CHRONICLING A PANDEMIC: UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS DURING THE MARCH 2020 SHUTDOWN

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CHRONICLING A PANDEMIC:
UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS
DURING THE MARCH 2020 SHUTDOWN

BY

TIMOTHY KENNEY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 shutdown in March of 2020 moved teachers into emergency remote teaching. Emergency remote teaching (ERT), which is a temporary shift of instructional to an alternative delivery mode due to crisis (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 6), caused teachers to deal with a pedagogy they had never anticipated (Yıldırım, K., & Elverici, S. E., 2021), often done with little guidance from administration (Trikolis & Papanastasiou, 2020). ERT also isolated teachers from their students and colleagues (Green et al., 2020; Hart & Nash, 2020) all of which led to a decreased sense of professionalism and efficacy (Reich et al., 2020). The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of secondary school teachers during ERT to see how they fostered their self-efficacy to better assist them during future moves to ERT. The research questions for this study were: 1) What were the meanings and understandings secondary school teachers gave to the experience of ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic? And 2) What impact did the move to ERT have on the experience of developing teacher self-efficacy?

This hermeneutic phenomenological study involved semi-structured interviews with nine secondary school teachers. The data was analyzed using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2021). Three major themes emerged: “Struggling to Maintain Relationships,” with four subthemes; “Struggling to Redefine Teaching,” with six subthemes; and “Struggling with their Own Feelings,” with two subthemes. This dissertation concludes with a discussion of the findings, recommendations for future research, and policy recommendations that could assist teachers in developing their self-efficacy during any future moves to ERT.
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As I sit here at the finish line, I find it difficult to know where to even begin when thinking of all those who have helped me over these past four years. As with phenomenology, this experience caused me to shift from what had become common and known about my life to the uncommon and unknown. Not an easy thing to do at the age of 48 with a family and numerous responsibilities. Yet I would neither have made that jump nor would I have finished the journey without the support and encouragement of the following people:

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Ron: This is for you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Journey to This Topic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of this Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance Learning</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Remote Teaching</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Issues during the COVID-19 move to ERT</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Inequities</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burnout</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology as Philosophy</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hermeneutic Phenomenology</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology as Methodology</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redefining the School Day</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reimagining Curriculum</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching Synchronously and Asynchronously</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rethinking Grades and Assessments</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Struggling with their own Feelings</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Anxiety</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of Guilt</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question One</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Educational Foundations</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning Their Roles as Educators</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question Two</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of the Study</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Research</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations for Policy and Practice</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Thoughts</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX D</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Participants................................................................. 36
Table 2. Interview Structure..................................................... 39
Table 3. Participant Triadic Reciprocity during Shutdown............. 116
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Bandura’s Triadic Reciprocity......................................................... 28
Figure 2. Bandura’s Modeling Process......................................................... 30
Figure 3. Data Analysis................................................................................. 42
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My Journey to This Topic

My journey towards this topic was not a direct one. As a secondary school teacher who has taught for 28 years, I have consistently worked in traditional school settings, which I define as a building or structure in which students and colleagues are physically present. Being physically present allowed for face-to-face interactions with my students as well as my colleagues. These interactions have always been essential in developing my own confidence as a teacher.

The need for these interactions began years ago when I worked in a school at a residential psychiatric hospital. Every afternoon was spent with colleagues discussing the day's events and using that time as an opportunity to process the stressors associated with working with that particular population of students. This collegiality morphed into collaboration as we began working together as an interdisciplinary team to provide a more rewarding educational experience for the students. This collaboration also provided us as their teachers opportunities to address the needs of the students we shared. Upon leaving that school, I took a position working with other educators in developing an at-risk school. Working collaboratively and across disciplines, our team created and implemented both a system to address behavioral issues and a more rigorous curriculum. These experiences at the residential facility and the at-risk school at the start of my career imbued in me an understanding of how my success as a teacher and my students' ability to internalize their learning was connected to the ability to collaborate with my colleagues. As a result, as my career took me to other schools in other school districts, I continued to seek out other educators who were willing to work together in order to enrich the academic experiences of our students and our own skills as educators. This desire to collaborate with other colleagues led to the creation of an
academy at an urban school in Florida and the development of an interdisciplinary Humanities team at a suburban high school in Rhode Island. In the process, I found that my own self-efficacy had grown based upon my ability to collaborate with colleagues.

Based on these experiences with collegial collaboration, I began my doctoral studies four years ago in a program offered through both the University of Rhode Island and Rhode Island College. As I began, my focus was on the effectiveness of interdisciplinary teaching at the secondary level. This remained the focus of my research up until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020 which forced schools into emergency remote teaching (ERT). Emergency remote teaching is defined as “a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternative delivery mode due to crisis circumstances” (Hodges et al., 2020, p. 6). For the purpose of this research, emergency remote teaching (ERT) will be defined as a forced move to remote teaching without preparation or warning and with limited resources and support due to a crisis situation within a school, a town, a state, or a nation.

When schools were forced into ERT, for the first time in my career, I found myself removed from the very support systems that I found to be essential for my success as an educator. I was isolated, left on my own to find ways to develop the most meaningful educational experience online that I could for my students. I heard little from the colleagues on my team, less from building administrators, and far less from the district office. More importantly, the relationships and interactions with my students that had historically allowed me to determine the success of any lesson had been relegated to occasional Google Meets, sporadic emails, or comments left on shared documents. Left alone, I began to question my ability as an educator to assist students through a difficult and uncertain time while still providing them with a meaningful educational experience. In addition, my teaching course load at the time included not only the traditional honors and college placement classes, but also a class composed of
students with various special needs. These students already struggled both academically and socially when in-person and having the direct assistance of two teachers and one paraprofessional. Watching their struggles increase exponentially when operating remotely was emotionally draining. Finding myself lacking any opportunities for the collaboration or interactions that had become the cornerstone of my own pedagogical approach, I spent many days wondering if I was accomplishing anything of value at all.

The inability to interact with my students in-person wore on me and I began to understand just how important my interactions with my students were for me as an educator and the role it played in developing my confidence. Sitting alone in my home office, assigning asynchronous tasks in which my only communication seemed to be limited to email, sporadic Google Meets, or feedback on shared documents, my belief in myself began to ebb. I repeatedly questioned my own efficacy, wondering how I would be able to provide for the academic and social needs of my students over the remainder of the year. As a result, I was feeling burnout at a level I had never experienced before.

At that moment, the focus of my research changed. ERT was a unique experience for me and for my colleagues, but what exactly was that experience? What were their stories? Were they like mine? I began to wonder if my feelings of inadequacy and burnout were unique or indicative of the experiences of other educators at the secondary level. I began to become more aware throughout the move to ERT that I was seeing emails and social media postings from administrators and academics calling for a deeper understanding of students’ experiences, but few calling for an understanding of the experiences of teachers. Then, as the state Department of Education began to discuss how remote teaching would be used in lieu of in-person teaching when issues involving the weather, the health of the students, or other unforeseen events would arise, I began to see that ERT would no longer become a once in a lifetime occurrence, but an integral part of any teaching pedagogy going forward. Knowing that to be the case, I realized that
teachers and administrators need to understand this experience and the ways teachers addressed their self-efficacy during ERT. Their experiences needed to be understood so that those involved in education can develop ways to foster teacher self-efficacy in order to address any potential feelings of burnout when schools need to move to ERT in the future. As a result, my research focus immediately changed. I wanted to allow my colleagues to share their stories and I wanted to chronicle them as best as I could. Therefore, my research questions changed from exploring interdisciplinary education to the following:

(RQ1) What were the meanings and understandings secondary school teachers gave to the experience of emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic?

(RQ2) What impact did the move to emergency remote teaching have on the experience of developing teacher self-efficacy?

**Statement of the Problem**

In March of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced most public school buildings across the United States to close. Yet rather than simply declare the school year to be over, governors across the United States asked teachers to engage in emergency remote teaching (ERT). The switch to ERT was never seen as a permanent replacement for face-to-face education but rather as a means to allow for instruction to continue without any suspension (Yildirim & Elverici, 2021). According to Hodges et al. (2020), the “primary objective in these circumstances is not to re-create a robust educational ecosystem but rather to provide temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis” (p. 6). This unexpected shift was a major transition for all stakeholders and presented challenges “above and beyond those normally inherent in distance learning” (Schuck & Lambert, 2020, p. 2). It demanded that teachers develop new ways of thinking about their
methods and their resources reflective of the rapidly changing needs of the students as well as teachers’ limited access to resources and support (Hodges et al., 2020).

The move to ERT produced a great deal of stress and confusion for teachers as they were unprepared and unaware of what was expected of them (UNESCO, 2020). Many teachers found themselves dealing with problems ranging from poor internet connections and low student participation to pressure from school administrators and other technological problems (Yıldırım, K., & Elverici, S. E., 2021). The move further required teachers to adapt their curricula and their teaching styles to ones that could be conveyed remotely, often without guidance or interaction with administrators or colleagues (Trikolis & Papanastasiou, 2020). Such limited interaction and guidance can often lead to feelings of inadequacy and disempowerment (Hart & Nash, 2020) as even the most experienced teachers who felt confident in their ability to teach may have found their confidence shaken as they found themselves lacking a supportive community (Haverback, 2020). The move into ERT necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic separated teachers from their students while also augmenting teachers’ feelings of isolation as they found themselves lacking personal interactions with their peers (Green et al., 2020; Hart & Nash, 2020). All of this contributed to a loss of professionalism and efficacy among teachers (Reich et al., 2020).

**Significance of the Study**

Studies have consistently shown that teacher self-efficacy plays a significant role in the effectiveness of teacher instruction and the willingness of teachers to be innovative. Yet in times requiring ERT, such as the move during the COVID-19 crisis, teachers’ self-efficacy may have varied widely based upon their beliefs in their ability to teach remotely (Haverback, 2020). Teachers accustomed to being able to form relationships with students, parents, and colleagues may have had their personal identity affected as they found the change to ERT disruptive to these interpersonal connections.
(Kim & Asbury, 2020). However, teachers with greater self-efficacy are more resilient when faced with the challenges associated with something such as ERT (Kraft et al., 2020). A lack of self-efficacy becomes an even greater concern during ERT as a lack of self-efficacy affects a teacher's willingness to adapt to the demands and innovations of teaching remotely necessitated by ERT (König et al., 2020). As a result, teachers unable to meet those demands are more likely to progress toward burnout (Sokal et al., 2020). On the other hand, teachers with high efficacy beliefs are more likely to view ERT as a challenge rather than a crisis (Baloran & Hernan, 2020). Therefore, enhancing and transforming teachers' self-efficacy beliefs may help guide teachers through the difficulties associated with any future moves to ERT (Haverback, 2020).

However, the changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic were unprecedented. While research has been done on the changes in pedagogy necessitated by the move, little research has been done on the experiences of secondary school teachers themselves and their perceptions of their self-efficacy during the pandemic. This gap in the research needs to be addressed so that those in the educational field can address possible feelings of teacher burnout associated with any future moves into ERT, as failure to do so may lead to teachers leaving the profession.

**Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to chronicle the experiences of secondary school teachers during the move to ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding these experiences will allow for further research into ways to provide support for teachers during any future moves to ERT in order to help foster their self-efficacy. During the COVID-19 pandemic move to ERT, teachers were physically isolated from their students and their colleagues and isolation has been found to be a strong factor in decreased feelings of self-efficacy. However, not only were teachers isolated, but they were also dealing with other stressors associated with the reason for
the move into ERT, such as concerns over the health of their family, worries over financial stability, or anxiety associated with the pandemic itself. All of these factors can contribute to emotional exhaustion which can then lead to feelings of burnout, often shown to be a strong factor in why teachers leave the profession. Therefore, understanding the experience of secondary school teachers when they moved into ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic can provide insight into ways to foster teacher self-efficacy in order to ameliorate feelings of emotional exhaustion and burnout when another move to ERT occurs in the future. In addition, this study will contribute to the teacher education literature by helping those in the educational field to understand and prepare for possible issues that may arise when they find teachers moved into ERT.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

School districts have already begun to make emergency remote teaching (ERT) a key component of teaching pedagogy going forward as many districts plan on using ERT when faced with any future events that may precipitate the need for schools to close. Therefore, this literature review begins with an understanding of the differences between distance learning and ERT before moving into an examination of some of the issues teachers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The section then continues with an examination of teacher self-efficacy, teacher burnout. I then provide background on phenomenology as a philosophy overall before focusing on hermeneutic phenomenology. The section concludes with an explanation of social learning theory as my theoretical framework.

Distance Learning

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the most common term used by administrators and policymakers to describe the educational experience was distance learning. Distance learning is defined as “institution-based, formal education where the learning group is separated and where interactive telecommunications systems are used to connect learners, resources, and instructors” (Simonson et al., 2019, p. 31). Today, distance learning delivery is often done synchronously, meaning teachers and students are present simultaneously on some sort of online platform; or asynchronously, meaning teachers and students are not present simultaneously and work independently of each other. Both synchronous and asynchronous approaches allow for students to learn at different times and different places (Koi-Akrofi, 2020; Simonson et al., 2019). Early on, before teachers and students had access to the internet, the two most common forms of distance learning involved the paper reliant approach, whereby the student would
receive a package of material through the mail, complete that work and then return it via mail to receive feedback; and the other common approach involved the use of video or television to supplement the work the students needed to complete and then return via mail for feedback (Croft et al., 2010). Early students of these forms of instruction were primarily located in rural or remote areas that did not have easy access to a traditional brick-and-mortar schooling (Sadeghi, 2019).

Although distance learning is not new, “the expansion of the Internet and the willingness of national and regional accreditation agencies to consider other than traditional instructional milieus has encouraged the rapid development of online courses” (Uhlig, 2002, p.670). This willingness to embrace distance learning has been traced most notably to the launch of Race to the Top as more and more school districts looked for ways to supplement student learning so that students' scores on Common Core examinations would improve (Ravitch, 2013). Later, in 2010, former Governor Jeb Bush of Florida and Bob Wise of West Virginia and the organizations they were affiliated with released the “10 Elements of High Quality Learning,” which extolled the virtues of online learning, yet critics believed that it's underlying purpose was deregulating online schools in order to increase profits (Ravitch, 2013). Today, before distance learning programs go online, many policy questions need to be addressed in order to mitigate any issues that may arise, including questions that deal with academic goals, fiscal responsibilities, geography, governance, labor-management, legal issues concerning privacy as well access to student support services (Gellman-Danley & Fetzner, 1998; Simonson et al, 2019).

When creating a distance learning program, the primary purpose for teachers is to provide an authentic educational experience for their students. Just like traditional schools, teachers should be certified at the appropriate grade level and for the appropriate subject (Sherry, 1995). Teachers and administrators involved in designing a
distance learning program must have the same expectations for student learning as they would for students within a traditional classroom (Simonson, 2018; Traxler, 2018). Therefore, true distance learning programs require careful instructional design and planning in order to provide the structures needed to meet those expectations. Typical planning for such distance learning classes is typically three to six months, although some classes can take a full academic year (Barbour et al., 2020). Such planning requires courses to be carefully designed before teaching begins, teachers to be trained in the pedagogical approaches that work with distance learning, support systems to be accessible by both the teachers and the students, and assessments to be designed reflective of the distance learning experience (Simonson, 2019). This also includes careful planning not only of the content, but also of the type of interactions between teachers and learners, which includes student-content, student-student, and student-teacher (Barbour et al., 2020). For teachers, the effectiveness of distance learning is often dependent on the feedback they provide their students (Simonson et al., 2019). This feedback is important as communication between students and teachers has been found to be a significant factor in the success of distance learning (Yao et al., 2020).

Emergency Remote Teaching

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers and students were actually not engaged in distance learning, the term used by the media and many in education. Instead, teachers were asked to engage in ERT. Often distance learning and ERT are viewed synonymously when they are, in fact, very different entities (Bawa, 2020). ERT is defined as “temporary access to instruction and instructional supports in a manner that is quick to set up and is reliably available during an emergency or crisis” (Hodges, 2020, p.6). ERT involves:

the use of entirely remote teaching approaches for instruction or education that would otherwise be provided face-to-face or blended or hybrid courses, and
which will revert to that model once the crisis or emergency has finished. The primary goal of ERT is not to re-create a stable educational environment, but rather to provide immediate access to education and training in a manner that is easy to develop and easily accessible during an emergency or crisis. (Rahiem, 2020, p.4)

Unlike distance learning programs that are developed over time, often only after the development of a strong needs assessment (Gellman-Danley & Fetzner, 1998), ERT requires immediate access to education and training, thereby placing teachers into the impossible situation of becoming an expert in online teaching in times ranging from a single day to a few weeks (Barbour et al., 2020). This move to ERT requires teachers to redesign what they originally developed for face-to-face classrooms quickly, reimagining it all to fit an online environment (Green et al., 2020).

During times before the pandemic, any such redesign of curriculum and instruction would have taken a considerable investment of time and resources by the teachers. After all, teaching “requires investment of certain pedagogical strategies, and in any type of setting (whether it involves synchronous or asynchronous interactions, ‘online’ or ‘off-line’), it includes backstage orchestration of tools, tasks and social organization to foster productive learning activity” (Green at al., 2020, p. 907). The shift to ERT required teachers to take more control of their course design, their course implementation, and their course assessment (Hodges et al., 2020). In addition, teachers during the COVID-19 crisis found that they had to adjust rapidly, often “without guaranteed or appropriate infrastructural support” (Rapanta et al., 2020, p. 927). Green et al. (2020) refer to teachers also having “uncertainty about Internet access or connectivity, learning about new types of technology and how to handle/manage an online synchronous/ asynchronous space, feelings of isolation and remoteness” (p. 908). In addition, and probably most importantly, unlike distance learning in which students
and teachers choose to take part (Bawa, 2020), none of the stakeholders during the COVID-19 shutdown chose ERT. One consequence of this lack of choice is that many students felt disconnected from their teachers, their schools, and their own education (Reich et al., 2020). Despite these issues, teachers adapted their curricula and their teaching styles to ones that could be conveyed remotely, often with little guidance or interaction with administrators or colleagues (Trikolis & Papanastasiou, 2020). Such limited interaction and guidance can often lead to feelings of inadequacy and disempowerment (Hart & Nash, 2020) as even the most experienced teachers who felt confident in their ability to teach might have found their confidence shaken as they found themselves lacking a supportive community (Haverback, 2020).

Many teachers also felt like the job they had known and loved was lost in the move to ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic. Reich et al. (2020) found that “teachers lost connections with students and colleagues while also losing a sense of professional competence and efficacy” (p. 9). Separating teachers from their students and removing personal interactions with peers simply augmented teachers’ feelings of isolation (Hart & Nash, 2020). Wegerif (1998) claims that isolated teachers are likely to become anxious, defensive, and unwilling to take risks. These reactions to isolation become even more pronounced when engaged in ERT because teachers need to demonstrate a greater commitment to their work than before (Baloran & Hernan, 2020). In addition, teachers who once felt they were experts in in-classroom instruction now found themselves learning new pedagogical approaches that caused them to question their expertise and increase their levels of stress (Hart & Nash, 2020). Besides feeling unprepared, teachers were also unaware of what was expected of them (UNESCO, 2020) and found themselves with “competing responsibilities, such as home schooling their own children, caring for vulnerable family members, and/or managing their own mental health” (Kim & Asbury, 2020, p.2). Finally, the transition to ERT required teachers to focus on what
they could do at the present moment, thereby having an effect on teachers emotionally as “reactive activities that focus on the now and not the future are not conducive to mental health or wellness” (Dabrowski, 2020, p. 37).

These feelings of isolation are not unique to ERT as studies show that those feelings have also been felt by teachers who utilize distance learning (Croft et al., 2020). Studies have shown that the development of virtual cohorts or online communities may assist in helping distance learning educators deal with that sense of isolation (Croft et al., 2010). Kosir et al. (2020) found that teachers who were able to utilize information and communication technology to develop a sense of community had more positive attitudes towards distance learning. Yet a fundamental difference between the sense of isolation felt by distance learning teachers and teachers engaged in ERT is choice. Teachers who engage in distance learning accept their positions aware that they will be teaching remotely. In addition, distance learning courses often have many structures and supports woven into the infrastructure of the courses in order to decrease those feelings of isolation (Barbour et al., 2020). However, these supports were lacking with the sudden move into ERT during the pandemic.

Teachers thrust into ERT did not choose remote instruction. Instead, they chose to teach in a traditional school setting where they expected to be in contact with many people daily. Yet the move into ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic moved teachers away from both their students, their colleagues, and the school community. Studies have shown when that happens, when teachers do not feel connected to their peers, “their commitment to the team, including their determination to ‘not let people down’ will be negligible, perhaps even nonexistent” (Dolan, 2011, p.64). Such limited interaction and guidance can often lead to feelings of inadequacy and disempowerment, which can lead to lower senses of self-efficacy, which has been shown to be a factor in teacher burnout (Flinders, 1988; Hart & Nash, 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007;). When in ERT,
administrators need to find ways to rebuild some sense of community in order “to attend to the loss of self-efficacy that teachers are feeling, *en masse*” (Reich et al., 2020, p.10) in order to mitigate any progression towards burnout.

