entities like Zoom and Schoology. The quotes below exemplify those commenters that felt they had gained some expertise and some skills that they may continue to use.

I think a lot of people have found things that work better for them. And…I've definitely seen more of a willingness to ask for help. …And I think that's been good. (Participant 7, April 2020)

one thing I have done this year is actually do critiques via Zoom. …we'd sit in a room and we, you know, look at a student's work. And I've actually liked it better that way, like on Zoom, because more students are willing to participate in the chat. (Participant 7, April 2021)
It was surprising to me that, despite the shared trauma of the previous 12 months, there was a marked resilience that teachers described as they looked ahead to another year. When the interviews were conducted, despite the introduction of vaccines, there was still no certainty that the pandemic would fade (in fact, it did not fade for more than a year). Teachers felt they had survived this past 12 months and would be able to survive the next. This teacher expressed that sense of resilience “We're just going to just keep going. And we check in with the kids, but I just kept teaching.” (Participant 5, April 2020)

The teachers who chose to work fully remotely had far fewer challenges in working with students. They had worked from their own homes. The teachers who worked at the school had a much more difficult and complicated job – made even more difficult and complicated by seeing the in-person students in classrooms that had remote teachers. Supervising those kids fell to the people in the building. Teachers who were remote could turn off their laptops and tune out from school when they were not in class. Teachers who were in the school were still on duty and on guard even when they had no students. It is understandable that teachers who worked in person had resented those who did not come to the building in person. Remarkably, those teachers who had reported feeling deep resentment about the split caused by the remote teaching policy, despite a year of these differences, expressed hope and optimism about rebuilding that community. This statement is an example of a participant recognizing the fractures in the community, but also feeling that the administrative decisions came from a place that cared for the faculty.

as much as it's caused a weird rift in our staff, it, I know it's a huge privilege to work at a school where we were told, if you need to work from home, you can. (Participant 4, April 2021)
In a school that had prided itself on its sense of community two years prior, that sense of community was not completely forgotten. When asked about what might help the community recover, the most important thing that teachers believed would rebuild the community was simply being physically together. I found this quote to be hopeful and optimistic that relatively easy interventions could help bring the community together.

It's not over arguing about a book that we read for the summer, it's a, you know, like playing tug of war or, you know cornhole or something and, and having lunch together and laughing and remembering things. (Participant 8, April 2021)

The Administrative Lens

I began this work expecting to learn about the experiences of teachers throughout the pandemic. I did not expect to learn anything about myself as a leader within this study. Unexpectedly, I learned quite a lot about my own leadership throughout the data analysis and writing phases of this study. Teachers’ personal and professional identities are inextricably tied to their sense of agency and “knowing how to do it” within their teaching context Grimalt-Álvaro, C., & Ametller, J. (2021; Stets & Bearcat, 2022). When the pandemic began, I was the second in command at John Bapst. As the pandemic continued through the 2020-2021 school year, I was applying for and interviewing for the Head of School position at the school. The previous head of school, with whom I had worked for my entire 13 year administrative career at that point, had announced his retirement.

Over the course of the pandemic, teachers experienced stresses partly from the loss of the familiar. New technologies and work expectations changed literally everything about teaching for them. It should be said that it also changed everything for administrators. As a worker, I had
felt a great deal of pride in my own work as the second in command at school. The pandemic interrupted my regular work patterns and demanded new decisions, made in new ways, for outcomes that had been modified by the pandemic (managing student and teacher anxiety became a primary goal, even before academic achievement at this time at John Bapst). I felt the loss of my old sense of agency and definitely felt professional identity stress. Reading and re-reading the transcripts for this study also meant reliving a difficult time – made more difficult by the loss of my own sense of competence at a former job.

That stress was made worse for me by the change in position. While a promotion is generally a good thing, for me it was a mixed blessing. I lost the job I felt good at and was granted a new job that, during the pandemic, bore little resemblance to the job I had applied for. I was adrift and depressed. The 2021-2022 school year was still affected by pandemic guidelines and, while we had our kids and teachers at school, I was making decisions with little experience and without the confidence I may have had if I had been more experienced as a school head. In many ways, the 2021-2022 school year was harder and more stressful than the previous year.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

My original research questions were written during what I now realize was still the beginning of the pandemic.

“How did the new tools and new technological media, and their implementation change teachers’ feelings about their practice?”

“How did teachers’ perceptions of the culture of the school and nature of its community change as a result of the logistical and pedagogical changes brought on by the COVID pandemic?”

“How did this experience change the way teachers feel about their work currently and for the future (if at all)?”

There was an embedded assumption that the most significant long term change from the pandemic era would be new technological pedagogies. While the pandemic has brought significant technological changes to both pedagogy and administrative practices, the most profound effects at John Bapst appear to have been cultural.

Research Question 1: How did the new tools and new technological media, and their implementation change teachers’ feelings about their practice?

In the first phase of the pandemic (March - June 2020), administrators and faculty appeared to be in a full crisis. There were no cases of COVID at the school (the first case in the John Bapst community was recorded in November of 2020). Though they were in a state of shock, they felt a sense of mutual support among faculty and administration. There was a day off, followed by a single in-service day and a demand for a total change from in-person instruction to fully remote instruction, to happen immediately. Changes were made to every component of school; including the schedule, grading, attendance, and expectations of students.
(see Appendix C for details on the reopening plan). The changes brought on by the sudden change to remote teaching caused stress in general among teachers (Midcalf & Boatwright, 2020). It is notable then, that despite relatively little training and high levels of uncertainty from that time, that no teachers in this study reported negative feelings about work or technology during the earliest phase of the pandemic. Instead, the most notable features from that era, aside from the shock over the sudden change, were feelings of empathy for others (students, faculty, and administrators alike), and gratitude for mutual support and administrative flexibility.