**Educational Issues during the COVID-19 move to ERT**

**Technology**

Teaching online presents different challenges than teaching in the traditional classroom setting (Dunbar & Melton, 2018). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were augmenting their students’ in-school experiences with online resources. However, even as teachers were trying to add technology into their pedagogy, research before the pandemic pointed out that teachers were unprepared to incorporate technology effectively into their teaching (Foulger et al., 2017). In fact, effective integration of technology in classrooms was dependent more on who the teacher was and where the teacher taught than anything else (DiGregorio & Liston, 2018). Despite these challenges, the speed and urgency necessitated by the pandemic required teachers to incorporate technology regardless of how comfortable they felt using the medium. Despite the lack of confidence teachers may have had moving their instruction online, teachers made the move with limited tech support (Green et al., 2020; Trust & Whalen, 2020). This expectation of teachers to use technology during ERT without support not only highlighted the lack of skills many teachers had in using technology, but also hindered their ability to design high quality instruction, ultimately adding more stress and creating more roadblocks to teaching and learning when teachers were already dealing with so many personal and educational concerns (Trust & Whalen, 2020). Without sufficient technical support from others more knowledgeable, many teachers struggled.

In the move into ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic, technical support was needed to ascertain teachers’ comfort levels with technology and then provide the
support required to bring teachers to where they wanted to be. In addition, technical support can assist teachers in accepting that technology can be relevant to their own teaching practices, thereby making the experience more positive (DiGregorio & Liston, 2018). Having sufficient technical support also allows for better coordination with all stakeholders, thereby ensuring a better experience for all during any subsequent moves into ERT (Dunbar & Melton, 2018). However, this does not necessarily mean more funding be allocated for technology. In fact, studies have shown that “successful congruity between approaches to teaching and the adoption of instructional technology warrant more than the investment of monetary resources” (DiGregorio & Liston, 2018, p.3). Further investment in devices is a part of the solution. What is needed even more is further investment in a sufficient number of support staff required to meet the needs of teachers during ERT.

More technological support would also assist teachers in developing a greater level of comfort with technology. This comfort level is referred to as computer self-efficacy, defined as people’s beliefs in their abilities to use technology effectively (DiGregorio & Liston, 2018). Teachers with lower levels of computer self-efficacy are more likely to become frustrated and anxious when using technology, while those with higher levels are more likely to embrace its use in the classroom (DiGregorio & Liston, 2018). A teacher’s level of computer self-efficacy also determines whether or not teachers see the technology as a tool for complementing instruction rather than a means to provide instruction. This requires teachers to improve their technological pedagogical and content knowledge (TPACK) (Byker et al., 2018). TPACK refers to the combination of teachers’ knowledge of the content combined with technological resources that effectively enhances students’ understanding (Byker et al., 2018). TPACK demands that it is not enough for teachers to know “of” technology; they must feel confident in integrating that technology as well. Therefore, computer self-efficacy needs to be built by
either allowing teachers to have their own mastery of technology integration or through the vicarious experience of watching those who have successfully integrated technology into their instruction (Byker et al., 2018).

**Educational Inequities**

Teachers found themselves dealing with inequities among their students that required them to adjust their expectations. Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, “policymakers wrestled with whether to focus on continued coverage of standards-aligned content—basically teaching the class as normal— or whether to shift to review, enrichment and learning goals that steered away from trying to maintain pre-pandemic expectations” (Reich et al., 2020, p. 14). Part of understanding what approach to use requires teachers to understand students’ experiences inside and outside the classroom and determine if those experiences are due to deficits or differences. For example, many students were faced with “new COVID-related challenges such as taking on a new job or extra hours at an existing job, or taking care of younger family members as parents and caregivers went off to work and schools no longer served children” (Reich et al., 2020). Forcing academic expectations on students assumes that all students are having common experiences. Yet unfortunately, any policy that suggested teachers focus on pre-pandemic standards and pacing of courses “was predicated on the idea that many typical students benefit from the routines, schedules, and expectations that schools offer” (Reich et al., 2020, p.14). Some teachers tried to apply the same standards written before the pandemic because, in their minds, that curriculum withstood the test of time (Pearl, 1997, p.211). However, students found online education during ERT difficult because they found it difficult to be engaged (Reich et al., 2020).

**Self-efficacy**

This willingness to engage with the world is referred to as self-efficacy. Bandura (1977a) defines this as the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior
required to produce an outcome. While this term has sometimes been used to refer to one’s general sense of competence, the term is better defined as an expectancy specific to a behavior within a specific context (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012). According to Bandura (1977a), “efficacy expectations determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences” (p. 194). Whether one initiates an action or persists in an action is dependent upon the importance of the outcome, the expectation about how well a change in behavior will create a desired outcome, and the judgements individuals make about whether or not they possess the skills in order to implement the course of action (Maddux & Gosselin, 2012). One’s expectations can vary based upon magnitude, or the organization of tasks based upon levels of difficulty; generality, or the ability to generalize the success at one task to the success of another; and strength, or the degree to which individuals will persevere despite “disconfirming experiences” (Bandura, 1977a, p.194). In addition, while people may have the innate skills to accomplish these tasks, they may be reluctant to try unless they believe they will succeed. Although individuals have the capability of intentionally acting (i.e., personal agency), individuals may not have the necessary beliefs (i.e., self-efficacy) that will lead them to act. Individuals with high levels of self-efficacy may attribute their failure to a lack of effort while individuals with low levels of self-efficacy may attribute failure to a lack of ability (Bandura, 1994). In addition, a low sense of efficacy can also lead to feelings of depression and anxiety. This occurs when people who impose standards of self-worth on themselves that they cannot attain or when people do not have access to the social relationships needed to model ways to handle difficult situations (Bandura, 1994).

Bandura (1993) states how building self-efficacy comes from mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and the emotional and physiological well-being of a person. Mastery experiences refers to the number of
successes or failures experienced by individuals. As efficacy is built through repeated successes, the impact of an occasional failure is reduced (Bandura, 1977a). These experiences are structured in a way so that individuals can build coping skills and instill beliefs that they can exercise control over potential threats (Bandura, 1994). In addition, as individuals build their efficacy based upon mastery experiences, they are able to transfer those feelings of success to activities that are dramatically different than the ones originally experienced. Vicarious experiences refers to the development of self-efficacy by seeing others perform activities without adverse outcomes. However, “vicarious experience, relying as it does on inferences from social comparison, is a less dependable source of information about one’s capabilities than is direct evidence of personal accomplishments” (Bandura, 1977a, p. 197). Bandura goes on to say how modeling behavior is only effective if clear outcomes are established. Verbal persuasion is the idea that people can believe they can cope successfully with an experience through suggestion. However, “to raise by persuasion expectations of personal competence without arranging conditions to facilitate effective performance will most likely lead to failures that discredit the persuaders and further undermine the recipients’ perceived self-efficacy” (Bandura, 1977a, p.198). Emotional and physiological refers to the effect an individual’s emotional arousal may have on their self-efficacy. Bandura (1977a) writes: “By conjuring up fear provoking thoughts about their ineptitude, individuals can rouse themselves to elevated levels of anxiety that far exceed the fear experienced during the actual threatening situation” (p.199).

High beliefs of self-efficacy have been shown to be a key factor in successful student outcomes. Numerous studies have shown positive relationships between teacher self-efficacy and variables indicative of teacher performance (Holzberger et al., 2013). Teachers with stronger beliefs of self-efficacy are more confident in their abilities and more prepared to experiment with and implement new educational practices, all of
which increases the likelihood that teachers will remain in the profession (Hasio et al., 2011). The amount of time teachers remain in the profession is itself a factor in teachers’ feelings of self-efficacy. A study by Alea et al. (2020) used descriptive statistical data collected from teachers in the Philippines. Over 2300 responses were collected in order to find a correlation between teachers’ demographic profiles and their response to the COVID-19 outbreak. One conclusion of the Alea et al. (2020) study is that “the length of teaching experience and specialization were very strongly correlated to readiness to distance learning” (p. 141). Length of teaching experience is an aspect of the mastery experiences aspect of self-efficacy as well.

Wegerif (1998) claims that teachers’ abilities to form relationships helps alleviate their feelings of anxiety and make them more willing to take risks. Such relationships serve as the foundation for pedagogy and often accelerate school improvement efforts as well as the integration of technology into teaching (Digregorio & Liston, 2018). In addition, teachers “become more efficacious and more competent problem solvers than relying on their personal intuitive theory for problem solving” (Durley & Ge, 2018, p. 144). This becomes even more important when engaged in ERT due to the need for teachers to be willing to utilize new instructional technologies in their classroom (Digregorio & Liston, 2018). Kosir et al. (2020) found that teachers who were able to utilize information and communication technology to develop a sense of community had more positive attitudes towards distance learning. The study goes on to say that sharing good practices and positive experiences could lower teacher stress while enhancing their feeling of support from administration.

**Burnout**

ERT during 2020 required teachers to deal not only with the stress associated with moving to a new pedagogical approach but also with the stress of dealing with their own emotional, financial and health issues associated with the pandemic. This
heightened stress can affect both the self-efficacy of teachers and also lead to teacher burnout (Kim & Asbury, 2020). Burnout is described as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2008). A key aspect of burnout is emotional exhaustion to the point where teachers are no longer able to give any more of themselves psychologically. This emotional exhaustion felt by teachers is often described as “a tired feeling that develops over time as one’s emotional resources are drained” (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008, p. 1350). Grayson and Alvarez (2008) mention how teachers who feel emotionally exhausted can become cynical towards their students, parents, and the schools. Ultimately, emotionally exhausted teachers exhibit “diminished job performance and eventually quit their jobs” (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998, p.492).

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2007) conducted a study in which they examined 2249 Norwegian teachers in elementary school and middle school. After analyzing the data by means of structural equation modeling, they found emotional exhaustion and depersonalization to be the central elements of burnout. These two elements were also found to be negatively related to teacher self-efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

Reducing stress can alleviate burnout and, in the process, keep teachers committed to the profession, which allows for the retention of high-quality teachers (Rajendran et al., 2020). Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, burnout was found to be a contributing factor in the inability to retain high-quality teachers (Rajendran et al., 2019). According to Reich et al. (2020), this exhaustion was felt by teachers during the COVID-19 shift to ERT as they struggled with feelings of guilt over their inadequacies to teach effectively during ERT. Dabrowski (2020) writes: “Burnout, stress, and fatigue have been noted as impacting heavily on the engagement of educators, which in turn impacts on the quality of education students receive. Stress and burnout will likely increase now and beyond the current pandemic” (p.37). Reich et al. (2020) write how
“As teachers lost connections with students and colleagues while also losing a sense of professional competence and efficacy, they described their experience with words such as ‘mourning’, ‘loss’, and ‘sadness’” (p.8). However, teachers with high efficacy beliefs are more likely to view ERT as a challenge rather than a crisis (Baloran & Hernan, 2020). Therefore, “enhancing and transforming teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs may help guide teachers through this (the COVID-19 pandemic) difficult time” (Haverback, 2020, p.2). Baloran and Hernan's (2020) study emphasized the importance of such commitment during the COVID-19 crises and the role self-efficacy plays in “maintaining and supporting work commitment” (p. 10). Dabrowski (2020) writes: “Burnout, stress, and fatigue have been noted as impacting heavily on the engagement of educators, which in turn impacts on the quality of education students receive. Stress and burnout will likely increase now and beyond the current pandemic” (p.37). Therefore, understanding teachers’ thoughts and feelings of exhaustion during ERT is essential in order to mitigate the progression toward burnout (Sokal et al., 2020).

**Phenomenology as Philosophy**

Phenomenology is a theoretical perspective rooted in constructivist epistemology and considered to be “one of the first genuine moves away from the positivist paradigm and into qualitative research where subjectivity of experience became more valued” (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). It is also an umbrella term referring to both a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches (Kafle, 2011). Phenomenology as a theoretical perspective refers to “looking at what we usually look through” (Vagle, 2018, p. xii.) or, as stated by van Manen (2007), phenomenology is a “sober reflection on the lived experience of human existence” (p.12). Here, van Manen (2007) talks of how any reflection of an experience must be thoughtful and free from any biases or prejudices. Removing these biases and prejudices allows for a better understanding and interpretation of the events themselves. For most people, the events
that happen in life hold no meaning. Instead, meaning is constructed by human beings (Dibley et al., 2020). According to Vagle (2018), a phenomenological viewpoint occurs when what is expected has been removed, forcing individuals to view the object of the experience in a new light. That experience of seeing something in a new light is a core tenet of phenomenology. Once seen, meaning is reconstructed based upon the experience itself, making phenomenology “nothing more or less than a way to imagine the real” (Rocha, 2015).

Phenomenology is objective in that it searches for the objects of the experience rather than just the description, yet phenomenology also involves evaluation as it calls into question what people had previously taken for granted (Crotty, 1996). People make sense of their world based on the subjective experiences of their past, which they then apply to their understanding of objective experiences had by others (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For a phenomenological approach, subjectivity is favored over objectivity and interpretation matters more than measurement (Dibley et al., 2020). Creswell and Creswell (2018) delineate how individuals may share a common experience, but the meaning of that experience is subject to the individuals themselves.

In fact, going back to the essence of an earlier experience requires an understanding of how individuals have already defined their experience in subjective terms (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990). Essence refers to “a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). Trying to find the essence of an experience, according to van Manen (1990), involves “grasp[ing]...the very nature of a thing” (p. 177). This essence is found when all other aspects are stripped away, leaving the experience alone to be understood. Vagle (2018) compares finding the essence of an experience to the reduction of a liquid in a pan. As the liquid is heated, components within that liquid evaporate. What remains
would be what Vagle (2018) would refer to as essence. One arrives at the essence when one reflects upon something and discovers another major component of meaning. (Moustakas, 1994).

Phenomenology comes in two forms: transcendental or hermeneutic. Transcendental phenomenology is defined as “phenomenology that is concerned with how objects are constituted in pure (transcendental) consciousness, setting aside questions of any relationship of the phenomenon to the world in which one lives” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173). In transcendental phenomenology, objects exist whether we engage with the object at all. Transcendental phenomenology is rooted in the works of Edmund Husserl, a German philosopher who was concerned with epistemology and rejected the idea that the empirical sciences could not uncover the meaning of the lived experience (Dibley et al., 2020). Instead, Husserl wanted to explore the way that one looks at something (Peoples, 2021). According to Husserl, people live most of their life with a natural attitude (emphasis added). Husserl defined natural attitude as the way individuals rarely question the events of the world but simply take them for granted, causing people to experience a common and familiar understanding of the world (Dibley et al., 2020; Peoples, 2021; Vagle, 2018; Van Manen, 1990). This natural attitude of understanding the world is where people typically exist: a place where things are simply accepted as they are and where people rarely question their experiences with each object or event (Dibley et al., 2020). Husserl claims that “the character of the natural world is hidden to us because we view it from a natural attitude that allows us to live in the world” (Dibley et al., 2020, p.8).

Understanding a phenomena requires a movement from the natural attitude to what Husserl described as the lifeworld (emphasis added). According to Husserl, the lifeworld is “consciousness of the world, including objects or experiences within it, and is always set against a horizon that provides context” (Bevan, 2014, p. 136). Lifeworld is
where one’s living and experiencing of a phenomena takes place (Vagle, 2018). According to Vagle (2018), this is the moment beyond time, space, and relationships where individuals are immersed in the phenomenon itself. It is the “pre-reflective ground for our being in the world, which is given to use in the natural attitude and is taken for granted in everyday life” (Berndtsson et al., 2007, p. 259). Getting beyond natural attitude requires one to bring intentionality to a subject. Here intentionality does not refer to purpose or to deliberation. Instead, intentionality refers to when one’s mind becomes conscious of something—whether that be an object or an experience—one reaches out to and into that something (Crotty, 1998). One’s understanding of a tree, for example, is a combination of the outward appearance of the tree and the tree found within one’s consciousness based on memory, image and meaning (Moustakas, 1994). The reality of that object or experience is determined by one’s consciousness of it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus intentional experience “incorporates a real content and an ideal content, in and through which we dwell in thought, perception, memory, judgment, and feeling, in order to comprehend its essences” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 55).

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

Hermeneutic phenomenology, also known as interpretative phenomenology, is rooted in the work of Martin Heidegger and is a human science which studies persons (van Manen, 1990). Heidegger was a student of Husserl’s who viewed phenomenology differently than his teacher. For Heidegger, “a phenomenon was not so much a ‘thing itself’ that resided in intentional consciousness but was ‘brought into being’ in the day to day contextualized living in and through the world” (Vagle, 2018, p. 9). Heidegger believed that phenomena are lived in the world and the interpretations people bring to the phenomena are a part of that phenomena as well. In fact, Heidegger saw interpretation and understanding as the key aspects in organizing and giving meaning to one’s existence (Berndtsson et al., 2007). According to Dibley et al. (2020), Heidegger
“was more concerned with being in the world, rejecting Husserl’s being of the world” (p.16). Because of that relationship between an object and the experience one brings to that object, “no objects can be adequately described in isolation from the conscious being experiencing it, nor can any experience be adequately described in isolation from its object” (Crotty, 1998, p. 45). Although we may make decisions and understand phenomena through our lived experience of the world, we are rarely aware of the reasons for how we interact with the world (Dibley et al., 2020). Our human experience is then dependent upon this relationship as we cannot be described apart from our world just as our world cannot be described apart from us. This relationship Heidegger refers to as Dasein, or “being in the world” (Dibley et al., 2020; Vagle, 2018).

Dasein refers to the human way of being in the world and emphasizes that “individuals cannot abstract themselves from various contexts that influence their choices and give meanings to lived experience” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 174). In fact, it is an opening or space in which humans understand themselves and their relationship to the world around them (Dibley et al., 2020). Yet, at the same time, only through Dasein can any meaningful reality be constructed (Crotty, 2015). According to Dibley et al. (2020), that meaningful reality— the reality of the lived experience— arises when one engages in thoughtful meditation that allows one to become open and aware of those very contexts that influence choices and give meanings. This understanding of meaningful existence comes by understanding and rendering “explicit and thematic what is at first implicit and anathematized” (Crotty, 2015, p. 97). Understanding structures and events that make human existence possible then allows for greater development of one’s Being, which then returns to the world with a better understanding (Crotty, 2015). This constant synthesis and growth is part of the hermeneutic circle: a moving back and forth between the whole and the parts of the phenomena (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). We
must go back and forth and question our prior knowledge in order to get to an understanding of the lived experience (Dibley et al., 2020).

In hermeneutic phenomenology, the goal is “to enter the world of the person and interpret the meaning they assign to the experience” (McConnell-Henry et al, 2009). That meaning is constructed through that interaction between the individual, the individual’s experience, and the object. Heidegger rejected the idea that we must suspend our previous understanding, but “that it is only through our prior understanding and reflections that we can ask further questions and better understand the experience” (Dibley et al., 2020, p.17). Heidegger believed that the “phenomena are lived out interpretively in the world, and hence the world should not be bracketed but fully engaged in the phenomenological inquiry” (Vagle, 2018, p.9). The objects and events in the world are in themselves meaningless. Only through the conscious experiencing of these objects and these events can they have meaning (Crotty, 2015). Thus hermeneutic phenomenology “is concerned with interpretation of the structures of experience and with how things are understood by people who live through them” (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007, p. 173). However, that need to understand the world often only occurs during a changed life situation, a moment in life when people become much more aware of time and space (Berndtsson et al., 2007). This changed life situation often requires a new learning of skills as well as a new way to act, which was the case for secondary school teachers when forced into ERT.

**Theoretical Framework**

Social learning theory serves as my theoretical framework. ERT disrupted the interactions that teachers had typically used to shape their definition of themselves as educators. Instead, teachers found themselves isolated from students and colleagues as they tried to understand this new experience. While people make sense of the world by synthesizing new experiences into what they have previously come to understand
(Brooks & Brooks, 1999), this synthesizing of the new experiences does not occur in isolation. Instead, this occurs through interaction with others (Crotty, 1998). Bandura (1977b) referred to this interaction in his social learning theory. Rooted in the ideas of both Piaget and Vygotsky, Bandura’s theory is that learning is actually a combination of cognitive and behavioral characteristics and not just limited to cognitive and psychological factors. Social learning theory is in response to the behaviorist philosophy that was dominant in psychology during the early 20th century which asserted that all learning was the result of an individual's positive or negative experience with the environment. Yet in 1961 Bandura conducted his Bobo doll experiments in which children involved received no reinforcements for beating up the doll, thereby showing how similar behaviors were learned by individuals shaping their behaviors to the people observed (Nabavi, 2012). These observations lead to Bandura’s claim that all learning occurs in a social context.

Social learning theory— or social cognitive theory, as it came to be known— claims that both cognitive and environmental factors shape human learning and behavior (McLeod, 2016). A key aspect of social learning theory is triadic reciprocity which posits that behavior, personal factors, and environmental factors “all operate as interlocking determinants of each other” (Bandura, 1977b, p.10), as shown in Figure 1. O’Rorke (2006) describes personal factors as beliefs, expectations, attitudes and knowledge; environmental factors, as resources, consequences of actions, physical setting, and one’s social context; and behavior factors as individual actions, choices, and responses people have to certain stimuli to achieve goals. According to Bandura (1977b), the relative influences exerted by these interdependent factors differ in various settings and for different behaviors. For example, there are times when environmental factors exercise powerful constraints on behavior, and other times when personal factors are the overriding elements in the course of environmental events” (Bandura, 1977b, p.10).
Triadic reciprocity describes how people adjust relative to changing environmental situations in order to achieve a desired outcome (Schiavo et al., 2019).

**Figure 1**

*Bandura’s Triadic Reciprocity*

According to Bandura (1977b), most social learning occurs during everyday situations when certain behaviors are either casually or directly observed. This behavior is not externally regulated and is more than a one-way control process that reduces individuals to “passive respondents” (Bandura, 1977a, p.9). While reinforcement does play a role, it serves mainly as “an antecedent rather than a consequent influencer” (Bandura, 1977b, p. 37). As a result, social learning is more effective by informing the observers in advance about the benefits of the behavior rather than waiting for them to imitate the model and reward them for it (Bandura, 1977b). Learning through observation is done through observing other people, called models, and the process of learning through observation is called modeling (Sutton, 2021). These models provide symbolic representations of certain activities which serve as guides for appropriate behavior. Bandura identified three types of models: 1) a live model involving an
individual demonstrating or acting out the behavior; 2) a verbal instructional model involving the behavior being described or explained and 3) a symbolic model involving the use of real or fictional characters depicted in texts (Nabavi, 2012). Bandura identified four key aspects of the modeling process, as identified in Figure 2.

According to Bandura, observational learning requires that an individual’s attention must be drawn to the behavior. Drawing attention to the behavior is dependent upon a number of factors, such as the observer’s characteristics, the features of the modeled activity, and the “structural arrangement of human interactions” (Bandura, 1977b, p. 24). Once an individual’s attention has been drawn to the behavior, that individual must be given sufficient time and opportunity for the behavior to be stored in their memory. Observational learning and retention is made easier through the creation of symbolic codes “because they carry a great deal of information in an easily stored form” (Bandura, 1977b, p.26). Once stored in memory, one must be given time and opportunity to try to replicate the action. In the process, “people usually achieve a close approximation of the behavior...and they refine it through self-corrective adjustments on the basis of informative feedback” (Bandura, 1977b, p.28). Finally, an individual must have the desire to replicate the behavior as well. This motivation is dependent upon whether or not the individual values the outcome of the behavior more than if it has punishing effects. Bandura also claims that a person’s past experiences and interactions influence reinforcements, expectations, and expectancies, all of which shape two things: whether a person will engage in a behavior and the reason why the person engages in a behavior (Bandura, 1995).
**Chapter Summary**

Based upon a review of the literature, I have provided a foundation for a hermeneutic phenomenological study on the experiences of teachers during ERT and the ways they may have fostered their self-efficacy. In Chapter 3, I explain the methodology used to conduct the study, including an explanation of phenomenology as a methodology, the rationale for the selection of participants and the procedure for data collection and analysis. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how validity and quality are established in this study.
CHAPTER 3
Methodology

This chapter begins with my research questions followed by an explanation of why hermeneutic phenomenology was the chosen methodology to answer those questions. Next, I present my research design. I begin by explaining how participants were selected for the study, why interviews were an appropriate form of instrumentation, the procedures for data collection and analysis, and a discussion on validity, reliability and the limitations of the study. I conclude by providing my positionality as a teacher who experienced ERT during the COVID-19 shutdown, a necessary component of any hermeneutic phenomenological study.

Research Questions

The development of my research questions was not a linear process. Instead, I found myself constantly moving back and forth between the literature review and the experiences I had during ERT. I needed to develop questions that could be answered reflective of the purpose of the study while being philosophically sound at the same time (Dibley et al., 2020). This required me to realize that phenomenological questions should focus on a lived experience that may lack clear boundaries of a beginning or an ending (Adams & van Manen, 2017). In addition, phenomenological research questions should never be just problems to be solved, but instead “should cultivate the unwilled willingness to meet what is utterly strange in what is most familiar” (Adams & van Manen, 2017, p. 783). I also had to understand that I should not expect my questions to be answered as much as they were questions that push me to explore the phenomena (Adams & van Manen, 2017).

Therefore, the questions I sought to answer through my research were:

(RQ1) What were the meanings and understandings secondary school teachers gave to the experience of ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic?
(RQ2) What impact did the move to ERT have on the experience of developing teacher self-efficacy?

**Phenomenology as Methodology**

As a research methodology, phenomenology describes the meaning found in common for a number of individuals who have shared the same experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The purpose of a phenomenological methodology is to get at the essence of that shared experience for the individuals (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this research study, the same shared experience for the participants was the move to ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, while the experience of the move itself was objective, the experience while in ERT was subjective and dependent upon the life experiences of those participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology does not dismiss the situation in which the experiences took place because the meaning is found in the context of those experiences (Dibley et al., 2020). Understanding the meaning requires an understanding of the shared experience of the phenomena by the individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In doing so, the researcher is able to get to the essence of the experience.

Getting to the essence of an experience is found by constantly examining and re-examining the data in an attempt to strip the experience down to its commonalities. This process of perceiving and reflecting, of examining and re-examining the experience continuously allows one to understand meaning in one’s experience and that experience’s relationship to oneself (Moustakas, 1994). However, rather than a single experience, hermeneutic phenomenologists incorporate multiple perspectives as a part of the openness that leads to an understanding that might be hidden because multiple experiences allow meanings and understandings that may “illuminate mysteries or inform future possibilities about life questions” (Dibley et al., 2020, p. 20). The purpose is not to study the participants but the experience of the participants (Vagle, 2018).
However, hermeneutic phenomenology takes into account that the researcher has experienced the phenomena as well. As a result, this methodology requires that researchers must reflect on their own past experiences, their preconceptions, and their biases so they can more clearly access the experiences by the participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). In fact, researchers bring their own experiences with the phenomenon being explored together with that of the participants in an attempt to gain a better understanding of the phenomena. This back and forth between participant and researcher is referred to as the hermeneutic circle, which began the moment that I chose my research topic. At that moment, I was in the hermeneutic circle without knowing that I was (Dibley et al., 2020). This hermeneutic circle of understanding blends the meanings articulated by the researcher and the participants (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). This hermeneutic circle also requires constant reflexivity, forcing me to go back and forth with the data, to engage in conversations with the data in an attempt to develop themes, and then to apply those themes back to the data itself. Dibley et al. (2020) refer to this back and forth with the data as converging conversations.

The move to ERT due to a pandemic was unprecedented in our lifetimes and worthy of exploration and questioning. Yet any meaning of this experience is found through the interpretation by each participant, an interpretation dependent upon the situations in which the participants-- including the researcher-- found themselves when thrust to operate from home. Hermeneutic phenomenology takes into account the researcher's experience of the phenomena as well as the participants, making it the best approach for this study.

Research Design

Participants

Phenomenology does not require a large number of participants to take part in the study as the primary purpose of phenomenological research is to get an extensive
study of a human experience (Adams & van Manen, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). Typically, phenomenological research involves between 5-15 participants, with the final number determined when the researcher finds a level of saturation is achieved, meaning that no new information arises during the interview process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Peoples, 2021; Vagle, 2018). Phenomenology does require that the participants of the study experience the phenomena itself (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). However, it is also important for the experience to have passed because phenomenology requires the participants to reflect upon the experience (van Manen, 1990). In this case, the phenomena experienced was the move to ERT in March of 2020. This then required me to use purposeful sampling, which is the most commonly advised approach in phenomenological research (Peoples, 2012). Therefore, I contacted secondary school teachers that I knew had been forced into ERT during the March 2020 shutdown. However, I also tried to take into consideration a number of different variables when reaching out to participants in hopes that it would add a layer of validity to my results. Therefore, I contacted former colleagues from different parts of the country, with different years of experience teaching, and from different subject areas. Sex was taken into account during the recruitment phase, but variables like race and socio-economic status were not considered for this research as I believed they would add too many variables to account for when trying to get at the essence of the experience (Dibley et al., 2020). However, any subsequent research I undertake would likely include these other variables.

Teachers were contacted via email (See Appendix A) in which they were told the purpose of the study, the process for collecting research, the process to ensure their confidentiality, and the setting for collecting the research. If they were willing to participate in the study, I sent them the Informed Consent documents that had been
approved by the URI Institutional Review Board (See Appendix C) as well as a survey to gather some demographic information (See Appendix B). These Informed Consent documents explained how confidentiality would be assured through the use of self-selected pseudonyms while still allowing for publication of the dissertation as well as any future work. Snowball sampling was also used by asking teachers who were willing to participate if they knew of any other teachers who experienced the move to ERT. Recruitment emails were also sent to those teachers. Taking into account the number of teacher responses and their demographic information, I decided upon nine (9) as the final number of participants. This sample size also reflects the need for quality over quantity as hermeneutic studies benefit from “a concentrated focus on a small number of cases” (Smith et al., p.51).

The average age for the participants was 46, with the median age being 43. The average number of years teaching for the participants was 22, with the median also being 22. The youngest participant (28 years old) also had the fewest number of years teaching (5). The oldest participant (61 years old) has also been teaching for the greatest number of years (35). Of the nine participants, one teaches English, two participants teach mathematics, two teach social studies, one teaches science (both physics and chemistry), one teaches foreign language (Spanish), one teaches theater, and one teaches exceptional education. In addition, two of the participants also served as department heads for their respective disciplines during the move to ERT. All participants have some additional level of education beyond a bachelor’s degree. Two of the participants teach in the southern part of the country, one teaches in the Tennessee Valley area, and the other six teach in New England. (See Table 1 for summary.)

Although this study presented little risk for the participants, one way this risk was mitigated was by having the participants select pseudonyms. These pseudonyms were used throughout the research process. In addition, transcripts of all interviews were
shared with the participants as a form of member checking. Participants were asked to check the transcript for authenticity and to communicate with me if they had any concerns or questions. Most responses by the participants seemed to be concerned primarily with the grammatical errors found in their comments at times or the verbal non-fluencies that typically filled their transcripts. Participants were informed that in order to maintain the integrity of their responses, such grammatical issues would not be changed. In addition, participants did not receive any form of payment or service for their involvement in the study. Many participants did express appreciation for the study and seemed to find some sort of satisfaction in adding to the body of knowledge on the topic.

**Table 1**

*Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
<th>Subject(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Physics, Chemistry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor's +30</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Exceptional Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Wheeler</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Education Specialist (Ed.S.)</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor's +30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>History/Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eriver</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Christina</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Masters + 15</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mando</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Social Sciences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Theater 1, 2, 3 honors; Comprehensive Theater 1,2,3 honors; 4 honors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

When doing phenomenological research, the most appropriate form of data collection is the interview (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). Roulston (2010) writes how the purpose
of phenomenological interviews is to get detailed, in-depth descriptions as well as to understand the feelings, perceptions, and understandings of the participants. Open questions provide the best format for allowing the participants to answer in their own words. This allows the participants to address the phenomena and to explore their interpretations of the phenomena as well.

As the interviewer, I had to accept the natural attitude of the participants, free from any bias on my part. However, during each interview, I needed to keep a critical dialogue--a back and forth in which I reflected on both the experiences of the participants as well as my own experiences. This was done through the use of detailed field notes which served as a way for me to capture my initial thoughts during the interview as well as a way to collect my thoughts for any subsequent follow-up questions. At the conclusion of each interview, I journaled my reactions and feelings about what was shared by the participants. This journaling was different from my field notes. Journaling was a way to bridle my own experiences and attempt to get at the essence of the participant’s experience. While conducting the interviews, I needed to be an active listener, giving the participant my full attention whether in-person or by video conference. Finally, I needed to establish a rapport with the participants. One way I did that was by withholding my own experiences with ERT during the interview so that no disagreements could arise which could affect the ability to maintain that rapport (Roulston, 2010). Another way that I did this was by being empathetic throughout the process (Roulston, 2010) and by giving the participants the time and space to think and to be heard (Smith et al., 2021).

For this study, Seidman’s (2006) three interview approach was used (See Table 2). According to Seidman, the first interview is an attempt to have participants contextualize their natural attitude and begin to move them into the lifeworld of operating in ERT. The second interview is to better apprehend the lifeworld itself, done
by developing questions based upon a close analysis of the first interview. During this round, the questions were developed to immerse the participant in the lifeworld through intentionality. A third round of questions seeks to clarify the phenomena through reflection. In this study, participants were not interviewed a third time. Instead, the participants were given the opportunity to write a reflection based upon their reviews of their own transcripts that allowed for them to focus on the essence of the experience itself. Each interview was semi-structured with questions open-ended enough “in order to create space for participants to narrate their experiences” (Galletta, 2013, p. 47) while remaining focused on my research questions. Each round of interviews began with a statement thanking the participants for taking part in the study and reminding them of the purpose of the interview (Galletta, 2013; Smith et al., 2021). At times, I probed for clarification, adding to my field notes while listening to ideas raised by the participant that I might want to return to during the interview, all the while trying to encourage a narrative probe into the topic itself (Galletta, 2013). One of the most common responses made by the interviewer during the interview was “Anything else?” (Galletta, 2013) in hopes of getting the participants comfortable with talking about their experiences (Smith et al., 2021).

The first round of interviews were scheduled through email and the participants were given the option of meeting in-person or via Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, Inc., 2020). Most of the participants—whether due to distance, health concerns, or ease of access—selected Zoom as the primary means for conducting the interviews. Each interview was audio-recorded through the use of Otter.ai, an online audio recording and transcription program. After the first interview was conducted, I reviewed the audio recording of the transcription provided by Otter.ai, making changes to punctuation as needed and to ensure the anonymity of the participant. That final transcription was then shared with each participant to check for accuracy. The interview was then read in its
entirety by the researcher. When done, I created a new document with two columns. I copied the transcript and pasted it into the left hand column. I then read through the transcript another time. This time, I placed key passages in bold, composed my initial thoughts and reflections on those passages in the right hand column, and used the Insert Comment feature to post questions that arose that I believed would move the participant deeper into the experience during the second round of interviews.

**Table 2**

*Interview Structure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher Approach</th>
<th>Acceptance of Natural Attitude of Participants</th>
<th>Active Listening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer must allow the participants to share their feelings on the phenomena free from any interviewer bias.</td>
<td>Participants must receive the interviewer's full attention during the interview.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Structure</th>
<th>ROUND ONE</th>
<th>ROUND TWO</th>
<th>ROUND THREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextualization</td>
<td>Understanding the natural attitude of the participants.</td>
<td>Pushing the participants into the lifeworld to seek meaning.</td>
<td>Allowing the participants to reflect upon the lifeworld.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approaching the Phenomena</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying the Phenomena</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once the first interview was reviewed and the second round of questions was developed, another email was sent to the participant requesting the second interview. Again, these second interviews were transcribed, shared for accuracy, and then reviewed. Like the first round, a two-column approach was used in which the transcript was pasted in the left-hand column, key passages were placed into bold font, and my thoughts and reactions were written in the right-hand column. At the conclusion of the second interview, participants were asked to write a reflection in response to a single question (What was the essence of building self-efficacy during your time in emergency remote teaching?) and to email that reflection back to me. The two-column format was also used
for the interview as well. All of the participants emailed their final reflections except for two who were dealing with personal issues. However, in both of those instances, there was more than enough information in their two interviews so that it did not weaken my data.

All transcriptions and reflections were stored in files identified only by the participant’s pseudonym. The average amount of time for each interview during the first round was 49 minutes. The shortest one took 40 minutes while the longest one took 57 minutes. The median amount of time was 51 minutes, and the mode was 52 minutes. The second round of interviews took an average of 44 minutes, with a median of 45 minutes and a mode of 45 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

Transcriptions were analyzed through the use of the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach put forth by Smith et al. (2021) which involves a six-step process. (See Figure 3)

- Step one involves a reading and rereading of the data. Here, I immersed myself in the data by listening to the audio-recording of the transcript to slow down my “habitual propensity for quick and dirty reduction” (Smith et al., 2021, p. 82) while reading through the transcript twice.

- Step two then involved the initial noting of the transcript. This was done by adding an additional column to the transcript while re-reading the transcript. According to Smith et al. (2021), steps one and two often merge and are viewed as a free textual analysis. There are no rules on how to approach this step as the sole aim of this step is “to produce a comprehensive and detailed set of notes on the data” (Smith et al., 2021, p. 83). This is more than a superficial analysis. Instead, it involves “looking at the language that they use, thinking about the context of their concerns (their lived world), and identifying more abstract
comments which can help you make out a pattern of meaning in their account” (Smith et al., 2021, p. 83). This analysis often required me to draw upon my own experience with ERT, which allowed me to better understand the experience of the participants. However, although my own reflections on my own experience were included, the focus remained on using my reflections as a better way of understanding the experiences of the participants.

- Step three required me to take the data and attempt “to reduce the volume of detail (the transcript and the initial notes) whilst maintaining complexity, in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes” (Smith et al., 2021, p. 91). This is an aspect of the hermeneutic circle as I constantly went back and forth between the text, my notes, and my own experiences. Reducing the volume of detail required me to develop short statements of what was important in that text. This was done inductively through the use of in vivo coding in which these initial codes were drawn from the words of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These short statements served as emergent themes of the data. The words of the participants were then copied and pasted into a spreadsheet.

- Step four required me to find emergent themes. This was done by conducting a second round of coding in which I sought to find a structure that allowed me to best identify the most important aspects of each participant’s account (Smith et al., 2021). This was done by examining the participants' words that had been pasted into a spreadsheet and identifying a theme as well as any subtopics connected to the theme. These were then written in additional columns across the spreadsheet.

- Step five required me to repeat the previous four steps for the next participant.
• Step six required me to then look for patterns across all cases. The key at this level is to achieve a deep enough level of understanding based upon the data. According to Smith et al. (2021): “One of the exhilarating features of this type of process is the realization that often the increasing depth of analysis of the part, the short extract, illuminates and can be seen as integrally related to the analysis of the whole, the complete interview” (p. 104). This was done by reorganizing the data by themes as well as subtopics. The data was then refined down in order to come up with as few themes as possible.

Figure 3

Data Analysis
Validity and Quality

Yardley (2000) identifies four criteria in establishing validity and quality when doing any qualitative research: 1) sensitivity to context, 2) commitment and rigor, 3) transparency and coherence and 4) impact and importance.

In order to meet the requirement for sensitivity to context, the researcher should have “a fairly extensive grounding in the philosophy of the approach adopted” (p. 220). My exploration of both transcendental phenomenology (rooted in the writings of Husserl) and hermeneutic phenomenology (rooted in the works of Heidegger) meets one aspect of sensitivity to context. In addition, sensitivity to context is also met based upon the researcher’s interactions with the participants as they explored their interpretations of the move to ERT. According to Yardley (2000), this is also met when the researcher shows an understanding of “the normative, ideological, historical, linguistic and socioeconomic influences on the beliefs, objectives, expectations and talk of all participants” (p. 220), which is met because the researcher is also a teacher from a similar socio-economic background as the participants and also experienced the move to ERT. Finally, sensitivity of context can be met by utilizing the participants’ own words in the analysis, thereby giving participants a voice in the research while allowing the reader to check the interpretation being made (Shinebourne, 2011).

Commitment and rigor “can be demonstrated through prolonged engagement with the topic and immersion in the data of the research” (Shinebourne, 2011, p.27). According to Yardley (2000), “commitment encompasses prolonged engagement with the topic (not necessarily just as a researcher, but also in the capacity of sufferer, career, etc.), the development of competence and skill in the methods used, and immersion in the relevant data” (p. 221). Again, the researcher’ own experience with ERT began in March of 2020, just like the participants, thereby meeting the criteria of prolonged engagement. However, this prolonged engagement is also seen through the selection of
participants, the commitment in engaging with the participants over the course of multiple interviews, and the attention to detail in data analysis (Shinebourne, 2011).

The third criterion of transparency and coherence “relate to the clarity and cogency—and hence the rhetorical power or persuasiveness—of the description and argumentation” (Yardley, 2000, p. 222). When using IPA, Shinebourne (2011) says that this can be met by “providing specific details of the process of selecting participants, constructing the interview schedule, the conduct of the interview and the stages in the analysis” (p. 27). In addition, coherence refers to the clarity of the argument presented rooted in the language of the participants. The researcher has a responsibility to remain true to the participants description while also remaining true to the interpretive nature of IPA. The depth of this interpretation and the clarity of this analysis lead to the final criterion of impact and importance. This is determined by the worth of the research to others. According to Yardley (2000): “It is not sufficient to develop a sensitive, thorough and plausible analysis, if the ideas propounded by the researcher have no influence on the beliefs or actions of anyone else” (p. 223). Thus, the relevance and importance of the research itself to both the teachers involved in the study and to teachers overall is another form of establishing quality.

**Limitations**

Using a phenomenological approach, however, does have its limitations. First, since interviewing was the sole means for collecting data, the self-reporting nature of this approach is prone to inaccuracy due to a lack of recall, or due to some discomfort with self-disclosure (De Gagne & Walters, 2010). Next, generalizing the findings of the study to a larger population will be difficult. The small sample size typical in phenomenological research hinders the ability to say the results are reflective of the greater population. In addition, the racial demographics of the sample was relatively homogeneous as the sample contained no one who identified as a person of color.
Another limitation of this study is the researcher himself. Successful phenomenological research depends on the quality of the researcher. Conducting phenomenological research is not easy since I had to be open to the phenomena as experienced by the participants while also being aware of my own perceptions of the phenomena (Friberg et al., 2007). As a result, the interpretation of the data depended on successfully bridling my own bias. Many times, I needed to decide how to bring my own personal understanding into the study and when it would be most appropriate (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Original words and phrases as well as direct quotes from the transcripts were used throughout the report to limit the risk of reader misinterpretation as well as limit the loss of intended meaning by the participants.