When the summer of 2020 came, a new reopening plan was built with teacher input. That reopening plan included new technologies. Teachers had learned zoom very quickly in the spring, but had also learned to use Google classroom. Because of the Google ban in China, and the fact that many of our Chinese students would be learning remotely, Google Classroom was abandoned in favor of Schoology. Teachers’ morale and sense of efficacy is enhanced when they have a choice of teaching methods (Flowerday & Schraw, 2000). The choice to move away from Google Classroom was deemed necessary and teachers who had already been using it or who had learned to use in the spring could no longer choose this option.

In Cultural Historical Activity Theory, shared mastery of tools and use of tools is a primary component of workers’ experience of work and of community in the workplace. Teachers feel confidence in adopting new technological models when they are trained together and they share the experience adapting with each other (Ertmer et al., 2007). Shared experience and time to work together is important for successful implementation of new technological tools (Gray, 2004; Ning & Lee, 2015). Sufficient time, training, and collaboration were simply not available in this case. Though there was only one day for Zoom and Google Classroom training in the spring of 2020, it was done in a supportive and collaborative atmosphere. That training
session helped set the tone of “we’re all in this together.” It also made it ok to recognize that it would not be perfect. The tone of struggling together and making mistakes together encouraged teachers both to try to make it work and to also let administrators know if it was not working well.

Prior to the pandemic, it was noted that administration flexibility and openness to teacher input is a key factor in maintaining high morale and teachers’ sense of efficacy. This became especially true in the pandemic (Shoulders, et. al., 2021). Administrators at the school changed the schedule almost immediately thanks to teacher input. Because teachers relied on each other for assistance (through email, social media, and video conferencing), they had to be open about their own struggles. Teachers who struggled were supported and assisted by the administration and by each other. Ironically, the extreme feeling of the crisis freed teachers to learn new pedagogies better because everyone accepted that this was an impossible job. There was no fear of failure, only forgiveness and celebrations of success.

The new learning management system was selected by a committee that included teachers and department chairs. The teachers and administrators on the committee could not predict that there would be no available training for the new technology. Schoology had promised training but was swamped with demand over the summer and could not provide any live training before school started. Further, the decision to adopt a hybrid teaching model was made without sufficient understanding of when and how teachers would be trained in that model. Training for that was also unavailable. The result was teachers were left with the demands to use Schoology and a hybrid teaching model without sufficient training in how to do it. Teachers learn and adapt to new technologies when they receive training in a context in which they can work with others in a collaborative and supportive atmosphere (Trust, et. al., 2016). In the case
of the pandemic at this school, there were two major technological initiatives – Schoology and Hybrid Teaching – which were demanded, but also for which there was no in-person training and little time for collaboration and support.

Research Question 2: How did teachers’ perceptions of the culture of the school and nature of its community change as a result of the logistical and pedagogical changes brought on by the COVID pandemic?

When the 2019-2020 school year came to an end, classes ended but teacher stress did not end. The pandemic did not end, the governor extended the state of emergency multiple times and required schools to compile reopening plans (Maine COVID Response Timeline, 2021). Teachers felt ill-prepared for the challenges of the hybrid schedule and of Schoology. Nationwide, teachers felt ill-prepared and ill-trained for the school year (Ogodo et. al. 2021). The hybrid model is cited in the literature as the most difficult possible model for adoption (Bartlett, 2022). At John Bapst, the stress of that time was multiplied by the divisions caused by the remote option for teachers, by the uncertainty of where and when students would appear in class (live or zoom?), and of course by the fear that someone would eventually contract the virus and the school would have an outbreak.

Feeling ill-prepared for online or hybrid teaching during COVID could cause a kind of fatigue that compromises a teacher’s ability to continue showing empathy or compassion for colleagues or students (Yang, 2021). The burden of the multiple stressors seems to have evaporated the feelings of empathy John Bapst teachers had for administrators, other faculty, and even (at times) of students. Empathy seems, at least some of the time, to have been replaced by feelings of resentment over being asked to do the impossible. The hybrid schedule and the requirement for using Schoology removed teachers’ choice for many pedagogical options. Teachers felt as though they were being asked to “make it work” with insufficient resources.
In writing about Cultural-Historical Activity Theory, Engestrom (2000) discussed “disturbances” which are deviations from standard scripts in the way people do work. In the case of a classroom, one can think of a teacher standing before a group of students and giving instructions en masse to the group as a standard kind of script. Changing to an entirely new medium (zoom for a fully remote classroom) would be a disturbance. The teacher no longer has access to some of the kinds of information in the standard script: body language, whispers, eye contact, and so on. Zoom, when working at its best, for an entire class would disturb that. A teacher can see faces, but it is not exactly eye contact as students are looking at screens and not a teacher’s eyes. Further, a teacher cannot see how many other tabs are open on a student’s screen, what is happening in private chats or text messages or even hear what music is playing in the background if a student is on mute. When students’ cameras are off (as was often allowed because of student anxiety issues), even the face is not present. Whatever feedback a teacher is accustomed to getting from working in person with students is no longer available. Teachers frequently taught an entire screen of black rectangles with no video feedback from students. The outcome of an individual teacher’s work would be in question with each individual student. This is the change that teachers faced in the shutdown of the spring of 2020.