**Positionality**

I share the following as I begin my hermeneutic phenomenological study because I have a responsibility as the researcher to share my own experiences so that others can use those experiences as a filter for my findings. Hermeneutic phenomenology does not place the researcher separate from the event. In fact, hermeneutic phenomenology requires the researcher to have been immersed in the experience itself. However, at the same time, I have a responsibility to share my experience in order to be aware of my own biases so that they do not corrupt the understanding of the experiences by the participants.

The hermeneutical phenomenological approach put forth by Martin Heidegger requires an interpretation by the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Meaning is only found through the interpretation of the experience (Heidegger, 2008). Therefore, rather than bracketing researchers’ knowledge of the experience, hermeneutic phenomenological researchers should instead bridle their experiences. This requires the phenomenologist to become “much more familiar with one’s judgments so that they do
not compromise one’s openness to the phenomena” (p.14). This is done by constant journaling throughout the process by the researcher in order to document bias and use that information later as a means of interrogating subsequent results.

On March 12th, 2020, my department head spoke of the COVID-19 virus spreading rapidly and that we needed to make preparations to move into what she referred to as remote teaching. Later the principal informed us that due to the health emergency that COVID-19 was causing within the state, Monday, March 16th would be the first day of spring break. That gave me one day to develop lessons for students that could be completed remotely for two weeks. I packed up a minimal amount of supplies from my classroom, left a white board covered with notes from previous lessons, got into my car, and drove home. For the first time in my 28-year career, I would not be teaching in a school, in front of students, surrounded by colleagues whose days were delineated by a bell. However, those two weeks then became six weeks until finally the governor announced on April 22nd that schools in Rhode Island would not reopen in a face-to-face format for the remainder of the school year.

ERT took place for me in my home office. I had my MacBook which had been provided to me by my department and a Wi-Fi strong enough to meet the needs of me and my family. I had my own desk where I responded to emails in the morning, posted work on Google Classroom, or conducted my Google Meets. My wife and children understood that a closed office door meant I was working. I share this to show how I was able to separate myself physically from the rest of my family. I was able to create a teaching environment away from the everyday issues and interruptions that can occur at home.

When the pandemic continued, I remained nervous but not afraid. My feelings were reflective of three factors that affected my family. First, my family faced financial issues when my wife lost her job. However, we were eligible for unemployment which
helped us through those weeks. In addition, we had just refinanced our house, which gave us some money to use to pay our bills. Essentially, we were able to remain stable financially. Second, like all parents, I was nervous for my children’s health and safety, both physically and emotionally. When they came home on March 12th, my wife and I spoke to them and tried our best to ease their anxieties. We were fortunate that our children were both old enough to listen and to try to understand. Academically, they were both very independent: my son was a second semester sophomore and my daughter was at the end of 7th grade. School had never really been a struggle for them, so I was able to limit my involvement in their schooling to following up with them at the end of a school day and to answer any questions they may have had. The fact that they were home and monitored by my wife eased my concerns over their health. Third, everyone in our extended family was able to quarantine during the shutdown. My wife’s parents and my parents were living a comfortable retired life and had no pressing health concerns. These three factors— the sense of financial stability, the safety of my own children, and the health of my extended family— allowed me to focus on my teaching during the day. I acknowledge that my ability to focus solely on teaching during the work day was not something that all teachers experienced during ERT as many teachers were concerned about other issues related to the pandemic. Many teachers found themselves dealing with their own children and the struggles their children were having with their own education. Some teachers had financial issues, or other such stressors that forced them to focus their energies outside of their teaching.

One situation that did arise during the move to ERT involved the mental health of my daughter in May of 2020. She had begun to exhibit feelings of depression and loneliness which affected her own sense of worth. Fortunately, we were able to address the issue as it arose and provide for her the help that she needed. However, this experience deepened my own understanding of the social-emotional issues that my own
students were feeling. In fact, I shared with my students that my own family was struggling and that I understood the difficulty many of them were feeling. I share this personal story to acknowledge that my own experience with my daughter emphasized the negative affects the move to ERT could have on students. Rather than distance myself from my students, my daughter’s experience caused me to reach out even more. I understand these reactions would not have been possible for everyone during ERT as many teachers may have been dealing with social emotional issues of their own or with their loved ones. As a result, teachers dealing with such issues may have found their own situations too overwhelming, causing them to focus on themselves or their own issues at home.

During the move to ERT, the school where I was teaching at the time was an affluent school with access to technology. I considered myself a teacher with a high level of computer efficacy and always willing to find new and innovative ways to bring technology into my classroom. Typically, the only time I asked for technological assistance was if the equipment itself did not work. I was confident enough in my own skills with technology to try to solve most problems as they arose. As a result, I entered ERT confident in my own ability to use technology to re-imagine my curriculum. In addition, a few years prior to the move to ERT, the school district provided funding so that every student would be issued a Chromebook starting in middle school and continuing throughout their high school years. As a result, I was able to enter ERT expecting students to have access to a working device. I share this because not all teachers had the same level of comfort with technology as I had nor were they able to depend upon students having the same access to technology.

During my 28 years of teaching, I have always found myself to be someone who is innovative and enthused about teaching. Teaching has not been a job or a career for me--it has been my calling. I considered myself confident and efficacious. A key component in
fostering my feelings of self-efficacy had been the social and interpersonal nature of schools themselves. I have always valued collaboration with my colleagues, to the point where I always attempted to develop teams within schools that had no teaming structures in place. Thus, isolation as a teacher has been something that I have always viewed as a liability. I share that position because the move to ERT required teachers to operate isolated from their colleagues and their students. However, some teachers may have viewed the isolation as an asset and not a liability. Making explicit my views allows me to better understand the lenses that may shape my interpretations.

**Bridling**

This positionality, however, does not weaken a phenomenological approach but instead plays an important role in the process. Edmund Husserl’s (Vagle, 2018) view of phenomenology asserts that researchers must remove themselves from the experience as much as possible in order to complete the true description required of transcendental phenomenology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Vagle, 2018, van Manen, 1990). This does not mean removing one’s past knowledge of an experience. Instead, it involves “putting aside or rendering non-influential this knowledge” (Vagle, 2018, p. 73). Husserl referred to this aspect of transcendental phenomenology as bracketing. Bracketing requires researchers to be aware of their natural attitude and how it is taken for granted (Bevan, 2014). Adopting this critical stance maintains a fundamental form of validity as well (Bevan, 2014). However, the hermeneutical phenomenological approach requires an interpretation by the researcher and the participant (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Meaning is only found through the interpretation of the experience (Heidegger, 2008). Therefore, rather than bracketing myself from my knowledge of the experience, hermeneutic phenomenology requires that I should instead bridle my experiences. Just as a rider tightens and loosens the reins when riding a horse, Vagle (2018) claims that phenomenologists should do the same with their judgments. This requires the
phenomenologist to become “much more familiar with one’s judgments so that they do not compromise one’s openness to the phenomena” (p.14). This is done by constant journaling by the researcher throughout the process.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter began with an explanation of phenomenology as a philosophy. This was done in order for the reader to understand why hermeneutic phenomenology was the most appropriate approach for researching teacher self-efficacy during ERT. Once the hermeneutic phenomenology was explained as a philosophy, I then explained the methodology of hermeneutic phenomenology. This methodology began with the criteria for recruitment of participants followed by an explanation of my use of Seidman’s (2006) three interview approach. I then explained how the interviews were analyzed through the use of Smith et al.’s (2021) interpretative phenomenological analysis followed by an explanation of how the research follow’s Yardley’s (2000) criteria of establishing validity and quality. The chapter concludes with a statement of my positionality. This statement is important in hermeneutic phenomenology in order to explain the lenses from which I viewed the experience, thereby getting at the essence of what the participants shared.
CHAPTER 4

Findings

All of the participants in this study had never experienced the phenomena of emergency remote teaching (ERT) before. The purpose of this research study was to allow these teachers to share the stories of their experiences during ERT in order to better understand it as a phenomenon. To meet this purpose, I developed the following research questions: (RQ1) What were the meanings and understandings secondary school teachers gave to the experience of ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic? (RQ2) What impact did the move to ERT have on the experience of developing teacher self-efficacy?

To answer these questions, I conducted multiple semi-structured interviews with nine participants following Seidman’s (2006) three step method and analyzed the data using Smith et al.’s (2021) interpretive phenomenological approach. Providing an opportunity for the participants to share their stories of ERT was an essential aspect of my research. Therefore, I find it important to provide readers with a short narrative description of the participants and use their own words as much as possible to provide important context to my analysis.

Participant Narrative Descriptions

Claire: Claire is a 45-year-old mother of three young children, all of whom were elementary school age or younger when she moved into ERT. She and her husband, who is also a teacher, live in a home that she referred to as a “fixer-upper” and has been a source of stress for them over the years. She has worked as a social studies teacher for twenty years in a number of different school districts across the east coast. She has a bachelor’s degree + 30 and achieved National Board Certification, a recognition that is a source of a great deal of pride for her professionally. She currently teaches in an affluent school district in a small New England suburb.
Claire expressed a deep passion for teaching throughout our interview. She spoke often of how she saw her role as a teacher as more than just delivering content. She expressed how she feels responsible for helping her students become “good humans.” She said she wants to “help kids grow up” and “learn who they are.” She felt that she needed to help her students “develop empathy” more than just teaching them history and that history provided her with the opportunity to do just that. This desire for her students to become empathetic reflects a change in her philosophy during what she referred to as “the second part” of her career:

I want them to know that, like, it’s...it’s good to be intellectual, it’s good to be smart...in fact, you should strive for that. Like it’s good to be strong and it’s good to have your opinions...and history is important and you should love it because it’s interesting, and I want kids to have that. But that...I think my first...I think that was, like, part one of my teaching career. I’m in part two now, you know? And in the second half of my 30 years. In my first half, I think I was all about the history. And now I think I’m, I’m all about the human.

She made reference multiple times to wanting to be one of those teachers depicted in the movies who make a dramatic difference in the lives of her students.

The move to ERT was emotionally draining for Claire. As much as she wanted to be there for her students, the demands on her time as a mother forced her to focus on her young children at the expense of her role as a teacher. Finding a routine, something Claire described as “invaluable” for her both personally and professionally, became incredibly difficult:

My school day became my elementary school, my kids' elementary school day. I didn't have a school day anymore. Anytime I needed to do work, it was on nap time. Or it was (her husband) would take the kids and I would do my work and then we split, and it was doing work at night. It was staying up late. My hours got
weird, you know? I mean like during the school year, it’s like a 9:30 bedtime on a five o’clock wake up. During the pandemic, it was like, “Oh well, you know, you wake up in the morning, I can still work so fast, so I don’t have to shower right? so you can go to bed at 11, you can go to bed at midnight.”

Claire became visibly emotional when she spoke of how much she wanted to connect with her students whom she knew were having a difficult time, but she simply could not because of her responsibilities as a mother. This was something that made her feel “incredibly guilty.” The attempt to balance her responsibilities as a mother and as a teacher played a key role in defining her experience of ERT.

**Daisy:** Daisy is a 44-year-old mother of two girls, one of whom at the time of the move to ERT was in middle school and the other of whom was in high school. She is married to a science teacher who worked at the same school as her during ERT. The fact that she and her husband worked at the same school at the time was comforting for her during ERT as it allowed them to share their feelings and their frustrations about the school, the students, and the administration. Her children were also at an age in which they were quite independent and needed little help from her in navigating the academics of their classes during ERT. Daisy, a 22-year veteran teacher with a bachelor’s degree, was at the time of the pandemic the special education department head at a large suburban school encompassing a wide demographic of students.

Daisy’s passion for working with special needs students was evident in each interview. At one point, she shared her goal in helping her students be the best they can be:

I think knowing and seeing the, the need for a voice and advocates and not feeling sorry for that population, I think, is the biggest misperception people have when it comes to people with disabilities. We often want to feel sorry for them and that’s not the approach, as an educator, is people that we should take that, you
know, there's a level of responsibility that we have to, to work with all of our youth that they can become productive citizens so they can be all they were meant to be all they can be. So just being that advocate and understanding, you know those needs and trying to get them to the most productive place that they can be.

This role of being an advocate for students—whom she consistently referred to as “my students”—caused her to feel frustrated with education in general even before the pandemic. The pandemic simply exacerbated those feelings:

And you know the needs in education are ever changing and they ebb and flow, and there's a disconnect from education in general, as far as our exceptional population is concerned. And I've seen that more and more, it's the "We're going to push everyone down this single path without any regard to the very needs of all of our students not just our special ed students but all of our students." They all have varying needs and that square peg into the round hole instead of developing more appropriate programs all around for students.

This desire to provide the best experience for her students was one reason why she accepted the position of department head at her school. As a result, she became “the first person they call” when issues arose involving one of her students. She was also quick to point out that she could not do her job at all without the help of her team. She spoke of how important it was for her to place students with other educators who could best assist that individual student.

Daisy found that the move to ERT was “sheer and utter chaos” for her and her students. She found herself working long into the night trying to assist individual students with assignments given to them by other teachers. Her desire to be as accessible as possible for her students and their parents prompted her to provide her students and parents access to her cell phone so that they could call her at any time. She referred to the experience as a time of “survival” for her and her students: “So I was giving my
number to parents and students because if they had trouble like we were logging on to Zoom, you know, at 7:30 at night, and they were sharing their screen and we were walking them through, you know, all the pieces that they needed to, to walk through, just to, to get things done.” Despite her willingness to be accessible, she found herself struggling with the inability to connect with students, with teachers, and with parents, all the while still being held accountable to the legal documents required of her position. The demands of meeting the needs of her students socially, educationally, and legally were all major aspects of her experience during ERT.

Eriver: Eriver is a 55-year-old married mother of three children all of whom were college age or older and living on their own. Her husband is an educator as well who worked at a local college during the move to ERT. Eriver, who has a Master’s degree, has been a math teacher for 25 years at a small, rural school and has served as department head as well over the past few years.

Eriver’s desire to be a teacher began when she was a child when she would place herself in positions of trying to “creatively teach information to someone.” She spoke of how when she began teaching at her school, she was more authoritarian because she felt she needed to be for two reasons: one, she felt her subject matter required her to be that way; and two, her own children attended the same school where she worked and she did not want to seem as if she was playing favorites. Yet over the years, this authoritarian approach changed as she began to find the relationships she formed with her students a rewarding aspect of teaching:

And so I worried about that point as being the mom of three kids who are in the district, versus mom of (name of three children) who are, you know, their friends. Didn’t quite know how to handle me for a little while. So that in turn made me hesitant to be who I really wanted to be. So I was much more authoritative, I think, at that time. Actually now, and the years after my kids left and finally
graduated from there, I really felt like this is why. And the reason is the interaction and the relationships that you develop over time with certain students and how much they’ll be willing to say to you that it’s not even mathematical in any way shape or form. And to be able to get that—although I’m teaching a subject that is not about emotion at all— is definitely what I was trying to capture. Not necessarily knowing it at the time but it’s definitely what, what I like about it.

Her approach continued to evolve once her own children left the school. She pointed to their exiting the school as a point where she became “more thoughtful and mindful of everything else that’s going on in their world. That math is not the be all and end all.” She went on to say: “My philosophy of teaching would be— at this moment in time—would be to strive to teach them in all ways to be the best possible person they can be. So, it’s not all about the math necessarily anymore. It’s, it’s the whole person.” Her relationships with her students allowed her to react emotionally whenever her students had success in her class, which is something she referred to as “bonuses”: “That feeling is like-- that’s what I came for. I mean, not having it all the time doesn't prevent me from doing my job but when it does happen, it's like, ‘Yes!’ That's like your bonus. Because Lord knows we don’t get bonuses so those are the bonuses.”

Eriver’s move into ERT was very isolating, especially because of her desire to be there for her colleagues as their department head. She wanted to be a source of information for her department despite how little information she received from administration. As a result, she spoke often of trying to do her best, but was unsure what to do. The communication she did hear from administration concerned how teachers needed to be considerate of their students and take into account their family situations. Communications like this made her feel even more alone because she felt as if she and her colleagues were not being heard:
Because at the end of the day, we were all told by administration to, you know, help in any way we can because these kids are going through a lot and it always was: "These kids are going through a lot." It's not-- and this sounds selfish-- but it's not...It's these kids are going through a lot. Their families are going through a lot. Hello, [I] have a family. I have kids. They're going through a lot too.

As a result, Eriver found that any communication about the quality of work being done by the teachers seemed to her to be “insincere” at best.

**Mando:** Mando is a 56-year-old social studies teacher with a Master’s degree who works in a large, diverse suburban high school in the southern part of the country. He is a divorced father with a daughter who, at the time of the move into ERT, was in middle school. Although divorced, Mando often commented on how proud he is of the relationship he and his ex-wife have in co-parenting their daughter. This was something that he referenced multiple times when discussing his experience during ERT. Sharing custody provided Mando opportunities to focus on his teaching. He also shared how important the positive relationship he had with his ex-wife was when his daughter found herself dealing with emotional issues during ERT.

Mando’s choice of a career in education was one that he defined as a “calling.” He described the moment when he knew that he was meant to be a teacher:

And I had a dream one night, and I woke up and I said, "Alright, I’m gonna go be a teacher." Literally was a dream. It's nothing. It literally was a dream. When I woke up, I knew I was supposed to be a teacher. It was not a --- it was a calling. It wasn't something I initially wanted to do. I knew it's what I was supposed to do.

He went on to say how he never saw teaching as a job. Instead, she said it was something that he knew he was “supposed to do” and helped provide a purpose to his life.

His description of himself as a teacher focused primarily on two key elements. First, he spoke of how proud he was in his content knowledge and his willingness to help
his students succeed academically. This was seen when he spoke of how he would do “whatever it takes” to help his students learn:

There’s no hidden thing for it. And so whatever it takes. To make an assumption that any two humans are the same-- I don’t care if its the two kids in a classroom or two classes in different periods, or kids in different years, or different schools, or socioeconomic classes, or different races, or different genders or different identity, gender identity, or whatever it happens to be-- no two kids are the same. And so, I would have, I guess, I would have a different philosophy for every kid, depending on what that kid needs, whatever it takes. What do I need to teach you? And that’s what I’m going to do.

Second, as much as he spoke of what he would do in order to help his students learn, Mando spoke more of how he has a bigger responsibility as a teacher to be a role model for the students in his class:

And if I can provide free knowledge on content area that can help a kid do better at something else in life academically wise, that’s awesome. But then in our role as a teacher, I also have the opportunity to model good behavior, model humor, model problem solving, model how to speak with people in groups, and individually how to push kids.

Mando spoke of how important it was for him as a teacher to develop a relationship of mutual respect between him and his students. Mando commented on how he values the positive feedback he has gotten from his students throughout his career as more meaningful than any sort of awards or administrative recognition: “the letter that you get from the kid, the email I got from the girl that got all fives on her AP test. She’s like, ‘I could not have done this without you.’ I mean, that-- there’s your confidence. That any of you need a little pat on the back, there you go. It’s not from my boss. It's from the people I teach. The kids that I help.”
Maria Christina: Maria Christina is a 55-year-old married mother of four children. She has been a foreign language teacher at the same large, suburban school in New England for the entirety of her 31 years of teaching. Of her four children, only one was still in school during the pandemic: a daughter who was in the 7th grade at the time. Recently she was recognized as the Teacher of the Year at her school. Besides teaching and chaperoning numerous student activities, Maria Christina also ran the Unified club, a program that promotes social inclusion by bringing together students with and without special needs for a variety of activities. She found teaching to be very “natural” for her, even more so once she became a mother.

When she spoke about her philosophy of teaching, Maria Christina spoke of how her primary concern was for her students to know that she cared for them. She said:

So I always wanted to be the teacher that parents wanted their kids to have because they knew that I really cared for them. And it wasn't just going through the motions of teaching a subject. It was really more about getting to learn about the child and how they learned, and try to make my subject matter of fun, and just having them want more every day.

Maria Christina spoke of how this was not something that she learned from a textbook or from a class, but something innate: “I think that does come naturally to me. I never learned that textbook, it’s just, it’s inborn. I mean strategies you learn in a classroom. I learn them every day. I look for other resources: “Oh what’s going on now?’ But, you know, I do think that experience has led to it being more natural to me.” She went on to say that mindset is different than when she just began teaching:

I think my philosophy has changed. I think, before it used to be about teaching subject matter and now it’s knowing that I really have to capture the student first, because there's no way he's going to learn from me, if we don't have a relationship. So, my philosophy is build a relationship with your students first,
then the student, the learning will come. Where before, when I first started teaching it was just the opposite.

She identified this desire to develop relationships with her students as a source of pride.

The move to ERT was one of much confusion for Maria Christina because she no longer knew what was expected of her as an educator. She expressed frustration with her administration and their ability to provide clear guidance; yet at the same time, she sympathized with them as well: “They did so much work, and they had so much negativity around them from parents to, you know, state officials telling us what to do, how we're going to run things.” Her inability to connect with her students left her wondering about her role as a teacher and wondering if her students knew that she still cared for them while they were at home.

Rebecca: Rebecca is a 30-year-old English teacher who worked at a suburban high school in northern New England when she moved to ERT. Rebecca has a Master’s degree and has been a teacher for 7 years. During the pandemic, she shared an apartment with her partner. She found herself drawn to teaching because of her love of learning and her love of working with high school students:

And so, I would say that that’s when I decided I wanted to be a teacher. I think what draws me to it, is the kids, first and foremost. I think, I feel really lucky that I get to hang out with teenagers every day. I know a lot of people grimace when they hear that but I don’t. And I think I like it because it’s ...there's never a dull moment. For better or worse, I love that I can always be surprised by what students have to say or what they realize they have to say. And I think I like it because I love being a student and I feel like it’s a continual opportunity to be learning, as well as teaching.

She went on to say how fortunate she feels to be a teacher:

I do-- especially as I get a little bit older and see my friends going through sort of
different phases of job searches and life decisions-- I feel very lucky that I found something as early as I did that I love this much, because I don’t ...I know that’s not a given. And I felt really grateful for that. You know I do love what we do.

When asked to describe her philosophy of teaching, she was quick to identify the importance of teaching empathy to her students:

And I guess I think that in an ever-divisive politicized world that is really important and our, our subject and this field, sort of, allows for... allows for opportunities all the time to be learning about an experience that is different from your own, or finding some connection with someone who has a similar experience, whether it's an author or whether it's a classmate. And becoming a more aware and more compassionate person because of those things, and I think that I ...I value those qualities and I genuinely enjoy sort of developing those qualities alongside students and encouraging them to do that with what we do.

Rebecca described herself as being “too empathetic” at times and how much the relationships with her students help shape her instruction as well.

The move to ERT was emotionally difficult for Rebecca on a personal level. She mentioned how she “personally does not do well with uncertainty” and the move to ERT caused her to feel nervous:

I was very nervous. For the safe ...for my safety, for the safety of the people close to me because I sort of was susceptible to the rhetoric that the world was going to end. Like that was sort of, unfortunately, where sometimes my feelings were. And so, I think like a lot of a lot of being able to do anything at that time was sort of like coming down from that and, and leveling, I would say a bit of the nerves that were that were maybe coming from elsewhere, although certainly the, the uncertainty of, of our teaching situation didn't help, in that respect.
She explained later how these feelings of anxiety ultimately led her to turn to a therapist in order to deal with them effectively.

**Red**: Red is a 63-year-old drama teacher at a large suburban school in the South that serves a wide demographic of students. Red’s husband passed away six months before the pandemic. Although she lives alone, her adult children live in the area nearby. She began her career in theater and was an actress for many years before some parents in the area saw how successful she was working with children and suggested she apply to become the drama teacher at the local secondary school. Red accepted the position and has been a highly acclaimed theater teacher in the state for 35 years. When asked why she moved from acting into teaching, she spoke of the satisfaction she gains working with children in theater: “I just always liked working with kids, even as an actress on stage, when I had to work with children, I loved it. I loved it.”

When asked to describe her philosophy of teaching, she spoke of how much she values the creativity of her profession and using that creativity to reach her students. She described “reaching her students” as “the moment of connection”:

Well, as I said first I've seen that seeing the connection happen, that that moment of connection. And then the actual application. Once they make, they connect the dots in their mind, then they get to physically apply it and see that connection to that and, ultimately, the build from point one to full memorization, full costumes, whether it's onstage or just in class, becoming those characters that we talked about, we studied and we looked at in and researched. The ultimate, the ultimate of performance. The ultimate performance.

Her passion for performing and for the theater program that she helped build was evident and something she brought up often:

And I never thought that I would love it this much. When I first started, I was like "Yeah, you know, I'll keep it for five or six years" but then when I really got rolling
and got that program on its feet...that was the motivation to come in every day, knowing that I had taken a program that had two drama classes, and the rest were English, until my first semester was over, and then I had a full drama program within a semester’s time.

Theater was a way for her to get her students to “forget about their troubles” from the moment that they walked into her classroom.

Not being physically present with her students during ERT was very difficult for Red because she was not able to be “hands-on” with her students. She was also frustrated with how quickly the schools moved into ERT and the effect it had on the opportunities for her students to perform:

Because it was taken away so quickly. So we were just about to go to compete, three days away. And then we were supposed to have two other shows after that as it was: the freshman-sophomore play, and the troupe was going to do one last senior showcase performance. So, I mean it ... [the] whole bottom just dropped out. And I think it was just so abrupt, it just rattled everybody's cage, and it took us a while to kind of get grounded. Before we were like, okay, I can actually tell my troupe: "Use your phone. Send it to me on or send it to me on my own phone. You'll get graded. Try not to do it in your room. Try to get in a place you know that I know see the battle fan going." And give all the instructions again. So I got to say see some performances and they got to do some performances. It just wasn't for the public.

This frustration extended to the district office as well. She expressed how she felt the administration at the central office were unaware of the demands being placed on teachers and on their lack of understanding of how their decisions were affecting the arts as well.
Tina: Tina is a married 40-year-old physics teacher who has worked at an urban secondary school in a large New England city for 17 years. The students in her school typically come from lower socio-economic backgrounds and the school itself has been the focus of numerous reform efforts over the years. She has a Master’s degree and has been recognized as teacher of the year by her school district. During ERT, Tina’s husband was laid-off from his position for a number of weeks, but she spoke of how they worked together during that time in developing lessons for her students. Although she never spoke of any financial issues as a result of the lay-off, that is not to say that there were no concerns for her and her husband during ERT. However, she did not share them during the interviews.

Tina was able to trace her desire to be a teacher back to her childhood and her love of helping people, particularly members of her large extended family. At one time, she contemplated a career in nursing, but then felt that teaching best allowed her to combine her love of science with her love of working with young adults:

I think it's that whole mindset of, like, I can get people to work together towards a common goal, and, ummm....and I'm good at it. I'm good at listening and being empathetic and seeing where someone is at and getting them up to where they need to be. And those things, like, make me like teaching because I feel like I'm good at that. I'm good at helping someone learn something they didn't know before, or, like, accomplish a task they needed to accomplish.

She made reference to being empathetic multiple times during her interviews. She also explained how she enjoys the challenge of getting people to love science and to see how it can be found all around her students.

When describing herself as a teacher, Tina focused on how essential student feedback is for her. When describing the feedback, she was quick to point out that she was not talking about tests or quizzes. Rather, she referred to the immediate feedback
she gets by watching her students respond to her instruction during class. Their reactions and conversations provided her with feedback that helps build her confidence as a teacher:

I think part of it is student feedback. Just sort of, you know, you ...the confidence comes from knowing what you're doing and doing a good job at it. And so how do you know that? Well I know that because my students are learning, but sometimes that doesn't come through, even on, like, a written test. It's ...a lot of times in those conversations you have the kids where they're enjoying learning something that they enjoy, you know-- they're having fun. They're also, you know, able to talk to you about it and, you know, see that growth.

She also described herself as a teacher that is always planning. She explained that she felt preparation was essential to be an effective teacher. She spoke at length of her need to plan more than needed for a set period so that she could adapt her instruction based upon the needs of the students:

And so I think that with, you know, planning, when the students come in, especially in my environment, when they come in, and every day, I know exactly what we're doing, the time that it should be taking. If there's a hiccup, I've already got a side plan. So if it takes too long, or it doesn't take long enough, there's something else on. If you finish early, there's something else for those kids who are-- because I have all the kids, like, in one class together. And so the kids who are a little more academically ready, there's something else. So ...it's just this plan. Like it's ...there's always something for you to do that's meaningful, and things always work.

She was also quick to point out how important it is for her to have a colleague that she trusts and with whom she can workshop ideas. She found that collaborating with this
colleague was just as important in building her confidence as a teacher as the feedback she received in class from her students:

But also, you know, I think it's important to have, in my case, to have a great colleague who, you know, bolsters me up when I need it ...but it builds confidence as well because we can talk about teaching, and I know, like, I'm with her, you know? I know that I'm, I have the right ideas and I'm doing things that I should be doing, and we can bounce ideas off of each other, and that also helps because sometimes you do feel like "Am I ...what am I doing? Am I doing a great job or an awful job?" And to have a colleague say, "You know, I'm seeing that this is really working for you" or you know whatever. It does— it does help. So I think those two things, like the things from your colleagues, things back from the students, is really how I feel confident that what I'm doing is working.

This sharing of ideas and asking for help from her colleague was something that was instilled in her when young: “Throughout my whole life, whatever it is that I’ve done, I've always known that if I, you know, really want to get something done I can, and I can ask for help if I need. It's not like I can just get it done magically on my own, but I know how to get things done because I could ask people for help, things like that.”

When she spoke of her experience during ERT, Tina found the inability to get feedback from her students and her colleagues very difficult. One reason attributed Tina attributed to being unable to get feedback from students was their lack of access to the technology her students needed. She expressed her empathy for those students who had little, if any, internet access when operating from home and who found themselves having to work to support their families. She also found the lack of structure and organization of the “school day” during ERT very difficult as well. She explained how she felt a good teacher is always well-organized, yet she found the move to ERT to lack any sort of organization by teachers and administration to be very frustrating: “You know,
the students needed them [the administration and teachers], and they needed them to be there and they needed them to give them structure and stuff to do, and they...they weren't there for them. And that's how it is in school too: they're not there the way they should be there. So it's just more upsetting for me in terms of the students. Just not fair, you know? That they deserve more than that.” For a teacher who likes to have as much control over her classroom as possible so that she could meet the needs of her students, Tina found that lack of control difficult to accept during ERT.

William Weever: William Weever is a 44-year-old mathematics teacher in a small, suburban school in New England. Married with no children, William Weever has been teaching at the same school where he once attended for 21 years. He has earned multiple awards over the course of his career including being recognized as an AP Commended teacher, teacher of the year at his high school, and a Radio Shack Teacher of the Year. When asked why he entered teaching, William Weever spoke not only of his love of math but also of the influences that mentored him towards being a teacher:

I saw some good teachers that kind of worked as role models for me and I thought that a career in education was kind of a good idea. You know, I saw the benefits of it, I saw the, you know, the interaction with kids, the interaction with other members of the profession. And, you know, I thought that that was something that, that I’d be, that I’d be good at and that was suited to what I knew and what I enjoyed doing.

Besides the mentors, William Weever spoke of how he enjoyed the challenge of making the complex seem simple.

This idea of making the complex seem simple is at the core of William Weever’s philosophy as an educator. He said: “[I] think that really what it comes back to is sometimes, it really is about: keep it simple. What is it and be able to kind of recognize...what do they need to know? How do they ...how can they build? And what
kind of common themes go throughout-- whether it be math, whether it be, whatever-- you know, what, what are, what are those common themes that go through?” He considers himself a perennialist in that he believes that there are certain concepts— which he referred to as a “bank of truths” that all students need to know. He spoke of how, as a secondary school math teacher, he is meant to build upon the work done by teachers in middle school so that students can become successful in whatever path they choose:

My job is: I build off what they've got. And sometimes that means we fill in blanks, we strengthen stuff that isn't as strong as we'd like it to be, to be able to access higher level content. But I think that the purpose at the secondary level is really just to build that bank of knowledge and to take kids to that ultimate goal. I mean whether it be the world of work; whether it be going into technical school; whether it be to go into a four-year college and beyond.

However, William Weever was also quick to point out that a key aspect of this is developing relationships with his students. According to William Weever, these relationships begin with showing students his depth of content knowledge, but then using that as a way of helping kids understand the concepts as well. He said:

Try and show that you know your stuff, and you get that buy in. And that's where...that's where you start to get a relationship with kids and I think that's where it starts. It starts with that they want to learn something and that you care about them and that you can show them something, and you can teach them something. And I think that's what I've...that's what I've been good at-- in my time-- it is that. It's just the idea of being able to try and get kids who weren't always good at math or weren't always interested, to get them to realize that "You know, I can do this too." And I think that's, that's, to me, one of the most important pieces of being able to educate kids.
Forming relationships with his students allows him to adjust his teaching style in order to best meet their individual needs. He continued to talk about ideas such as instilling in his students a sense of “self-advocacy” and an ability to be “intrinsically motivated” to be important to him as a teacher. The importance of these ideas, he shared, was very different from what he would have said when he began teaching 21 years ago.

William Weever did not find the move to ERT to be emotionally difficult, yet he was quick to acknowledge that he did not have the same issues at home that a number of his colleagues experienced. William Weever said: “my situation there (at home) is a lot different than a lot of people's, I mean, it's just my wife and I, so it's quiet here so I don't have ...I don't have kids running around, I don't have, you know, I don't have to take the dog out. I don't have to ...so I mean there's not the same level of chaos that is here that is in some places.” He felt that his district did a good job communicating with them during ERT and he felt he was able to maintain a pretty regular schedule, similar to one that he would have followed during a normal school day. He felt fortunate that he had already had the opportunity to get to know his students before the move to ERT: “And I was lucky in that I, at that point, I had kids who were already, who already I kind of established, that I've already established a rapport with, who were already, already invested in the class. Already kind of knew the routines and, you know, were already bought in.” William Weever did speak of how he felt that not all teachers were working at the same level as him throughout ERT. He said:

And I think that there's, I think that there were some folks that might have mailed it in a little too soon. And I don't know that that was always addressed to the degree it was. But I mean that's ...I ...that's third hand, you know, from, you know, from kids who say, "You know, I haven't met with so and so so for the last week and a half" or whatever. But I am-- and I realized under the circumstances, there's a lot of things that were on their plates too, between determining who was
going to graduate under those circumstances: who was going to ...? what the, what was the...? what is the next step going to be? what was summer school going to look like?– but there's a lot of things that they had to grapple with during that time too. And, you know, I, although I know that there were a lot of people that worked hard during that time. I don't always know that everybody worked hard during that time.

**Data Analysis**

In the process of analyzing the data provided by these participants, three main themes emerged. These themes are: struggling to maintain relationships, which had four subthemes; struggling to redefine teaching, which had six subthemes; and struggling with their own feelings, which had two subthemes.

1. **Struggling to maintain relationships.**
   a. With students
   b. With colleagues
   c. With time
   d. With self

2. **Struggling to redefine teaching**
   a. Lacking guidance
   b. Incorporating new technology
   c. Redefining the school day
   d. Reimagining curriculum
   e. Teaching synchronously and asynchronously
   f. Rethinking grades and assessments

3. **Struggling with their own feelings**
   a. Feelings of guilt
   b. Feelings of anxiety
**Struggling to Maintain Relationships:** “Those relationships you set with people, whether they’re students or your boss, or whoever, that’s everything, everything is a relationship.” (Mando)

All nine participants described their struggles with the changing relationships with students, colleagues, and administration as an essential component of their experience during ERT. The participants also described their struggles with defining time and utilizing technology when operating from home

**Struggling to Maintain Relationships with Students**

All of the participants mentioned how they became teachers because of their desire to interact with high school students. Most of the reasons were similar to Rebecca’s who said that she “loved working with kids.” and that she “feel(s) really lucky that I get to hang out with teenagers” every day. Eriver shared how she “[r]eally enjoy(s) the interaction with kids of that age” and Red, who had a career in theater before becoming a teacher, said: “I just always liked working with kids, even as an actress on stage, when I had to work with children, I loved it. I loved it. And that’s the best thing I can give you.” William Weever commented how those interactions with his students are the cornerstone of his teaching: “And that’s where, you know, that’s where you start to get a relationship with kids and I think I think that’s where it starts.”

The participants described their responsibilities to be more than just delivering content and instead spoke of themselves as role models, confidants, and advocates for their students. Daisy, who worked primarily with students with special needs, spoke at length of the importance of those roles in dealing with her students: “[S]tarting with strong advocates for our students is really kind of key in building relationships and a safe place for kids to grow and thrive is kind of where I like to start in giving them that opportunity.” She went on to say: “Then, you know,...as teachers, you’d have those kids that come in and spill their guts to you and you have that connection with that kid.”
Maria Christina said “But I think there are a lot of kids that need-- I know this is going to be a little cliché-- but they do need a champion in their life.” Maria Christina went on to describe how relationships teachers in general have with their students allow them to know them better than the students’ parents: “We have bonds, we have relationships with them. We know them. Sometimes we know them better than their own parents.”

The participants further explained how meaningful relationships with students were developed by talking with them and listening to them during and after class. Rebecca shared her interactions with students begin by saying hello to them as she walks through the halls or by having “a conversation with a student, either before the class starts or at the end of class.” Maria Christina talked of how she made a point to always greet students in the doorway when they would enter the classroom, followed up with a few minutes of personal questions at the start of the class. These interactions helped her form relationships with her students which became more important to her the longer she taught: “I think, before it used to be about teaching subject matter and now it's knowing that I really have to capture the student first, because there's no way he's going to learn from me, if we don't have a relationship.”

The participants described how developing relationships with students was a way of demonstrating respect while also garnering respect as well. The respect of their students was referenced by all of the participants as essential to their success as teachers. Mando described his philosophy of showing respect to his students when he said: “And so I give a ton of respect because it allows me to demand that respect and in demanding that respect, that lets me get them to be mine.” Mando continued to explain that “get them to be mine” referenced a level of trust his students would have in him which would increase their willingness to take risks as students and as people. William Weever mirrored Mando’s sentiment when he said: “I think that in some cases, kids do for you
because you, you realize that they realize that you care about them and that you think that the, that that learning is important to them in some way.”

The participants mentioned how these relationships with students also empowered them as teachers and as individuals. As teachers, the relationships they have with their students allow them to assess their students’ understanding of content. Some of the participants referred to this as a “lightbulb moment.” Eriver described it as follows:

A light bulb going off, when, when they've got something that's challenging for them, whether it be --and I’m not even speaking of just honors kids. I teach a lot of intro, as we call it. And so that’s kids who have lower reading scores, lower math so there’s obviously challenging skill levels that they need to rise above. It's seeing a student actually say,--and not that they do often,--but actually seeing in their behavior that they get it.

They also shared how their relationships with their students often empowered them as individuals. Mando shared how his positive relationships with his students helped him not only as a teacher but also personally: “When I'm having a bad day, in my personal life, my kids (students) are the ones that are the therapists that pulled me out of it. Teaching, sharing knowledge and having the kid go, ‘Hey, great, great job today. I really enjoyed our lesson.’” Tina said: “Whatever stressors I was feeling, you know, I just felt like I was a ...you know a..I put on the backburner because helping the students made me feel better anyway.”

Many of the participants spoke of how sharing aspects of their own lives was a way to connect with their students. When Mando shared “One of the things that I've always had--and I think this is one of the things that endears me to my students-- is I talk about my personal life,” he was not alone. Others made reference to doing the same thing. For Mando, one part of his personal life he shared with his students that allowed
him to foster meaningful relationships with them was to speak about his role as a father to the point when he would encounter former students years later, they would ask about his daughter: “Like the fact that they know that (personal details about his daughter), and they know to ask that shows that I have that kid as part of my life as much as my daughter is a part of my life. And if they're part of my life, I want them to be able to know who each other are now.” However, not all of the participants found it easy to share personal aspects of their lives. For example, Eriver spoke of how when she began teaching, she felt the need to keep the discussions focused on the content. Yet as time passed, her interactions with her students changed and grew deeper “as long as I was able to let them in.”

When the participants moved to ERT in March of 2020, most of them had been able to establish some relationships with their students because they had been with them for months. Yet despite these established relationships, all of the participants spoke of the difficulty in maintaining them. The participants shared how they lost the ability to have those impromptu discussions in class or to listen to the conversations being held by the students themselves. Mando spoke of how so much of what he learned about his students was dependent upon listening to conversations in class among students, something that ERT no longer provided: “So I don't hear what they're going through. I don't get to hear the side conversations about someone who didn't have breakfast or someone got into an argument with their parents, so they're living at their friend's house, I don't get to hear all that stuff.” Mando continued and said: “And so they-- you don't have that opportunity to get to know them, and or to continue to support them in a way you would have when they were face to face.” These limited interactions with students caused some of the participants to question their effectiveness as teachers. William Weever described his experience as follows: “You're creating distance from the way in which you can interact with them. And those...I think that those things create natural
doubts as to how effective you could be under those, under those circumstances.”