Students and teachers generally felt a loss of connectedness during the shutdown (Perkins et. al., 2021), (Jelinska & Paradowski, 2021). What seemed to help address that feeling was reaching out through communities of practice (Ulla & Perales, 2021). That certainly seemed to play out at John Bapst in that teachers reported throughout the pandemic that teachers reached out through multiple media for support and ideas. The ability to seek help from others was reported as helpful throughout the pandemic. One participant suggested that a long-term result of the pandemic may be an overall increase in asking for help within the community. Interestingly,
in talking about the later stages of the pandemic, while that sense of seeking help from others was still noted, in the hybrid year participants reported that help coming from within teachers’ own departments rather than school-wide.

The hybrid schedule of the 2020-2021 school year complicated this much further. A teacher may have come to some mastery of working with students within the zoom frame but in a hybrid classroom things got much more complicated (Bartlett, 2022). A teacher working in-person under a hybrid schedule would have to use their newly developed zoom skills simultaneously with their formerly developed in-person skills. Further complicating this would be that the hybrid teacher would be trying (or failing) with zoom while their in-person students could witness their struggle in the moment. Similarly, whatever the teacher did with in-person students would (if the teacher was too far from the camera or microphone) exclude the students on zoom. All of this was complicated still further by requiring teachers to use a new learning management system (Schoology) for which they had not been fully trained and, again, doing this work under the watchful eyes of their students.

The remote option for teachers meant that some teachers were able to remain completely within the zoom only environment and could continue to hone skills they had begun learning months earlier, with fewer disturbances and the simplicity of working in a single medium (Nguyen et. al., 2022). Teachers who came to the school would feel the struggle of mastering this incredibly complex set of work expectations. As they walked, masked, to their classroom to continue the struggle, they would have walked past classrooms in which students were looking at screens to attend to teachers who were working from the comforts of their own home. It is little wonder that in-person teachers resented those who were remote.
It is remarkable that, over the course of the year, teachers did, in fact, make it work. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (Engeström, 2000) includes a concept that may explain some of what helped make it work. “Knotworking” is described as a process in which workers (in this case teachers) work collaboratively with customers (students in this case), with their organization and with each other. “Knots” are temporary groups that are formed to address issues and improvise solutions. Think of someone casually asking another “How did you handle that?” in a work setting.

Teachers, in the moment, asking teachers (or students) for advice or feedback on technological or pedagogical problems, then collaborating with other teachers and/or with administrators are often addressed by these very short term, organic groupings (Little, 2002). Asking for help from students or from other teachers on the fly requires a degree of vulnerability and trust among the different parties. In conversations with teachers at the school, I heard this phenomenon on a daily basis. All participants remarked that teachers constantly sought help from other teachers (via email or socially distanced in the school), as well as from online sources. A few commented about seeking help from students and noted the grace with which students treated them as they struggled to get through. By sharing ideas either in person or through electronic media (zoom meetings, social media) the solutions that “knotworking” generated could be, and were, shared and distributed among others.

**Research Question 3: How did this experience change the way teachers feel about their work currently and for the future (if at all)?**

When data were collected in March of 2021, teachers widely felt that the pandemic would be ending soon. The last research question meant to capture long term expected changes that teachers felt about their work, their community, and the tools they used. It seems that by
March of 2021, teachers at John Bapst were eager to move on from the pandemic, and resentments about remote status teachers had started to wane.

Teachers are generally more likely to experience confidence in new technological models when they are trained together and they share the experience adapting with each other (Ertmer et. al., 2007). It seemed that that shared experience of using and adapting to new technologies over the course of a year, and the spirit of dependence on one another, assisted in teachers’ sense of efficacy with using online teaching media and practices. A community of practice, even an online one, can reduce feelings of isolation that teachers experience when adapting to new electronic pedagogies (Gray, 2004). When teachers could work together to share ideas and support one another during hybrid teaching, they felt higher job satisfaction and a stronger sense of resilience (Reichenberg, 2022). The hybrid experience of teachers at John Bapst included both in-person and online collaborative communities that formed organically. Some groups met for lunch zooms, others met in the hallway or workrooms.

The pandemic caused some teacher leaders to emerge within schools, particularly with technological tools (Morrison, 2022). There was a marked resilience in the teachers’ comments in their feelings toward adapting technologies. They felt competent in the use of technology and having mastered incredibly difficult teaching methods and formats. At the time the interviews were conducted, teachers were reporting that they were ready to keep adapting if necessary and were more comfortable with using the technological tools that had been necessary. Despite the difficulties in the fall with adapting to the new schedule and new technology, by March teachers were reporting feeling more competent and ready to adapt to a new year.

Teachers’ sense of community is affected by physical proximity and shared experiences within the school (Grossman et. al., 2001). At the time the interviews were conducted, vaccines
had been announced for teachers, and most teachers had returned to in-person at the school. The teachers in the study felt optimistic about the community repairing itself when gathering became possible. All of them talked about a need to restore the sense of community at the school.

“Return to normal” seemed to be code for a return to the less-divisive and more collegial relationships among faculty that they remembered - as well as seeing more students and having all kids in school every day. There were also increased numbers of teachers working in-person and increased numbers of students in the school every day. Teachers reported fond memories of the previous sense of community and, despite anything that had happened in the previous year, a willingness to return to that.
CHAPTER 6

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The pandemic touched every school in the United States. It has been over 100 years since the last pandemic of this scale. Though it is uncertain when the next pandemic will come, if ever. Regardless of when the next pandemic will come, there are still lessons to be learned from the COVID pandemic. The quick response to the pandemic and the evolving response from schools, states, and nations, both answered and raised many questions. This study reveals the impact on teachers and a school community as the school took action to address the pandemic. It has revealed implications for administrative practice, for research, and for policy makers at the district, state, and national levels.

Implications for Scholarly Practitioner Practice

A full year after the beginning of the pandemic, teachers recalled in interviews how helpful communication was throughout the early shutdown and during the year that followed. The things that seemed to hurt the sense of community were those things (lack of shared training, holding faculty meetings via zoom, and so on) that kept people physically separated from one another. Similarly, those things that seemed to help preserve the community were times and phenomena that connected people together (social media, zoom-lunches, etc.).

The decision to adopt Schoology and subsequent lack of training seemed unavoidable under the circumstances at the time. All Google applications are banned in China. Google Classroom, therefore, was not going to work with our students from China and the lack of training was a result of the overwhelming demand worldwide for training in this area. The decision to allow teachers to work remotely with no questions asked was respectful of teachers’ individual situations, but also came at a cost to the community. Teachers who worked in person
(especially because it was a hybrid model) had much harder jobs to do than those who worked remotely. Because it was expressly described as “no questions asked” it left open the possibility that teachers were working remotely out of laziness or fear of the difficulties of the hybrid schedule. As an administrator I could not tell anyone what the reasons were for any individual's decisions. It was therefore left to the imaginations of faculty why anyone was, or was not, remote.

The hybrid schedule exacerbated that division within the community as it meant that teachers who were physically in the school knew how hard it was to work in this format and also knew how many of their colleagues did not have to struggle in the same way. This division was not addressed during the 2020-2021 school year, nor was it addressed in the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. At the time of this writing, that is still unfinished, but important, work.

In the first phase of the pandemic response, communication, flexibility, and empathy seemed to help maintain a positive climate (even though faculty were completely physically isolated from one another). As the first school year ended and a new one began though, emergency policy shifts, even with faculty input, resulted in unintended consequences. Similar situations may occur either on a broad or a smaller scale (natural disasters, political crises, etc). In those situations, it may be unavoidable that necessary decisions cause harm to a community. It is well worth analyzing the impact of decisions on a community and taking steps to repair it. In this case, even if the pandemic seems to be waning, the harm to the community is not likely to be repaired without thoughtful planning.

Independent schools are often structured differently than public schools. At John Bapst, the Board of Trustees is not involved in the day to day decision-making and operation of the school. Rather, the Head of School and their administrative team are charged with making and
implementing all decisions in operating the school. Those administrative offices are on the main hallway alongside classrooms. I had taught in those same classrooms and have long-standing personal relationships with those teachers. It was unrealistic to believe that my own emotions would be irrelevant in conducting this research. The proximity of administrators to teachers - both physical and social - had a profound effect on me as an administrator and as a scholar doing this work. Administrators at independent schools doing work of this nature would be better prepared if they acknowledged that this kind of analysis will affect them deeply. Keeping that in mind during the work will help throughout the process. Being prepared to feel the emotional impact of this work and addressing it in an ongoing way will assist in not just completing the work but in learning from it. It is one thing to expect to learn the hard truths. It is another thing entirely to be prepared for how hard those truths can be, and to be ready to learn from them. One of my mentors once wrote “emotion matters a great deal in the exercise of leadership, especially during times of crisis.”(Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2004). This is true for all school leaders, especially so for those in independent schools.

**Implications for Scholar Practitioner Policy**

As a person who served as a teacher and administrator during this crisis, as the person primarily responsible for implementing changes and new directives in handling this crisis, and then later as the researcher who reviewed peoples’ responses to the school's decisions, I can say that I needed help. The pandemic was a traumatic experience for all parties. For me, it was very difficult reliving the decisions we made and their impact again and again over the course of two years researching and writing this work.
Implications for Building Level Policy

One lesson that should be taken from this work is that it is both very important and very
difficult to objectively hear the impact of our decisions on the lives of the people we serve.
Building leaders work intimately with the faculties they serve. This experience and this study,
highlight the critical need for building leaders to hear and consider the needs of teachers in
setting building policy and in enacting policies over time. Even in the suddenness of the
lockdown, this school was able to take a day to both train and hear from teachers. Responding to
teachers’ concerns and both personal and professional needs helped this school respond to the
crisis. Though the year was immensely difficult, listening to teachers along the way helped the
school recover from the crisis.

Additionally, future scholarly practitioners would be wise to consider their own mental
health when they prepare to answer the hard questions of how their work is affecting the people
they serve. Policies to support or train scholarly practitioners in resilience, self-care, and
recovery will be important for people researching ways in which they may have been harmful to
their own communities or colleagues.

Implications for Policy at the District Level

In the case of John Bapst, there was only one academic building. The administrators and
faculty share the same space. This study suggests that the need for understanding the experience
of teachers and of administrators is a critical need for all districts. I worked side by side with
these teachers during the pandemic and did not fully understand their experience until I
completed this study. Building climate and teacher morale are key components to school success
under ordinary circumstances. Under extraordinary circumstances like this crisis, they are critical
to the long term resilience to the district. Listening for and listening to the experiences of
administrators’ and teachers’ response to demands for change are critically important for all districts.

**Implications for Policy at the State Level**

Prior to the pandemic, there was a shortage of teachers and administrators nationwide. The pandemic demanded extraordinary responses from teachers and administrators. The resilience of this school was directly tied to an empathic response from administrators. Listening to teachers and altering policy in response to teacher input allowed for a quicker and more robust recovery. State investment in educational leadership training in empathy and in setting priorities in times of crisis will help mitigate future school crises.

Investment in teacher and administrator training in online pedagogies is critical for future opportunities for schooling. Investment in teacher education in resilience will help mitigate future crises. It is not likely that video conferencing will vanish. Nor is it likely that crises that close schools will vanish. Funding for new technologies for schools during the pandemic, and the need to use those technologies, resulted in nearly all teachers becoming more familiar with online pedagogies than before the pandemic. It would be a waste to ignore that. Now that we know how to work online, that should be an expected part of every teacher’s toolkit.