One reason why the participants struggled to maintain relationships with students was that most interactions through available technology. Video conferencing in particular was a source of frustration for many of the participants. Maria Christina simply found it to be a poor way of interacting with students: “That (the use of video conferencing)--that kind of put us at a disadvantage because you couldn't have that relationship with them. You can't do that on a computer.” One reason the participants were unable to interact with their students when using video conferencing was that many districts did not require students to turn on their cameras. Many participants described experiences when they eagerly awaited seeing their students on screen, but often found themselves looking just at icons instead of their students’ faces. This was frustrating to most of the participants, such as Red, when she said, “I didn't like the fact that I couldn't see the kids. And again, there's that hands-on thing. I just, I like being able to see the kids.” Many pointed to the policy regarding turning on cameras as a reason why they lost connections with many students. Maria Christina described this policy as “a big disaster” and said: “I hated that the kids didn't have to sign in. I mean they had to sign in, but they didn't have to turn their computer, their cameras on.” Eriver said how allowing students to keep cameras off “also led to minimal or no interaction, making it even more difficult to know if you were in fact successful in doing your job.” Even when students did have their cameras on, the participants shared their reluctance to engage students in those same impromptu discussions they would have had when in-person because all students were present simultaneously, something Mando described as “all students sitting in the front row” of a class. As a result, Eriver said how she “felt very reluctant to highlight someone and say, ‘So how are you doing Bob or how are you doing Grace?’” Daisy, who acknowledged the concern of teachers regarding students keeping their cameras off, shared her perspective: “You know, and teachers would be frustrated because this kid's
not turning on their camera, not knowing that their kid’s not turning on their camera because their house is absolute chaos, and they don’t want everybody to see that, you know?”

Despite the frustration with the policies regarding video conferencing, the participants shared how trying to maintain relationships in some form was essential for them. The participants spoke of how much they wanted to be there to assist their students through the stress of the pandemic. Tina said how she had “the realization that the kids not just still need me, but actually might even need me a little bit more right now” when describing her efforts to connect with her students. Those times when they were able to interact with their students, many participants spoke how they could sense the struggles their students were going through. Maria Christina shared how she could hear in the voices of her students how much “the kids were struggling” and Daisy said how: “[y]ou see new levels of crisis in your kids, and it’s heartbreaking because you feel even more helpless because how do you fix that?” Yet knowing all that the students were going through made it difficult for some of the participants because of their inability to help. However, those participants also acknowledged how difficult helping could be. Eriver said:

[the needs of the students were] always at the top of our minds because that was what was brought to our attention is to pay attention to the kids. They’re losing. They’re struggling. They’re not knowing what you know...YOU have to help them. So it was “be their teacher, be their confidant, be their psychologist,” if you will. And...and that ...if you, if you thought about that too much, that could overwhelm you-- totally overwhelm you.

The participants did benefit from these interactions as well. Rebecca said how “incredibly meaningful and even comforting to be able to continue to have a connection with these students when we were not able to be physically together and when so many
other opportunities to be with people outside of school had also become unfeasible.” Red used personal anecdotes about her life during the shutdown because she said “[it] made me feel like I was at least giving them the part of me that I could without physically seeing them, every day and [I was] put[ting] my hand on their shoulder on their way out the door.” Mando shared a moment when he actually had a chance to see his AP students on a video conference. In retelling the story, I could see the emotion in his face. He explained how a large number of students attended and “I did set up a Zoom for all my AP kids. So I had a zoom call with I don’t know, 80-90 kids on it, I was in tears. Like I started crying….It’s choking me up right now.” He went on to say how much it meant to him that his students made the effort to come onto the video conference while reminding him how much he missed seeing them in person.

Not all of the participants were able to connect with their students during ERT and none were able to maintain the same level of interactions they would have had if in person. This inability to connect with students, however, was something that affected all of the participants. Claire’s experience captured this best. Claire said how she knew her students were struggling when they moved to ERT and how much she wanted to be there to assist them through it all, but the demands of being a mother of multiple young children made that virtually impossible. Her own children were at home learning remotely and were dealing with their own anxieties. As a result, she had to let those relationships with her students go, saying how she “pretty much ignored them through the pandemic.” This was a visibly difficult admission by Claire, who needed a moment to collect herself. She spoke of how she wanted to be available for her students, but found ERT made it too difficult to balance her responsibilities as a teacher along with her responsibilities as a parent:

I don’t feel like I had enough capacity to also deal with tragedies and happiness and everything else that the kids were bringing into my room. And so I just put
up a wall, you know? Just because I was at capacity with my own three at home. And it's not that I didn't care, because I did develop those relationships and developed them so much more earlier though when I was younger and I didn't have kids. And it became not that I didn't have time, but ...just that ...I didn't ...I didn't have the capacity to deal with it.

Her expectations for herself as a teacher made the inability to be there for her students even more difficult:

I love being a teacher right now--or not right now-- but I love being a teacher, but I can't-- and I want to ...I want to have a Google Meet with my kids. I want to see who's where, who's where, but like, I kept rationalizing. "Well, they're home with their parents and their parents are in my shoes and so their parents are also giving them the attention that they need so it doesn't have to be me." Whether that was true or not, that was what I was telling myself. And I know full well that there were kids that didn't have their mom and dads at home and that definitely needed their teacher, and I was unavailable. I was unavailable.

She went on to say:

I had to ignore [the students], I had to ignore school. It became, and I'm ashamed to say it, I'm ashamed that for the months that we were emergency remote teaching from March, April, May and June, when I had colleagues that I know were getting online, and, and Google meeting with the kids and meeting with kids, I was taking premade lessons, throwing them onto Google Classroom and grading them for completion, because I couldn't teach my kid math, my two kids how to read, deal with my three year old, and it was just, plus a house. Plus, they can't go anywhere, there's no outlet for them. And it just turned into...(long pause). ...Ignoring.

**Struggling to Maintain Relationships with Colleagues**
The participants also spoke of their attempts to maintain their relationships with colleagues during ERT. All of the participants made reference to the important role their colleagues play when in-person, with descriptions ranging from purely professional to deeply personal. Professionally, they spoke of how their colleagues help them improve as teachers. Tina spoke of a colleague that works across the hall for her that has been a resource for her for years: “I think it’s important to have, in my case, to have a great colleague who, you know, bolsters me up when I need it but also is reality, when, you know, I'm trying to do something that is too complicated or too easy.” As a drama teacher, Red described many experiences when she depended on other members of the fine arts department to offer professional critiques of her students and their performances. More importantly, she spoke of how much she appreciates her ability to share her frustrations with them about her classes or her rehearsals: “it's really nice to walk into your colleagues' rooms and just sit down to the chair and, you know, 15 minutes in between, you ...just be able to blow off some steam or ask how things were from the day before that you knew.” Claire spoke at length of the importance of her colleagues in helping her as a teacher when describing her work on an interdisciplinary team at the secondary level, going as far as to admit that she “wasn’t any good without them.” Claire also spoke of how her team provided her with a safe space to share ideas and to take risks as a professional. She described her relationship with the colleagues on her team as something that validated her as a teacher. Daisy, who also worked on a team at her school, remarked how important it was for her to be able to “pick up the phone and call one of my colleagues and we could just vent and kind of go through the day because we were in the same boat and bounce ideas off one another.” However, despite their relationships with colleagues, many of the participants described feelings of loneliness when in-person. Some attributed it to the makeup of their secondary schools, such as when Eriver mentioned she feels “kind of are isolated within our own classrooms
day to day, even when we're physically in a building.”

When the move to ERT occurred, many of the participants commented on how they continued to reach out to their colleagues. However, these participants were clear that the only relationships with colleagues that they could depend upon were the ones that had already been established. Claire said how she did not feel connected with anyone with whom she did not already have a relationship while Red found herself reaching out to her “little circle of theater people” while operating from home. She said: “my department, we were-- as I said before-- we were all in communication with each other, probably once a day, if not more.” Yet even beyond the small group with whom they communicated, all the participants commented on how they took comfort knowing that all of their colleagues were going through the same shared experience, a sentiment often referenced by many participants as being “in the same boat.” Eriver said how there was “a constant reassurance that we were all in a similar boat and hopefully all paddling along together to the same end” while Daisy said how she thought “everybody (was) on board rowing in the same boat in the same direction.”

However, the participants clearly differentiated between relationships with colleagues and relationships with administrators. Most described their relationships with their administrators to be sources of frustration. At the beginning of their description of their experiences with administration, most of the participants acknowledged that ERT was one that the administrators had never encountered before. Many of these participants also expressed some level of empathy for administrators who were trying to deal with parents, with edicts coming down from the CDC, and with their states’ Boards of Education. However, this led to conflicting information coming from administrators within the same school. Red spoke getting differing information from her building administrators about what was expected of her as a teacher, making it difficult for her to give her own students answers. She said: “Well, and each administrator
seemed to have their own idea, which was even more confusing because we had (administrator name) and the English teachers had (administrator name), and, and they weren’t connecting. However, Red did describe one building administrator in particular who she felt did well in reaching out during ERT: “Anyway, he, as I said he, he maintained the coach feel, and reached out to all the teachers on every day just to make sure that we were doing okay, and if we needed anything, please let the school know.” However, she felt that he was the exception and not the rule. Red was most upset at the lack of communication from her superintendent, who she felt simply remained in his office and had no understanding of what teachers were experiencing. Red, like many of the other participants, spoke of how she felt “isolated” as a result. The participants all shared how they would get “emails offering support” at the beginning of ERT from administration. The participants shared how those communications were appreciated. However, as ERT continued, many of the participants expressed how these emails from administrators lost their authenticity, described by Claire as nothing more than “lip service.” Eriver described the communications she received as follows:

I mean, yeah, there are comments there are "You guys are doing a great job." But it was never with heart. It was never ...you know like, you could tell it was just something that had to be said. It was never, you know, worried that much about how you were doing professionally and personally throughout the process,

**Struggling to Maintain a Relationships with Time**

The push into ERT took all of the participants out of the structure and routine associated with teaching in-person. The loss of structure made it difficult for all of the participants to define a beginning and end of their responsibilities as teachers. Rebecca found the lack of a set schedule during the day disconcerting because, “having zero parameters does not feel good or productive to me.” Without that structure, many of the participants spoke of how difficult it was to allow themselves to stop working. Tina
mentioned how the day never seemed to end as she was constantly emailing students and parents and trying to give as much feedback as she could: “It’s, it’s one of those things that like so timewise, it was from when I woke up to when I went to bed.” She spoke of working late into the night trying to ensure that students were receiving work back to them for the next day. Daisy said: “I think some days it was just looking at the clock and realizing you were so lost in what you were doing, and now it’s 7:30, you know, and it really comes down to, ‘Are you still working?’ I think sometimes that was the stopping point was someone else saying ‘Are you still doing something?’” She then continued:

Some days I’m like ”Oh I gotta get started right away.” I’d be up at six o’clock, answering emails, and I’d be working and working and maybe I take a break, like four, and then I get back on the computer because there was a sense of urgency that I needed to help these kids because we were in the middle of this crisis, and here's this kid who really wants to pass this math class, and has all these questions and I'm it. It's me, you know?

Erive mirrored this sentiment:

I think it was because you were never off. Like when before distance learning, if I left the building, I could feel like I was off and done. And I actually would still get emails from kids, but I could feel like, ”Yeah, I'm done with that. I'll catch it the next morning." When COVID hit, distance learning hit, I didn't feel like there was ever any cut and dry. So, at five o'clock if someone who was absent from the day's lesson said, "Oh, you forgot to put it on," you know, sometimes I forgot because it wasn’t in our, my nature yet to always put things in so I would forget to put some on Google Classroom so they would email me at five o'clock or 530 or six o'clock--whenever they looked at it again. And, of course, I'm going to do it because, yeah,
it needed to be done. But there was...the lines were not there anymore. The boundary lines.

She went on to say: “[L]ike when does it stop, you know? Like where, where can I honestly say it’s fair for me to not answer that now. I didn’t...there was no way to answer that question myself. Like, where can I draw the line?” This sense of obligation was shared by most of the participants who felt obligated to keep going long after their contractual hours. Many participants questioned whether or not they should even stop at times during what would be their normal school hours. Without a set schedule, the participants took it upon themselves to develop some sort of routine. For someone like Tina who spoke of how much she thrives on routine, this required her to set times for her to walk away from teaching during the day:

I started to take that break from like three to five or three to six. That would be, I’m cooking, I’m cleaning, you know, depending on what the weather was which was pretty cool last year, you know? I would always go for a run. I actually tried...I actually did a lot more exercise because I’ve walked and run usually. I try to take a walk during my lunch break, just again, to break up like the day.

Even though Tina set time for her to disconnect from her students, she still felt the need to get back online: “And I did get better. Like, I got a better schedule for myself. I had to actually make a rule that, at three o’clock, I would sign off. That’s, you know school ends up at three, and then I didn’t let myself go back on until whatever time, you know? Five or six or something.”

**Struggling to Maintain a Relationships with Self**

All of the participants shared how their experiences required them to take care of themselves both physically and emotionally, but not all were able to do so. They felt their emotional strength was important because of the need to be available for their students, such as when Tina spoke of how she often pushed aside her own emotional needs in
order to meet the emotional needs of her students. Many participants also shared how being emotionally present for their students also benefited them as well. Mando spoke of how his desire to be strong for his students actually strengthened him: “I really wanted to be strong for my kids. So I had to be strong myself, which helped me.”

Being “mindful” during ERT and needing to take time for themselves was something else the participants described. When asked to define mindfulness, Eriver said: “So it is really taking, putting time aside: reading a book, going out and exercising, enjoying your family--all those social emotional things that, you know ...Mindfulness.” For many of the participants, this mindfulness meant allowing themselves to stop focusing on their students and their responsibilities. For many, this meant disconnecting, such as when Red spoke of how she “would walk away from the computer for a while. I would just, I would have to go out on my back porch and just to sit in, you know, in the sunlight a little bit. Get some ice tea, go have a snack-- something.” For some, taking time for themselves meant taking time for themselves spiritually. This provided a sense of comfort for some participants, such as Daisy. Daisy shared a bit about how important her own faith was during ERT and spoke about how it gave her a sense of perspective. For her, it was “having that sort of awareness of things [being] bigger than what we are capable of even understanding at that time and moving forward.” Besides giving her some perspective, Daisy spoke of how her faith was also a source of hope: “I think we just sort of rallied around, you know that hopefulness, that that faith that things will, you know, return to some sort of normalcy and people will be okay and your family will be okay and your, you know, students to have and your colleagues at school that they’re gonna survive and be okay.” Daisy was not alone in turning to her own faith during ERT. Red, Maria, and Eriver all spoke of how much they needed to take time for their faith in order to deal with ERT.
All of the participants acknowledged that they were told to take care of themselves at the start of ERT. They all made reference to emails or postings on social media extolling the need for them to step away from their roles as teachers. However, some of them felt that the sentiment changed as ERT continued. Some of the participants spoke of how the terms “mindfulness” and “self-care” became platitudes expressed that lacked any real meaning. Daisy said:

It's kind of like self-care-- that was another one you heard. "You have to take care of yourself. self-care." Well self-care isn't a shower. That's basic hygiene. So, give me something else. That's...it's...it's a double edged sword. Like I think there was, I think there were true good intentions behind the word and how it was used and what they meant and I think that some, some leaders truly meant it. But at the end of the day, this person had to answer this person, had to answer this person, had to answer this person and essentially you were talking about "This student is failing. Why and how are you failing the student?" And not failing the (unintelligible) teaching. How are you failing them emotionally or you're not....Because, yeah kids fail. They don't get the concepts or whatever, but when we talk about kids failing it's bigger than just them failing the class because I think a lot of times it's like, if a student is failing your class, you have failed them in every way possible. Not just as, you know, that role as a teacher. You have failed them.

Yet despite the need to take time for themselves, some found it difficult. For someone like Claire, taking time for herself was incredibly difficult because of her responsibilities as a mother. She spoke often of how she was unable to find any balance. As a result, she found herself emotionally drained: “From the moment we went home on March 13 until...the moment we went home on March 13 until June 25, or whatever date that was, I had no day where it was just like, ‘Oh, right. Like, I feel good about this now.’
And if I showed that outwardly, I was faking it. For sure. No balance, there was none.”

Claire was visibly emotional when speaking about her lack of balance:

But if something has emotionally taken a toll on me, it doesn't matter what's in front of me. I can't work on it. And because kids require so much of you as a parent emotionally, it became very hard to do the schoolwork because I found that to be lesser than my children. I felt like I was so nervous all the time because my kids are in those formative years. Was (name of son) going to be behind in reading, you know? Was (name of daughter) getting everything, the mental stimulation that she needed? Meanwhile, I got those two at the table and we're ignoring the two-year-old, who's in the other room playing by herself. Granted, I know that she needs that but she had an awful lot of that during ERT. And so I was not able to compartmentalize, so I was not able to get things done.

This inability to compartmentalize and take time for herself made ERT even more difficult for Claire.

**Struggling to Redefine Teaching:** “Everybody [teachers during ERT] was in crisis and if, if nothing else, we know that when we're in crisis, you have different people and sometimes they're their true selves of what it is that they are capable of doing and all that. But, as educators, we had to look at that, quickly assess, and come up with what we thought was going to be the best way to teach the material to support the students, all at the same time.”

*(Daisy)*

The experience of ERT required the participants to change to a pedagogical approach they never expected. With no preparation and little direction, the participants had to reimagine themselves as teachers and to redefine academic success while isolated from colleagues and students.

**Lacking Guidance**
The move to ERT was done quickly. The participants found themselves knowing they were going to have to adapt their teaching but were given little information from the start. Many of the participants referenced the uncertainty of that day in March 2020 and how little they knew what changes it would mean for them as teachers. Tina described her moment when her school told students to return to their homeroom to wait for further information:

We so...so finally, we start to get all the kids together and again, there's no announcement, there's no email. We’re just sitting there, you know, waiting. But of course we teachers realized enough like "Let's put on the news." So in most classrooms, you would have seen, Governor (name), you know, giving her announcement that she was going to shut down and do these various things. And so we were sort of, you are watching that at that point. But it was, I want to say, at least that we were in the classroom for an hour and a half, but it might have been two hours before the bell rang. They obviously kept us there until the end of the day. So...so again, like, we don't really know what's happening.

Without clear guidance from their administrators, some participants spoke of gathering pieces of information on their own but were unsure of what it all meant. Eriver said:

I think though that we all thought it would go away, you know? That-- all right, we can do this for two weeks, and then we'll be back to normal. And, as time went by, we started to find out more and who's paying attention to the news and who's paying attention to administration emails as much as-- there weren't many, if I recall. It was basically what you were hearing on the news.

The lack of guidance meant that the participants were unable to pass along information to their students. Rebecca found herself in a classroom with students she did not know and describing the uncertainty of the moment:

The next day, Thursday, was when everyone thought we would go remote but no
one knew for sure until the end of the day when the principal came on. I was in “directed study” last period that day. And I remember like somebody coughed and I winced. Because no one was wearing a mask. And the principal came on, like, 20 minutes before the end of the day, and announced that we would be fully remote starting the next day. That there would be no school for students the following day, which was a Friday, but that teachers would come in to figure out how to do remote teaching....And so the rest of that school day, which admittedly wasn’t that long, but he announced that, like, during the last period. And I remember thinking like how, how can anyone do anything for the rest of the school day now that we know that that’s happening-- students and teachers? And it was sort of a strange place to be because I don’t really know the students in “directed study”, everyone’s sort of doing their own thing, but it’s sort of like, "Who do I talk to? How do we talk about this?” Also I think we have, we’re supposed to leave now after school and so-- I don’t know.

Rebecca spoke of how “we had the clarity that that was going to happen but then we had the clarity that we had no idea how it's going to work” and went on to say how they “did not know as much about what it meant to be effective at teaching in this time.” Others described their experiences as trying to ease the emotional uncertainty of their students, but struggled to do so without any clear direction. Maria Christina described trying to allay the concerns of her students and those of her own daughter:

I tried to, as a teacher, I tried to...you know, I told the kids I was being proactive instead of reactive, but I said, "Worst case scenario, you're just working from home for a few weeks, you know? We'll still have class we'll still be able to do our stuff." So I was trying to be calm for them and even for (name of daughter), like I said because she worries about everything. But I was still trying to not panic, you know? Try not to panic. I didn't know how we were going to figure everything out
for school. With the internet. I didn’t know what the expectations were. Many soon found themselves trying to answer questions from parents as well. Daisy, in particular, found herself answering questions from parents who were concerned about ensuring their children’s IEP and 504s were being met. Not having any clear answers became a source of frustration for her:

So I think that anxiety and not having the answers when people were asking you for the answers ...You know, the teachers were the contact points. Yeah principals, I'm sure, we're getting questions and calls, but not the same level. I mean every day in class, you have students asking me questions about who/what/when/where/ why are we coming back? Because it took them weeks before they finally decided we wouldn’t be stepping back in the building. So that was an anxiety producing enough for, you know, my students for so many reasons because they, you know: “Am I going to see my friends again?” “Am I going to, you know, get a hot lunch or a hot breakfast?”

The lack of guidance from administration made it a struggle for participants to envision this new style of teaching. They understood that the methods used when in-person would no longer work, leaving someone like Eriver with even more questions:

You know, like all of what we do is so reactionary to what they feel and how they interact with us, and all of us were just like, "How do we do that? How do we..." You know we're talking into a box now. And we can't ...We can't ask them to be online and show their face even, so how do I know if the five students out of 20 that usually struggled in class are actually getting it now, and if they're actually even paying attention to me when I'm presenting new lessons? Now it was...there were so many questions about how to do what we did. And the best way possible to do it.
Without clear answers from administration, many of the participants tried to reach out to their colleagues for direction. Mando spoke of how he felt the lack of information from anyone caused a great deal of confusion among his colleagues:

The zero preparation from anybody for that (move into ERT)--- not not that anyone had any preparation. Not that anyone knew what to do with that-- but I don't think our district did any guidance at all. I don't think my union did any guidance. Everyone was on their own, freaking the crap out, sending emails to each other. "Hey, how are you doing this? What are you doing with this?" We all helped each other-- you know, the teachers you're friends with, whether they teach at your school or not. You may reach out to "Hey, what are you doing with this?" And just, yeah, I don't ...I, you know, I don't think they did a good enough job.'