**Implications for Policy at the National Level**

Amazingly, the COVID pandemic freed billions of dollars for schools to access new technologies, new training, and new resources for schools. Everything from new HVAC systems, to masks, to computers, tablets, and even food became more possible because of a shared sense of crisis. For a brief moment in history, there was a national impetus to put real money into education. The teachers in this study were able to teach all their students because of direct
federal and state investment in technologies and training (when training became possible). The COVID pandemic showed the nation that it was possible to do great things in a short amount of time, if we were prepared to invest the money and set it as a priority. The biggest implication for national policy is not to forget that. Like in the New Deal, the GI Bill, and the Cold War, a national emergency freed up money and national interest in supporting education. It would be best for national policy makers to realize that they can maintain that same spirit and support in times when there is no national crisis.

**Implications for Scholarly Practitioner Research/Theory**

Adaptive leadership models often address the physical and social logistics of making changes to institutions. They also often address the impact of those adaptive challenges on the faculty and staff of schools in a kind of third party way. There appears to be a need for research in the area of how it feels to be a teacher. Though the COVID pandemic was global and affected literally every school, even 2 years after it began there was relatively little scholarship on the effects of the pandemic on teachers themselves. There is much to be found on the effect on learning and on students, but the experience of teachers during this crisis is relatively absent.

One area that seems to need some inquiry is the way in which making decisions may affect the decision-makers, as well as those who must implement those decisions. I supported every decision the school made in the pandemic and I implemented each one believing that what I was doing was best for the entire school, as well as best for the individual teachers. My own emotional reaction to this study and to the transcriptions of interviews reveals to me that more inquiry into the impact of decisions on those who implement them would be useful and enlightening. There must be thousands of administrators who are emerging from the pandemic a
bit worse off from it. In an environment that is already facing shortages of teachers and administrators, that should be studied.

As a practitioner who is trying to understand my own institution, using a neutral interviewer to conduct interviews proved to be helpful in multiple ways. Teachers seemed to feel free to be honest in their appraisals of what their experience had been like. Because that interviewer was also a principal who had led their own school through the same era, the transcript revealed insights from their own experience. The questions and recorded conversation often included interesting observations from their own experience and, as a part of building rapport with participants, included information from their school. That information was not included in the data for this dissertation, but did inspire conversations between me and them about our shared experiences as school leaders in the pandemic. This model could be useful in any setting in which an administrator needs to collect sensitive data on their own institution.

**Implications for My Own Practice**

I made the decision to conduct this research early in the summer of 2020. As an administrator in this school (and also a teacher at that time), I felt that the pandemic would be over before the end of the 2020-2021 school year. I shared in the teachers’ feelings of suddenness and shock at the early shutdown. At the time I made the decision to conduct this research, I was proud of our school’s early response and optimistic about our abilities to cope with it through the coming school year. Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, vaccines were developed and approved. When the interviews were conducted, I felt (as most people probably did) that the 2021-2022 school year would be a return to pre-pandemic conditions. Additionally, during the 2021-2022 school year, I began work as Head of School. I assumed that position in July of 2021. The hiring process for that position was underway when the pandemic
began. I was named the new Head in October of 2020 – to take effect the following summer. During the first full school year of the pandemic, I was implementing policies for navigating it. During the second full year of the pandemic, I was making those policies - while simultaneously analyzing the data from the previous year.

Reading the data for this study; the transcripts, the emails, and social media posts, was emotionally extremely difficult for me. I believed at the time the interviews were conducted that I would be using the data to help the faculty remember and readjust to “normal” conditions - at the summer in-service and school opening in the fall of 2021. Of course, the pandemic did not end on the timeline I had hoped for and expected. Rather, the 2021-2022 school year was a continuation of the pandemic, with less guidance on how to navigate it.

At the time I was first reading the transcripts, I was preparing the school for a second pandemic year. The first year I had been implementing decisions that had been made under the direction of the previous Head of School. In the 2021-2022 year, I was directing a new set of decisions, aware of the emotional impact of the previous year’s decisions, but powerless to make things better. I was too new at this position and we were still navigating through restrictions forced by the pandemic. I felt like my own research told me what was bad from the previous pandemic conditions, but did not shed much light on how to make the school better in the new phase of the pandemic.

I had to put the data down multiple times because I became aware of the ways I had been a collaborator in the hardest times in these teachers’ lives. I had made, facilitated, or implemented all the changes that made life so difficult for teachers. I knew in real time that I was making their work harder, and felt I could do nothing about it. We all wanted kids to be back at school, and we all wanted to get away from hybrid teaching. But we had many more cases of
covid and much less guidance on the best way forward. I had to make some tough calls that I really would rather have avoided. For example, though we were not fully hybrid in the 2021-2022 school year, I had to make the decision to allow some students to be fully remote (travel barriers from Asia, and some health issues in our students made it necessary), and prolong the hybrid experience for many of the teachers.

The entire year, I was publicly talking about the many ways we were grateful to be closer to normal, while privately struggling with the decisions I had to make on behalf of the school. These are people I’ve spent half of my career with and I care very deeply for them. It was hard to bear the weight of their words and still do the work I had to do to keep the school open and running.

This study made it very plain to me that, at least when trying to research my own institution, my role as a practitioner is inextricably linked with my work as a scholar. I always felt that scholars are by nature scientific and neutral. I thought in this work I could review the data with accuracy, clarity, and logic. I realized doing this work that it was impossible to be neutral. It was impossible to be emotionally detached from this work. As a practitioner studying my own practice, logic and clarity competed with emotion and ego defenses against the hard truths that was learning. It was not possible (and in retrospect, not desirable) for me to suspend my care for the community in order to study it. In the end, I found that it was worth it to experience this, especially in the ways that it informed my immediate and future work with my colleagues.