For Daisy, she found herself brainstorming with colleagues from her department to try to alleviate that sense of confusion:

So, we were put into groups to try to brainstorm schedule, and what that should look like: should we meet with our students every day? every other day? How do you sort of manage that chaos? And then we broke into departments to sort of brainstorm department wise, because this was brand new for exceptional ed: “Wait a minute, how do we serve students in a virtual classroom?” You know, what does that even look like? And not knowing.

Maria Christina’s department also met on their own to try to find answers: “We talked about what we’re going to do, how we’re going to do this, who’s going to do what. So, that week was super stressful, because nobody knew what...nobody knew what to do.” Yet she also spoke of how the speed in which the administration expected them to prepare for ERT added to the confusion:
I remember listening to different professional development ideas for how to teach via Zoom or Google Meets and what to do and how to even get on-- because we've never even done that. So that was a lesson in itself. So, I just felt like they should have given us more time to do that. To better prepare ...It just wasn't a good time.

**Incorporating New Technology:** While all the participants shared that they had used technology in their classrooms previous to ERT, the level to which each of them had integrated technology was different. Yet the move to ERT made all forms of technology essential in redefining their teaching, none more important than video conferencing. However, although they were told to incorporate video conferencing into their teaching, they had little time to learn how to use it effectively. Daisy described the struggles some of her colleagues had with video conferencing at the start of ERT:

> Over the course of the weekend, we got like three or four emails like one right after the next. Each email had different information about new changes. So literally Monday was like "Hey we're going to need faculty on Microsoft Teams", which was hysterical because everyone in my group text was like, "What's Microsoft Teams?" because it was one of those things that nobody--like-- we hadn't done that. We hadn't had a faculty meeting that was virtual remote, so it was a comedy of errors with everybody, logging in--- and we're pretty big school for our area-- so we have 100 or so teachers plus all the other faculty, because they wanted everybody to log on, so it's pretty amusing watching people not know how to turn the camera on and get logged in and get through the app. So we met and you could feel the sense of just change, that nobody really knew.

Despite their own struggle with the platform, they found that their students struggled as well, making instruction that much more difficult. William Weever described an experience he had when he began using video conferencing with his students:
Well, the technology aspect of it was, it was a daily struggle always because you didn't, you didn't know. "Could you hear...can you hear me okay?" They drop out. "Did you hear what I just said?" You know? So now, you're not answering the question because you don't know? Because you can't hear me? Because I'm not on? Like, so there's always that technology aspect kind of looming over you in terms of, like, how much, how much could they get out of what I just said?

Besides incorporating video conferencing into their instruction, the participants spoke of how they felt the need to keep finding different online platforms and different uses of technology to use with their students. Rebecca spoke of the need to try “every type of technology” as a way “to fill this sort of unknown” of the time. Much of this exploration of technology involved trial and error for the participants as many of them felt they had little, if any, technological support from their districts. As a result, many of the participants, such as Eriver, depended on their spouses or partners at home to assist them in learning new ways to incorporate technology into their teaching effectively. Tina, who described herself as being quite adept with incorporating technology into her teaching, recognized that many of her colleagues were struggling with technology during ERT:

I'm a quick learner and I'm good at technology. But God bless the people who had to figure that all out, like, in that moment, you know? Just some of the teachers couldn't unmute themselves, you know what I mean? Like, I do that sometimes by accident-- but I mean, some didn't understand how to work in Zoom, when we're doing a full meeting with the school. So then you think, not in a negative way, but just in a “feeling bad” way, for some people, I'm sure....It's a very different story if they had to figure that all out, but I had to know how and so that helped.
Some of the participants felt pressure to use more and more technology, which made many of the participants feel as if they were never doing enough. Tina spoke of meeting with colleagues to talk about technology often made her feel ineffective:

Yeah, I think that, I mean, when it first happened, I, you know, I dove into work, and again I say that but like honestly, I felt at that time when you talk about confidence, I felt very ineffective. And when I heard other people saying like, "Oh I got Johnny to sign on" and I didn't get Johnny to sign on, I'm like, "What am I doing wrong? you know? "How come I'm not getting Johnny?" But, you know, and just, you know, like I said, like you heard other people saying they're like "Well I'm doing, you know, the Jamboard" and I'm like "I got a Google Jamboard" you know? So I felt really ineffective, but I don't think—to be honest—I don't think I was any more or less ineffective than anyone else like your average teacher. I think, you know, it's easy to sort of ...it's just like Facebook. It's easy to throw a couple things out in the faculty Zoom and make it sound like you've got it all together, but I'm sure everyone was struggling just as much as I.

Later, when reflecting upon it all, Tina was impressed with how many different ways she found to utilize technology during that time. She said: “And of course, it was just, you know, again this whole new wave of technology. I...you know, if you ask me how I even learned all of it, I couldn't. I don't even know if I could go back and tell you, but that's what happened at that moment.”

**Redefining the School Day:** The participants shared how many of them on their own had to redefine the parameters of the school day itself. Without clear direction from administration, many of the participants tried to create schedules for their individual classes. In the process, many found their schedules conflicting with those of their colleagues. This was common at the start of ERT for most of the participants. Rebecca
spoke of how put a schedule together that she thought would work with her students without any guidance:

`I arbitrarily decided that my A block class was going to meet at nine and my B block was going to meet at 10 and, you know, C was going to be at 11 and D was going to be at 1145, or something like that. I just picked the time. I said "Here's a Google Meet link." I sent an email I think to the class and said, "Here's, here's when we'll be meeting. You know, I hope you can join." But, but, you know, if a kid's math teacher had said "We're going to meet at 11" then the kid had to choose, and that happened during the first couple of weeks. And I did get feedback from the class that I had decided that we're going to meet at nine. They were like, "This is too early." So, then I think I changed it, but it was very, sort of, ad hoc and loose.

The conflicting schedules was a major problem for someone like Daisy who needed to work with teachers from various disciplines during ERT. She found herself helping her colleagues develop schedules so that her special needs students could have a certain level of consistency:

So teachers were creating their schedules with their students. You know we're meeting at various times throughout the day. And that's when we start– I think after the first week– we kind of came back and said "All right, we need to keep to your time slot. You know if you're going to meet with kids, here's the schedule that you need to follow."

Reimagining Curriculum: The participants also spoke of their struggles in adapting curricula they had been teaching for years to ones that would work remotely. One reason for needing to change their expectations was because teaching the easiest of tasks became very difficult to do remotely. Simple in-person tasks like passing out papers or providing examples in front of the class became a struggle. This was even more difficult
to do when trying to teach students who were lacking the academic support at home that they would have received in-person. Daisy shared a time when trying to teach her students a simple task that would typically take five minutes in-person: “Instead, it takes me 30 minutes to get the board set up and try to get it on screen. And then my internet goes in and out. You can’t really hear every other word, you know, so it was like whole new levels of frustration for tasks that would take five minutes in person to 30 minutes, virtually.”

Once they realized the challenges of teaching remotely, the participants shared how they needed to teach less than they would if students were in-person. Eriver, who began with a new group of students at the start of the semester, said: “I didn’t feel the stress anymore of how am I going to get through the curriculum I need to get through? Because nothing was known. It’s like, okay I can worry about this, and stress over it, but who’s that gonna help?” Rebecca spoke of the hard time she had at first “adjusting her expectations” for her students and found that she had to learn to feel comfortable about doing less with her students than she normally would have done:

the expectation of what we could accomplish in any concrete amount of time went way down. Because sort of inherently ...like if we're going to spend 10 minutes of this Zoom saying hi to each other, that's something, but that’s 10 minutes that we’re not going to be talking about outlining an assignment or editing or whatever. And I would say-- I think also just the sort of stamina, was, was much lower to do anything online. And so an activity that was longer than 10 minutes was probably not going to be worth it.

William Weever felt it his responsibility to be conveying “some information out to them as succinctly and as easily as I can, and to try to get them to, you know, still engage in a good conversation about mathematics.” Like most of the participants, this meant that William Weever had to be content with accomplishing less than he would in-person:
Certainly, the ...when you’re teaching something like calculus and the depth that it had, and we were teaching in 20-minute classes? That was something that was difficult to try and boil it down to where "Alright guys, we got 20 minutes, and I can do a question and a half in 20 minutes." And that ...We can move the ball forward, but we can’t move with that, that much forward. So it’s like that was a very difficult thing in terms of trying to manage my own expectations as to what I could accomplish reasonably in that period of time.

Later, he said:

I scaled down the workload because, again, like, I mean some of the nuances, some of the ...some of the details stuff wasn’t necessary under those circumstances. So that you can have a good idea of a topic without, without delving into every nook and cranny to get there. So, you know, I was selective in what, in what I assigned at certain places. I was able to ask tougher questions that I might have had them kick around in class. Might be, you know, an example question that we kick around together instead. You know, some of those homework questions were cut down. You know, I mean, if you can do it right 10 times, you don’t need to necessarily do it right 50 times and so.

Rebecca shared how she also came to realize what she was able to accomplish: “I think yes, in that I was able, pretty quickly to discern, you know, these are the things that I’m going to do that work for me and my students and I’m going to keep doing them, or not keep them. I have found that this works and then I’m going to keep doing it, you know?”

Tina, who had shared at length the academic struggles of her students when in-person, spoke of adjusting so that what she taught was meaningful and accessible:

And so then came, how do we, how does-- you know, each person found a different thing that worked-- but how do you get your kids to come to class and do what they need to do, giving them things that are meaningful, but then also
totally accessible? Because again, I love my students very much, but for so, so many of my students, they do need a lot of support, you know? It's written down in the (newspapers) that my students are further behind than students in other schools. And so they're coming into physics, they don't have a lot of math skills and all that stuff and so now I'm trying to teach. And, of course, you were at a point where things are just about to get harder. You do a couple of easy things, you sort of try to scaffold them up and now all of a sudden things are gonna get harder, and that's when we're gone. And, and so that was a real struggle.

**Teaching Synchronously and Asynchronously:** Synchronous and asynchronous teaching was new to the participants during ERT. Most of the participants found themselves utilizing some sort of combination of both when trying to instruct. Eriver described her experience teaching synchronously and asynchronously as follows:

I would go through a lesson. I had Adobe, so I would scan in my lesson, which is a fill in the blank, kind of notes that we would normally give them. Scan that in, give them that in Classroom. They would open it up, I would open it up. I would write on it, filling it in. I would tape it, when I remembered-- sometimes I forgot. But I would tape it so that anybody who missed that could see it again. And then I would leave them with a worksheet to practice what I had just taught. And that was honestly the way most every class went. I would leave them the last 10 minutes of the hour or so when I say "Alright, get started."

By combining the two approaches, Tina tried to make the experience both meaningful and personal for her students:

So anyway, so, then of course you have the kids who really can't come. So then you're recording the Zooms so that the kids can have it, but then you're realizing, like, recorded Zooms sort of sucked, and they're not as informative. So, what I actually ended up doing, which I thought worked-- and I do think it works pretty
well-- I think. In the end, I took attendance with just an attendance form like, "Let me know if you worked on these assignments today." But I Screencastify every lesson beforehand, and I tried to make them really interactive. Um, you know, and I also had and I last year-- not last year, the year before when this happened-- I actually had a very high percentage of students who were.. had resource teachers in the classroom, usually with me ...So what I ended up doing, which worked really well, were these pre-recorded Screencastifies with PowerPoints that I tried to make as fun as possible. I made a lot of my own videos so they get to see my face still, you know? I did little experiments and you know whatever it was. But I Screencastified the video first, so we could interact. And what I posted for the assignment was, like, sort of like those note sheets where there's blanks, like, "Fill in this definition" or "Fill in this missing set of words" or "Fill in this equation." And the way I did this I was, like, "Okay we're gonna do these parts together." And so we do about half the worksheet together, you know? I do think/wait-time where I'd be like, "Pause the video and press play when you're done." And then like they ...and I would always say, like "Welcome back!" you know? Just silly stuff. But so they, you know, they come back and ...And then, at the end of that, I'd say "Okay, so we learned all those things. You did all those things. Now you're going to complete the last questions on the worksheet on your own, and you're going to submit that to me." And, you know, and so I tried to put a range on there.

Synchronous teaching for many of the participants meant working in small groups to answer questions or working one-on-one with individual students via video conferencing. Daisy described one of her experiences teaching one-on-one with a student:

Yeah, I had, I had a student who we were desperately trying to graduate and it
was time for the student to move on. And they were really struggling with the content of what they needed to do. And they weren't getting what they needed from the teacher and I said “Okay– you and I are going to sit down, and we're going to hammer this out.” And we were on Zoom for, I think, three hours going through this coursework...And as we were kind of breaking it down, she's like, "Oh, this makes sense" and then she would kind of go off and answer several and then she’d kind of pause and need my help. But through that she finished.

These small group or individual synchronous sessions required them to reinvent lessons to meet each student’s individual needs. At the same time, as ERT continued, the participants became more aware of how remote teaching brought them into the homes of their students. This changed the dynamic for some as they began to see their teaching as more “intimate”, such as when Daisy described her experience:

But if the pandemic highlighted anything, it was that you really truly had a tailor to the needs of your students because it was sometimes a more intimate teaching experience, because it was ... I mean you were in people's houses. And everybody was in crisis and if, if nothing else, we know that when we're in crisis, you have different people and sometimes they're their true selves, of what it is that they are capable of doing and all that but, as educators, we had to look at that quickly assess and come up with what we thought was going to be the best way to teach the material to support the students, all at the same time. And it looks different in every classroom. Learning was, in every single classroom ... it was different, and it wasn’t good or bad. It was just different.

**Rethinking Grades and Assessments:** ERT caused the participants to question their traditional methods of grading and assessment. One reason why grades became less important is that many districts changed their policies on how grades would be used, such as districts deciding that students’ grades during ERT would not count against the
students’ overall scores. Daisy shared how her district decided that they (the district) “were going to use that last quarter to remediate, basically, the third quarter” and Mando shared how his district actually changed their views on the grades needed on a state graduation requirement: “And my district got rid of a lot of requirements that you had to have for-- the state actually got rid of requirements that you needed for graduation. Like ‘You have to get a score of this on a test’, then they said ‘Okay, in COVID, it’s waived.’”

The participants also spoke of no longer using grades as a punitive measure to hold students accountable for turning work in by certain due dates. All of the participants spoke of how they knew many of their students were going through some difficult times that were more important than schoolwork. As a result, most of the participants were willing to accept work from students regardless of due dates. For some, this meant accepting work up until the end of ERT. Eriver described this change in the participants thinking when she said:

So those boundaries that used to exist where I could say "You had a homework assignment. It's due when you get to class. I check it off, and we move on and it's not in by that time, it's late." We were told in several cases, several times over and over and over: be mindful that they're going through a lot. They're trying to process things. So it...I think it was said right out that you don't want to put punitive measures on their grade based on, you know, being late, or whatever, because they're going through a lot. So that left it totally up in the air. And a lot of us read that as "I can accept anything, anytime." And, you know, even quizzes and tests.

However, some of the participants questioned this approach at times because some students simply never appeared online during class or never turned in any work. They questioned the validity of passing students who would have traditionally failed their classes. Red shared her frustration with her district’s approach:
It got to the point where if a kid had not done anything, our next question was, "And you still want us to give them a D?" And that was the answer. What you're saying is: “Yes, for the most part”... so we had to tally up how many F's we had, and why. We had to justify why they were given the grade of F and we were like, "Well just look at (online grading platform), you know? Look at the grades. Turned in nothing. They didn't log in." But we had to justify every one of them.

Yep. Every one of them.

She explained that she was told by her administrators that failing students meant that she was not showing them “grace and compassion,” phrases heard by other participants as well. This was something Red termed “insulting,” especially when she spoke of all the phone calls she made to connect with students who did not turn in any work. Red went on to say:

Well, you can't pass a kid if they're sitting at the other end sleeping all day and not even attempting to get onto the computer. How do you handle that with grace and compassion? That you know but ...quite frankly his idea was, you've got to find a way to make them pass. That was his ultimate goal. Well, if they're not doing anything-- and a lot of us raise concern about that to our department chair who would take it back to the principal who would have to take it to, you know, to the superintendent-- but we just, he wouldn't budge. I just ...I just think he needed clarification and better communication with us.

With grades becoming less relevant during ERT, giving students feedback became more important for the participants. The participants utilized a variety of approaches when giving feedback such as email, videos, chats, phone calls, insert comment features, and online discussions with their students. William Weever spoke of how his students, “would let me know how things were going (in class) in certain ways through emails, through things that they contributed in chats and verbal stuff, and
obviously also by the work product that they turned in.” The participants found that the feedback they gave was important in validating the work the students were doing. Tina shared how returning work with feedback quickly to the students became important to her:

> It’s like getting that feedback from kids requires me to give them feedback and so it’s this constant feedback. I graded things they handed in that night. I wanted it graded in 24 hours for them. So it was like, "What you’re giving me is important to me and here is it back” and that way I get the next thing from them.

Finally grades and assessment were no longer seen as an effective way of gauging student performance because many of the participants doubted the validity of any form of remote assessments. Quite simply, many of the participants questioned whether or not the work submitted by their students was reflective of what they were capable of doing on their own. The participants had no way to prevent students from looking up answers online or from collecting answers from their peers. William Weever said he felt “that testing kids in this environment was not productive, was not productive at all.” He went on to say that he thought giving tests “was a fool’s errand to give them a test that they could turn around and, you know, cheat with their friends on it, so I didn’t bother.” Maria Christina shared William Weever’s concerns over testing. She said she did not trust assessments:

> [B]ecause when they were remote, they could cheat. They could do it. It’s the truth. It’s, you know, you had access to everything on this computer, and we had no way of knowing. So as far as the check ins and the assessments, you know, they were not...we did the best we could with our situation.

Some of the participants found the inability to assess students very difficult, as if they were relinquishing their primary responsibility as teachers. Eriver described it as a loss of boundaries:
But in the back of everybody’s head, we were told you gotta be flexible because they (students) are going through a lot. So, we had no boundaries. Essentially, you can cheat on your quiz, you can hand it in to me at any time, you can make it up at any time, you can tell me you're not ready for it, and can I say no? Can I put my foot down and say "No, Sorry, you're gonna take it." I didn't feel a sense that we could do that. And so there's no boundary.

**Struggling with their own Feelings: “[I felt] guilt because I didn't have that...I wasn't...I felt like my students were, academically, not gaining. And I felt because I didn't have relationships with them. There was nothing I can do to help them, other than let them know I'm there.” (Maria Christina)**

The experience of ERT required the participants to deal with a variety of feelings associated with the pandemic as well their feelings associated with their responsibilities as teachers of children during a time of crisis.

**Feelings of Anxiety:** Some participants struggled with feelings of anxiety regarding their own health and the health of their loved ones. For Rebecca, these feelings became so strong that they manifested themselves as an anxiety attack for the first time in her life:

I was really nervous. I mean, I've never ...I've always been a cautious person, I would say. Like I'm not a risk taker, but I have never experienced what would sort of became obviously identifiable as anxiety, until March. And for the months after that....And I remember Mother's Day, actually– I was thinking about this earlier because I was thinking "Would this come up?” but I guess it's only coming up because I'm bringing it up– but ...we had been in it for a little while, but I remember having a perfectly nice day with my mom. We sat outside, we were separate and that felt like we could do that. And then I felt very conflicted about whether or not to go inside her house. And she said that I could and I almost did,
but at the last second, I didn't. And then I got really upset that I hadn't, and also felt uncomfortable-- I would have felt uncomfortable if I had. And so I think that was sort of my mindset-- not completely 100% of the time-- but somewhat perpetual state of...Rather than being the exception, it was the rule to feel sort of uneasy and nervous--and that's not my norm. I would say my norm is the opposite. But I remember, I remember saying later that night like "I just want this feeling to go away and it has not gone away for longer than sort of discrete amounts of time."

These feelings continued for Rebecca, even though she was able to work from home, a place where she felt safe from the virus:

I felt this sort of like the same sort of nervousness about, well, what's going to happen, you know? I would say I felt, to some extent like, “Well, what does this mean? and how is this going to work? and how can I know what to do and then do it well?” And those--those I think at the beginning at least seemed like sort of unanswerable questions.

For Mando, his concerns were not over the physical health of his daughter, but over her emotional health. The length of time Mando spoke about the way his daughter's personality began to change during the pandemic, from being outgoing to more withdrawn, showed how much the experience meant to him:

It was very emotionally tough for my daughter because she had gone from March until whatever-- October, whatever-- and really hadn't seen any friends. [She had] her 12th birthday, all this stuff that was. She had seen her mom, her stepdad, me, and the four grandparents– one of which almost died COVID. (Mando’s ex-wife’s) mom almost passed away. And so it's really hard for her, and I get it. I remember...I told her mom. I'm like, "She needs to go back to school. She mentally she has to go back to school, it's not an option anymore."...She just
didn't want to do it. Like she was lethargic and it ...I mean, it hurt our relationship. And we have...we have (amusement park name) annual passes but we didn't go to (amusement park name) for nine months because of COVID. And we didn't do any of the stuff that we would have done. I'm like, "What are you doing?" Like "Get in the car." "Why?" "I don't know. We're just gonna go drive around, we're gonna go drive. Roll the windows down and drive and blast music." And, you know, that was a fun evening for us....And it was she who asked me, like, "Dad, I want to go to therapy." Like wow okay you're self aware that you know the value of that.