I learned in this study that our greatest successes during the pandemic were when we listened to teachers’ needs and communicated with them clearly and frequently – even when that communication was that we did not know answers, but were working on solutions. They felt
respected and heard and bought into our shared mission to serve the students. In the second year, when teachers had complained about the hybrid schedule, we did nothing to change or modify things, mostly out of a sense that consistency would be good for everyone. We didn’t listen to them at that time. Teachers began to be resentful of others. Had we continued our communication, flexibility, and listening, we may have been able to avoid some of the splits in our community. We would have made changes and had less consistency, but teachers would have felt heard.

I also learned that self-care and forgiveness are key needs for any administrator. Forgiving others for their own stress responses, forgiving myself for not knowing all the answers, and continuing to be positive and productive were keys to my own emergence from the pandemic. I feel I would have been better served by being more vulnerable, trusting teachers’ input, and listening more.

**Conclusion**

In April of 2022, partly because of a requirement in my program, partly out of curiosity, and mostly out of a desire to understand the impact on the school community, I scheduled a conversation to ask teachers how they were feeling a year later. I invited anyone from the faculty who wished to attend. Nine teachers volunteered to meet and discuss it. Due to the fact that identities of all the original interview participants were kept confidential, I do not know if any of those in this conversation were also part of the original interviews. We met in the library to talk over what we had all been through over the two years. My most important goal in that conversation was to have a diverse group of educators, who had been with the school since before the pandemic, think together (in person, around a table) and talk together about what we
had been through, and more importantly, what work needs to be done to restore the sense of community that had existed prior to the pandemic.

It had been a year since my data were collected, but a year of continued (albeit milder) COVID restrictions. The school had gone “mask optional” in compliance with the governor's order one month before. Very few restrictions remained in place at the school. The group represented nearly every department in the school and also represented teachers who had been fully remote, who had been fully in-person, and who had done both, in the year before. The conversation covered the length of the pandemic and the school’s response. Teachers who had been fully remote were able to (unprompted) explain why they had been remote and those who had worked in-person expressed sympathy and understanding for those choices. That was the first time in my experience over the two pandemic years that I had seen an exchange like that.

When asked about the sense of community, they said they believed that things had improved. Despite the hard feelings, teachers felt ready to rebuild a community. What they most wanted was to spend time together in-person as a whole community. They felt the conversation was a good beginning to rebuild the sense of community they had enjoyed before the pandemic.

When I asked them what I, as a Head of School, should do, they asserted that the conversation was a very good start. What they most wanted was to be together with their colleagues, to have food and to have this same reflective conversation with others. They expressed hope that things are getting better and, with a few chances to be together, the community will be as strong as it was before.

As of this writing, we are in the 2022-2023 school year. Almost no students or staff are wearing masks. Teachers greet each other in the workroom and in the hallways. Faculty meetings are in-person and we have returned to our regular patterns in school. In nearly all aspects of our
school operation, the COVID pandemic seems like a thing of the past. The teachers who seemed most stressed during the pandemic seem to be less stressed and many teachers seem to be getting along in the ways they had before the pandemic started.

In retrospect, taking the time to train and be together that first day of the pandemic. And over time to establish norms of listening and being flexible were keys to this school’s resilience. It is remarkable that though there was great bitterness during the 20-21 school year, much of that was dissipated 12 months later. Being caring and empathetic before the pandemic made the pandemic more manageable. That year was very hard, but the school may be able to heal faster because of the relationships and culture prior to all of this.

We adopted the most difficult possible form of hybrid teaching and kept with it. Sticking with that, though, also meant that we did listen to teachers when they felt they needed to be remote. Listening to them and sticking with the “no questions asked” option for teachers to get away from the school made things more difficult in the short term, but may have helped our resilience in the long term.

Interestingly, this year, we have had two teachers who needed to be out for multiple days in a row and they asked if they could keep teaching remotely during those days. One of those teachers is fully remote because of a personal health issue that gets in the way of being physically in the building. In past years, a teacher out for a week or more meant a long term sub or worksheets for kids. Now, (at teachers’ request) sometimes when a teacher is out, they can keep teaching. We have listened to teachers and returned to things like Secret Santa and faculty potlucks and focused on spending time together to re-establish our sense of community. As we all move past the pandemic, we would be wise to see how the lessons learned can help us move into the future with improved service to teachers and students.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

- Please describe your experience as an educator over the course of the pandemic
  - How was last spring (March 2020 - June 2020) compared to the fall (August 2020 - December 2020)
  - How are you feeling about your work as a teacher now?
  - In the fall, did you teach fully remotely, or in-person?
  - Compare your experiences with in-person teaching, fully remote teaching, with hybrid teaching.
  - After this experience, how do you feel about remote teaching, about hybrid teaching? In what ways, if any, do you feel you’ve changed as a teacher as a result of the pandemic?

- Tell me about your experience with learning new technologies?
  - What, if anything, was difficult for you, in learning Zoom, schoology or any other new technology?
  - What, if anything, was easy for you in learning Zoom, schoology, or any other new technology?
  - How would you describe your comfort with educational technology prior to the pandemic?
  - Describe your experiences learning and using Zoom. How did it change over time?
○ Describe your experiences learning and using Schoology. How did it change over time?
○ How would you describe your comfort with educational technology currently?
○ In what ways, if any, do you feel your teaching has changed as a result of the pandemic?
○ How do you imagine your teaching will change after the pandemic is over?
● Please describe your experiences with your colleagues during pandemic
  ○ What do you feel was the effect of the spring, fully remote mode on teachers’ relationships with each other?
  ○ With teachers’ relationships with students?
  ○ How about with administration?
  ○ How do you feel the fall hybrid mode affected teachers’ relationships with each other, if at all?
  ○ With administration?
  ○ With students?
  ○ In what ways, if any, did the school community change as a result of the pandemic?
Appendix B: Sample Documents

In-Service Agendas, March 17, 2020 and August 19, 2020, Sample Prior Survey, Sample Email
Slow it down a bit, please,

David Weinstein
March 25, 2020

Hi Everyone,

We'll be back to the new schedule - rotation will be forthcoming. The main purpose for that change was to reduce stress for everyone - teachers and students. I expect the following things to happen as a result of this change:

- Classes are now predictable to have their schedule
- There is a minimum amount of worry.
- More time to think things through.

You know those emails we periodically get about a kid who is currently going through a hard time and we need to be sensitive? This is that email - all of them are now in this situation. We are beginning to see physical and emotional effects of the pandemic. This is NOT the time to provide work you can never return! It is better to slow down and comprehend what you can be, while still getting through some of your material.

So the subject line says it all. Things change a bit please.

David
Daven

Cc:
Johns Hopkins Board of School
Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

Date: Mar 25, 2020 9:59 AM

Colin Deubert
March 25, 2020

Thanks, Dave. This is indeed very important to remember.

Dave
Appendix C: John Bapst Reopening Framework

John Bapst Memorial High School Reopening Framework
Based on “Maine Schools Reintegration Framework”

From the Maine Department of Education

Invitation to the Reopening

John Bapst will reopen for in-person, on-campus classes on August 25, 2020 for new students and on August 26, 2020 for all students, both new and returning.

During the COVID pandemic, a safe reopening requires awareness of and adherence to clear protocols. One purpose of our plan is to signal through new rules and procedures how seriously John Bapst takes the health and safety of its teachers, staff, students, and families. From observing business and school reopenings in the US and around the world, we know that some employees and some school families are likely to feel that the risks involved in returning to school – whether because of a personal or family health issue or a wider concern about COVID and its transmission – outweigh the benefits of returning to school. We are inviting teachers to return to in-person teaching in classrooms while at the same time offering them the choice to teach from home on the school’s distance learning platform. Similarly, as long as they are not at risk themselves and are prepared to follow all of the health protocols we have developed, we invite students to return to campus, while at the same time offering access to classes online should students choose to learn from home.

Resources and Criteria for Reopening

Throughout the process of researching and writing this plan, John Bapst has used helpful and commonly accepted criteria from the US Centers for Disease Control, the Maine CDC, the
Maine Department of Education, the Academy of American Pediatrics, the Independent schools Association of Northern New England, the National Association of Independent Schools, the Association of Boarding Schools, and other states’ guidance and other schools’ reopening plans, and even information from countries where the return to the classroom happened this spring. Especially helpful has been the relationship we established with Northern Light Healthcare System’s Work Health group. Their doctors and other professionals met with us several times and walked the campus, offering advice and perspective on many areas of school life.

Because the task of reopening is complex and the challenges at times overwhelming, our hope in this document is to set forth the draft of a plan that begins with goals and values and moves our school community in the direction of a successful reopening. We know that medical understanding of the COVID virus and its offshoots is evolving. More importantly, we know that the staff and families of John Bapst give us our strength as a community and give our diverse students a place to belong. We believe deeply in the importance of the student-teacher connection and in the integrity of academic learning. Moreover, the school’s outstanding academic program is balanced by arts, athletic, and extracurricular programs that round out student growth.

John Bapst’s whole-student philosophy of education thus makes clear that physical health and safety comes first. Our teachers in particular emphasized in our reopening discussions the paramount importance of safe entrances, classrooms, hallways, eating areas, and other spaces. Their voices have been instrumental, and so we say without hesitation that what follows prioritizes teacher and student well-being.

A Common Set of Steps for Student/Staff Health and Safety
In June the Maine Department of Education published a long list of questions schools should take into consideration in making their reopening plans. The state classified the questions according to physical health and safety; mental and emotional health; academics and distance learning; and health services, food services, and transportation. About six weeks later the DOE then provided clear, specific requirements for safety, all of which will be adopted by John Bapst in one form or another:

- Symptom screening before entering school for staff and students
- A requirement that anyone who has *any* symptoms consistent with possible COVID stay at home and get a medical diagnosis
- Wearing a mask or other facial covering in school at all times except meals, with masks provided by families and a back-up supply available at school
- Physical distancing in school and in all John Bapst-sponsored programs using the widely accepted six-foot separation rule of thumb
- Modeling and practicing hand hygiene
- Designation of medical isolation spaces, in our case for both day and boarding student populations
- Adequate fresh-air ventilation
- Reducing the number of people normally inside the school at any one time

John Bapst’s approach to the details of reopening led to the creation of eight faculty-staff subcommittees and to online meetings in which feedback was sought from parents and students.

**Preparing Physical Spaces**

Over the course of the summer John Bapst has taken or will have taken a number of steps on campus to support a safe reopening from a physical facilities point of view. Among these are:
· Hand sanitizer dispensers throughout the school
· Signage for one-way hallways and stairs
· Repairs to the foyer doors to increase the number of entrances to the school
· Plexiglass protection for employees in certain office areas
· Reduction in the number of student desks per classroom (maximum 16-17)
· Designation of a second nursing station to be used only for COVID-related situations in which the student or staff member needs to be examined away from the current nurses’ office

**Hybrid Academic Model with Block Scheduling**

The school is moving to a two-day block schedule rotation in which half of the classes meet on the first day and half on the second. The new schedule:

· Reduces the number of passing times during the day
· Doubles the number of potential open campus periods
· Gives teachers at most three teaching periods each day
· Gives students at most four classes on a given day
· Provides extended time for lunch

Most significantly, John Bapst is adopting a hybrid model in which only half of the students are physically in the classroom on any given day, reducing the on-campus student population at the beginning of the 2020-21 school year from approximately 500 to 250. This will make social distancing easier and reduce crowding. The specific protocol for dividing the student body is still under development.

Supporting the hybrid model is the adoption of Schoology, a learning management platform that teachers will use in conjunction with Zoom or other technologies in communicating with all
students (those in school and those at home on alternate days) and in teaching in person and remotely at the same time. Note that in the event the COVID situation worsens, John Bapst will be well situated to move to an all-distance learning format.

**Athletics**

Competitive sports represent the area of school life most in conflict with the established six-foot social distancing guideline. At this time, students in pods of no more than ten have begun summer workouts with their coaches using detailed statewide directions from the Maine Principals’ Association. In Phase 2 of the MPA plan, athletes will begin sport-specific training while still observing social distancing and staying in pods. More conventional team practices would begin in August.

However, what we are seeing at the college level suggests that there is no safe way to reconcile contact sports with other provisions of the reopening plan. It would be inconsistent, for example, to enforce the six-foot rule on campus every day, only to have students playing football or soccer in the afternoon, either among themselves or against students from another school altogether. We are waiting as long as possible to make a final determination about plans for fall sports. In the event major changes are made, the school is committed to facilitating appropriate sports and fitness opportunities, whether under the umbrella of the MPA or as an individual school. It appears to us that sports like golf, cross-country, tennis, and perhaps others could be played safely and that the sports most at risk are those featuring close contact with other players (football, hockey, basketball, field hockey, soccer, cheering) and/or in problematic settings (swimming).
Food Service

Beginning in March 2020, the John Bapst boarding program made changes to breakfast and dinner service that will continue in the fall. These include:

- Maximum four students to a table
- Elimination of self-service at buffets
- More pre-packaged options for takeaway or consumption in the dining hall

The school’s lunch program has been a topic of discussion of a reopening subcommittee. With only half of the student body on campus each day for lunch, it will be easier to distribute previously ordered, packaged lunches to students. It has become clear that classrooms are not the ideal place for lunch to be consumed, as this is the one time during the day when masks must come off and the dangers of a classroom full of “bio-burn” are highest.

Residential Life

As of late July, travel barriers remain in place preventing many John Bapst international students from being able to arrange their ticket to the US. The school’s online distance learning program will allow these students to begin their courses on schedule and then to travel as soon thereafter as possible. Families will receive a credit on their tuition invoices for unused food, dorm, athletic, and other costs.

Note that when students are preparing to leave their home country for the US, the school is encouraging them to get a COVID test within 72 hours of departure and carry proof a negative test with them. This along with the F-1 visa and I-20 may facilitate entry at US Customs and Immigration areas in airports.

Quarantine regulations continue to evolve. Depending on a student’s country of origin and travel itinerary, if a quarantine is required the school will assign the student to a quarantine place on
campus, where the student will stay until the quarantine is served. If a student is accompanied by a parent, the family is strongly encouraged to stay in a hotel off campus since an off-campus parent would not be able to come and go on campus until after the quarantine period is completed. An international student arriving by August 10 would be able to serve a full fourteen-day quarantine before the first day of classes.

The small number of boarding students who are here for the beginning of school will be placed in single and double rooms across the campus, spreading out to provide for greater social distancing than has been possible in the past.

Boarding students follow other protocols with regard to movement around Bangor. In general, students are allowed to go into stores if wearing a mask but are not allowed to enter restaurants.

**Busing**

School buses are particularly difficult places to practice social distancing. A couple of major points to keep in mind.

- We encourage families to consider transporting students, rather than using the bus. This improves social distancing en route to school.
- We are continuing to work with sending schools to coordinate bus service for those who need it.
- We will continue to operate our bus run from Veazie and also the run from Blue Hill.

**What If a Student or Staff Member Tests Positive for COVID?**

Protocols for these situations are being developed at the state level as well as regionally. We are still working on our own protocol. Our own practice will be informed by public health officials and aligned with best practices in the region.
Conclusion – with an Emphasis on Understanding Risk

We have always put the health and safety of our students as a top priority. The pandemic has also added focus to the health and safety of our adults. Older adults who are relatives of students and staff, who are staff themselves, and people with underlying medical conditions are all at particular risk. We value all the members of our community and their extended families. Our love of school and the life of the school must be balanced with our concern for all the members of our community.

Based on the current COVID incidence in the Greater Bangor area, we believe safe reopening is possible. In this part of the state, case numbers and hospitalizations continue to be low. The CDC’s school capacity and readiness markers also suggest that a safe reopening is possible. Most businesses in our area have reopened, and the University of Maine-Orono, also following a wide range of accommodations and new protocols, plans to reopen this fall.
Appendix D

Screenshot of John Bapst Quarantine Staff Lounge
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

David Armistead began his career as an educator in a one-room school in the Alaskan bush in 1991. He taught for 30 years in both public and independent schools. He has been an administrator at John Bapst since 2008. He has bachelor’s degrees in Psychology (Michigan State) and Secondary Education (Eastern Michigan), and a master’s degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Maine. He is a candidate for a Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership from the University of Maine in May 2023.