Besides concerns regarding physical and emotional health, many ascribed their feelings of anxiety to their sense of obligation as teachers. Some spoke of an obligation to do more to help their colleagues through some difficult times. This was true for Eriver who felt anxious that she was not doing enough for members of her department, especially because she knew many of them were struggling:

And it was loud and clear to me on many occasions when we would talk that some of my colleagues were very frustrated. [They didn’t] know how they were going to do all of this. Scared to death about what was happening and how they were going to be able to persevere and move through it. I also had department members that were struggling with home situations that I was already aware of before the shutdown, making them a little bit more at the forefront of my mind, as far as, you know, do they need assistance more than [academics]? My department was really, really close all the time. And so, dropping us all and having us just never meet again for, you know, the foreseeable future was like, "Oh, now what?" We always are together, you know, at some point. And every day, we were always together. And to be dropping that from our day, I was devastated by that.
Others, like Daisy, felt anxious that they were not doing enough in meeting their obligation to make the work meaningful:

[I felt] anxious, but not probably for all the reasons people would think. It made me anxious because I didn’t have answers to give to parents and students that they were seeking. ...because how do you tell a kid to keep going and, yeah, login and get this work done when they're like, “Well what does this mean? What does this mean for me?” ....Because that's what you're supposed to do? Because not [every teacher] is motivated and I'm going to do this because of the duty because of the guilt.

**Feelings of Guilt:** Guilt was another emotion expressed by a number of the participants when describing their experiences during ERT. Many of these participants felt that they should be doing more to help students struggling to get through ERT. This was evident when Daisy described feeling guilty because she expected more from herself, which she referred to as her duty:

I think especially during the pandemic, it was this, this sense of guilt. Like, "I've got to do my part." Just like teachers do. Teachers carry, I think, the weight of the world on their backs. Out there in the news and the media is, you know, this teacher stays the day or this teacher really sucks. There's no in between, you know? But it's your job as a teacher because if you're sucking, you're not not doing your job. You're supposed to be doing this for free and then working all these other things in your off hours to make the world a better place and I think that whether you think that in your head or it's kind of subconscious, you're always. That's why. ...I mean we're in the business of people. So I think that knowing that, that, and then having this crisis on top of that, it was just this overwhelming sense of duty. And guilt. I would, I would say both.

Much like Daisy, Claire wanted to do more for her students, but found herself unable
because of her inability to balance her responsibilities as a teacher and as a mother.

Claire said:

I was so unfulfilled...I am good at my job, and I felt like an ultimate failure during...during that time. I just felt like I was, I was getting paid to do a job that I was barely doing. And on one hand, I'm like, “Well everybody's in this boat and so I shouldn't feel guilty”, and on the other hand, it was just like getting paid well, people are losing their jobs, and (in a much softer tone) I'm not doing my job. That's kind of where I was at.

Yet Claire also described her sense of guilt as persistent:

I always felt guilty, saying, "I need this time because I got to go grade these things. So can you take the kids?" For whatever reason-- I mean I know that that's on me as a parent. He is easier with [feeling guilty] than I am. And that's, that was part of the problem, that's ...My personality didn't allow me to find the balance either because [not doing her job as a teacher, it's just not who I am. I'm a-- I'm a doer.

The conflict Claire felt over not being there for her students was evident throughout the interview. However, she continued to assert that her role as a mother took precedence over her responsibilities as a teacher and she had to come to terms with that:

I felt like an ultimate failure as a teacher, not completely as a parent, because I allowed myself to be present for my kids and I did a lot of sacrifice for myself. And I know I'm using that term "sacrifice" like, I know that there...I know that I was lucky. I know that I was lucky. My kids were healthy. I was home. We could feed our kids. I was still getting paid. So I know that, like, my sacrifices were relative, right? I played games with my kids. I really valued that time with my kids, even though my kids drove me nuts. So as a parent-- not completely. As a teacher-- completely. Because I didn't do anything and I wasn't okay with it. 

107
As the interview continued, Claire became visibly emotional as she spoke of her concerns that her feelings of guilt will never fade:

I don't think that that kind of guilt will ever really go away. I don't really ever...even on good years [of teaching], I don't feel like I've fully served my students the way that I'm supposed to, you know? Like, because I am juggling other things and I'm not fully present for them all the time and I... I don't know, I don't know if it's like my idea of a teacher. I mean, in my mind, like I want to be that teacher that we've seen in the movies, you know? I want to be Jamie Escalante or I want to be Robin Williams, but it just the reality is just different. And so I'm... because I don't think I'll ever... I think that's my, that's like my goal and I don't... I don't feel like I'm ever going to get there as long as I've got all these-- I'm being pulled in every different way.

Others expressed feeling guilty because of the job and family stability they had as teachers during a time when others did not. Mando acknowledged the struggles many other people were having financially during the pandemic and how fortunate he felt to still be working: “Lucky. [I felt] very lucky that I had a job and that I was...Like, I almost didn't want people to know. Like, they see me out there doing yard work every day...and I'm getting paid. So I guess lucky? Embarrassed?...Not really embarrassed—lucky.”

Daisy shared how some of her guilt came from comparing her stable home life with the unstable home lives of many of her students:

And the guilt? I think that's just...knowing how...how blessed I am in, you know, my children, my husband, my life—granted, we are not living the highlife by any stretch of imagination or taking yearly vacations to Hawaii by any stretch of the imagination—but, you know, we're relatively healthy. (Knock on wood.) We have...we have what's a typical normal family, and trying to provide—I think there's that guilt of trying to provide some sort of normalcy for my [students] that
don't have that. And that, that stable force is probably where the guilt comes from.
CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The move to emergency remote teaching (ERT) stripped away the trappings of traditional education and reduced it to its essence, which refers to “a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon” (van Manen, 1990, p. 10). For the participants in this study, they found themselves isolated, without any clear direction, trying to redefine and balance their responsibilities as teachers with those outside of school. In the process, separated from the professional support systems present when in school, they struggled to build the self-efficacy required to meet the demands of the new pedagogical approach ERT required. There has been much research into the need for fostering teacher self-efficacy (Baloran & Hernan, 2020; Donohoo, 2016; Donohoo, 2018; Holzberger et al. 2013; Hsiao et al., 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016) in order to prevent teacher burnout (Dabrowski, 2020; Hart & Nash, 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Rajendran et al., 2020; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007; Sokal et al., 2020). This hermeneutic phenomenological study attempted to add to this research by examining the participants’ experiences during ERT in order to understand the factors that allowed for the development of their self-efficacy.

Discussion

This study attempted to find the essence of ERT by examining the meaning nine teachers gave to their experiences in an attempt to find commonalities. One of those commonalities is that ERT placed the participants in a phenomenological mindset without their knowledge. Before ERT, teachers entered schools with what phenomenologists refer to as a natural attitude, meaning an experience in which they rarely questioned the elements of education but simply took them for granted (Dibley et al., 2020; Peoples, 2021; Vagle, 2018; van Manen, 1990). Part of that natural attitude was
the implication that teaching took place within a set structure, during a set amount of time, with the ability to interact with students and colleagues face to face. As a result, structure, time, and interactions provided the foundation on which the definition of successful teaching had been built. Any modeled behavior, any vicarious experiences, or any mastery experiences had been built upon that as well. ERT lacked that foundation. Without that foundation, the participants moved from the natural attitude to what phenomenologists refer to as the lifeworld: the moment beyond time, space, and relationships where individuals are immersed in the phenomenon itself and see what they had previously taken for granted (Berndtsson et al., 2007; Bevan, 2014; Vagle, 2018). Being in this lifeworld forced the participants to see education and themselves in ways most had never seen before. As a result, the essence of the experience was one of tremendous instability as the participants rebuilt teaching and learning while juggling their responsibilities as teachers and as partners, parents and family members.

**Research Question One: What were the meanings and understandings secondary school teachers gave to the experience of ERT during the COVID-19 pandemic?**

Instability defined the experience for the participants. These veteran teachers found themselves isolated, trying to recreate a meaningful educational experience for their students. This was done with little guidance from others, making validation of their efforts difficult (Dabrowski, 2020; Reich et al., 2020). As a result, the participants were left to question previously held assumptions regarding the foundations of education and, in the process, themselves.

**Questioning Educational Foundations**

Before ERT, curricula served as a foundation for the scope and sequence for what would be taught by the participants. Yet all of the participants found their curricula to be impractical when confronted by the demands of remote teaching. One demand was ERT
changed the dynamics of instruction for the participants, making the explanation of material more difficult than when in-person. The participants also spoke of ERT making the most basic aspects of their instruction— from distributing materials to holding class discussions— much more demanding as well. This forced each participant to re-assess the educational value of their content standards, thereby resulting in them all focusing only on what they deemed to be essential. Rebecca spoke of how she came to realize “the reality that not everything [is] of equal importance.” William Weever in preparing his AP Calculus students for their test during ERT spoke of how “some of the details stuff wasn’t necessary.” This reconstructed curricula by the participants focused on “depth over breadth” as they resorted to providing deeper instruction on fewer concepts. This was done by the participants based on their experiences as professionals and based upon the needs of their students. This involved making lessons relevant and approachable. Tina, in particular, spoke at length of the struggles her students experienced, many of whom had to work to assist their families, or lacked the access to technology needed to be successful during ERT. Keeping them in mind, she reworked her physics lessons to make them meaningful for her students in hopes of encouraging her students to attempt the work. However, the reworked curricula was built without any knowledge of its success. Except for the two participants who referenced their AP scores, the participants lacked any quantitative data— such as standardized tests— or qualitative data— such as their own mastery with the pedagogical approach— to reaffirm their curricula choices. While some spoke of individual moments of student success, all described levels of uncertainty reflective of their inexperience with the pedagogical demands of ERT. This led many of the participants to doubt one of their fundamental roles as teachers: to ensure their students are learning.

The instability of the experience was also due to grades being declared an invalid form of assessing student performance. This led most of the participants to doubt another fundamental role they had as teachers: their ability to accurately assess student learning.
For all of the participants, the change in grading policies and graduation requirements made by the districts was a fundamental shift in their pedagogical ideologies. Grades, traditionally used as the way of determining the effectiveness of one’s teaching, were essentially deemed inauthentic during ERT. Participants also found them doubting the credibility of any student assessments. These doubts were due to the ease with which students could submit work that was not their own. As a result, qualitative evidence became a more authentic means of assessing students than quantitative; feedback became more useful than grades. Yet just as the participants shifted their methods of assessing student work, they found themselves being told to provide grades for their students at the end of ERT. Lacking their traditional evaluations methods, the participants were being asked to justify grades dependent on assessments no longer being used that were based on curricula rewritten individually during a pandemic.

**Questioning Their Roles as Educators**

All of the participants stated that they entered education to do more than just teach. They all expressed a desire to make a difference in the lives of their students. The participants held their responsibilities as role models and/or mentors to be just as important— if not more important— than their content. Yet ERT either removed all further interactions with some students or limited those interactions with students to video conferencing, email, and the like. Interacting through technology was found to be a poor substitute for interacting face-to-face. It denied the participants the ability to see the “lightbulb moments” that served as an essential type of formative assessment. In addition, they were no longer able to hear the discussions in their classrooms that allowed them to assist their students academically and to connect with them personally.

Yet the participants all shared the heightened sense of responsibility they had to maintain some interactions with their students due to the difficulties they knew their students were experiencing. This desire to reconnect with their students coupled with the
lack of ability to do so effectively with technology led most of the participants to express feelings of guilt, frustration, or anxiety. Yet as the participants continued to talk about their experiences, it was evident that these feelings reflected something much deeper. Their use of words like “calling” and “purpose” when describing teaching captured their feelings regarding their roles as teachers as being something more than a job. As a result, their inability to assist their students through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic affected some of the participants personally. Many of the participants spoke of how their interactions with students when in-person provided a level of confidence in addressing their own personal issues. By interacting with students in hopes of assisting them through the difficulties associated with the pandemic, some of the participants found themselves empowered as people. Conversely, participants unable to interact with their students found themselves doubting themselves as people as well. This added to the instability of their experience.

**Research Question Two: What impact did the move to ERT have on the experience of developing teacher self-efficacy?**

Bandura’s (1977b) social learning theory is key to understanding how teachers developed their self-efficacy during ERT. The experience of ERT magnified the role triadic reciprocity played in whether or not participants felt efficacious. According to Bandura, triadic reciprocity involves behavior, defined as one’s response to certain stimuli to achieve a goal; personal factors, defined as one’s learned experiences; and environment, defined as one’s external social context. For the participants, being present at school meant that behavior was regulated. This regulation was done through the use of things like bell schedules, school policies and classroom norms. Being present also placed the participants in an environment that allowed for the development of relationships with students and faculty. In addition, being present in school established an environment that allowed the participants physically to separate from the responsibilities associated with being at home.
Finally, in-person schooling placed the participants in familiar positions that allowed them to build upon the pedagogical success that they had experienced on their own or that had been modeled for them.

While environment, personal factors, and behavior together can help teachers learn to find success, teachers can also learn to find success from one or two of the factors as well. For example, a teacher can learn success if one develops a positive relationship with a student (environment) and covers everything planned for the day (behavior), even if one has felt nothing but anxiety over a parent meeting throughout the day (personal factors). Likewise, a great lesson that has the students talking as they leave the classroom (behavior) can outweigh the regret over the handling of a disruptive student (personal) and the lack of time talking with one’s colleagues (environment). However, there are also times when one component can be so overwhelming that the other two cannot counterbalance them. For example, a teacher who has suffered the loss of a loved one (personal) may find that their emotions eclipse any desire to talk with students (environment) or even to plan a lesson (behavior). Yet over time, that same teacher may utilize the other two factors (environment and behavior) as a way to return to some sense of equilibrium. Thus that teacher may long for the structure of the day and the ability to laugh with students as a way of overcoming personal feelings of grief.

In all these instances, success has already been defined by and modeled for the teachers. Knowing the definition of successful teaching and having it modeled is important in fostering teacher self-efficacy. Bandura (1977b) defines self-efficacy as the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce an outcome. However, one can only successfully execute the behavior if one can envision the outcome. Without envisioning the outcome, teachers are unable to ascertain if they can execute the behaviors needed. Until March of 2020, ERT itself had never been envisioned. As a result, the participants were left on their own to envision successful teaching and to implement the
behaviors needed to reach that outcome. This required the participants to learn to be successful by rebuilding teaching based on each one of Bandura’s three components of triadic reciprocity. These results can be seen in Table 3.

**Table 3**  
*Participant Triadic Reciprocity during Shutdown*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Environment (a)</th>
<th>Behavior (b)</th>
<th>Personal (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mando</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>River</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Able to develop relationships that assisted participant through ERT  
(b) Able to create stable routine/schedule during ERT  
(c) Emotions/feelings were addressed or maintained successfully

One participant found no success at all during ERT. Claire was the only participant who had elementary age children or younger at home during ERT. For Claire, her environment was dictated by her responsibilities as a parent. These responsibilities overwhelmed her ability to develop a consistent schedule because she was always responding to the needs of her children. In addition, the demands on her time as a mother limited her ability to take time for herself because she felt any free time she had should be spent focused on returning student work. This focus on student work also denied her from having the interactions with her students that she valued most as a teacher. As a result, Claire’s feelings of guilt and shame were the result of her inability to achieve "balance,"
leaving her feeling overwhelmed. In fact, in her final reflection, she expressed a great sense of anxiety over any possible return to ERT in the future unless her environment changes. She actually spoke of her willingness to leave the profession if a move to ERT occurs again similar to the one in March of 2020. Claire, more than any other participant, found herself contemplating leaving the profession as a result of her experiences during ERT. Even as school returned to in-person during the 2020-2021 school year, Claire shared how she still had not had time to process those feelings at the time of our interview:

I'm either processing it, or I have blocked it out. It's like PTSD and it's gone. Because I haven't really been seen once. I'm more focused on what we've experienced as a hybrid teaching over the past nine months--or 11 months or whatever it was. Nine months. So I feel like my time to process ERT is gone. I don't have it anymore. It was a time in my life where it's like...I will not look back on it fondly, but like that's...I think I'm still processing this past school year, not so much the ERT

Because of her experiences, Claire’s sense of efficacy appeared non-existent.

Others, such as Red, Eriver, and Maria, expressed low levels of efficacy during ERT due to the environment. Red and Maria both shared how performance was a major component of their subjects. Red, as a drama teacher, and Maria, as a foreign language teacher, spoke of classes that required students to act or to speak aloud. ERT took away the authentic opportunities of performance those participants valued as their classes were limited to video conferencing as a way of duplicating an in-person experience. Yet both Red and Maria found video conferencing an ineffective means of replicating their classroom environments. Eriver also struggled with the use of technology in creating the relationships she felt helped her students learn. More importantly, she found the environment problematic because her students' dependence on technology made validating the authenticity of her students' work difficult. These three participants found their negative experiences with the environment to be too much, causing all three at one point in their
interviews to question their purpose as teachers. However, these three participants spoke of how their families, their faith, and their ability to take time for themselves were essential in counterbalancing their environments. As a result, they were able to feel some efficacy at times during ERT.

One participant struggled with personal issues only, yet still was able to achieve a certain level of efficacy. Rebecca shared in our interviews how the anxiety associated with the pandemic was something that she had never experienced. Her concerns over the health of her mother, as well as the social unrest in our country during those months as well, were identified as the cause of the first panic attack she ever experienced. Her feelings of anxiety continued even after students returned to school the following year, leading Rebecca to begin mental health treatment. Yet upon reflection, Rebecca identified her district providing a clear structure to the school day and her ability to interact with her students as two factors that allowed her to feel a certain level of efficacy during ERT. In Rebecca’s example, environment and behavior helped counterbalance her emotions and feelings.

Four other participants—Mando, Tina, Daisy, and William Weever—spoke of feeling efficacious during ERT. Like the other participants, these four also struggled with the changes to their content and to their pedagogy. They shared the instability they experienced personally and professionally. However, despite that instability, they all were able to create environments and behaviors that they felt helped them achieve a level of success. All four spoke of having support from a partner or spouse at home that allowed them to focus on the demands put upon them by ERT, which allowed them to create a stable environment. However, all four spoke of personal qualities that they felt assisted them through the experience. These four participants shared having high levels of confidence in themselves as teachers and in their abilities to pivot as needed. In particular, these four participants referenced their years of experience as important in embracing the changes of ERT, including using and learning new types of technology. These four
participants also spoke at length of their personal qualities that they attributed with helping them deal with ERT. Mando, William Weever, and Tina spoke at length of their inner drive and determination which had helped them both personally and professionally. Daisy shared the role her faith played in providing her a sense of hope during the most difficult times of ERT. Thus their ability to feel efficacious seems to be rooted in their ability to balance personal, environmental, and behavioral factors.

Thus, this balance of the three factors of triadic reciprocity was key in shaping the essence of the experiences of the participants. Upon closer examination of those experiences of those who felt a level of efficacy, the following conclusions were drawn based upon Bandura’s hierarchy:

1) Mastery experiences only occurred towards the end of ERT when some of the participants achieved a certain level of technological success. While some, such as Mando and William Weever, pointed to their students’ AP test scores as evidence, most others pointed only to the implementation of various types of technology during ERT as a sign of mastery. None identified their own assessments or their own teaching as a sign of mastery.

2) Vicarious experiences were never mentioned by the participants as a way of building self-efficacy. While some identified receiving emails from tech support or from colleagues explaining ways to use technology, none identified a time in which they were able to watch a successful lesson by other colleagues during ERT. While it may have occurred, the impact of the modeled behavior never gained the participants attention enough to mention it during our interviews. In fact, many of the participants doubted the voracity of their colleagues’ successes instructing their students during ERT, comparing those stories to the sharing of life events on social media.
3) The participants found verbal feedback useful in fostering self-efficacy during ERT. Some shared how their interactions with colleagues helped them develop a sense of solidarity, making the participants feel less isolated and more that their experiences were shared by others. Student feedback was described by the participants as having the strongest effect. Moments when they reconnected with their students were always described as being very meaningful. However, almost all the participants doubted the sincerity of the verbal feedback they received from administrators. Many shared how they found that feedback to be insincere at best or insulting at worst, often commenting that administrators during ERT could not understand the experiences of their teachers.

4) Nothing was more important for the participants in this study than their emotional and physiological well-being in developing self-efficacy. Teachers who spoke of being efficacious during ERT spoke of having a strong sense of self and did not feel high levels of anxiety associated with the pandemic, although they acknowledged that not to be the case for many of their peers. These participants spoke also of their ability to be mindful or to turn to their faith to assist them through that time. Those who struggled the most felt feelings of high anxiety or feelings of guilt due to the fact that they were not able to do their jobs well, despite their desires to do so.

**Importance of the Study**

Emergency remote teaching is most likely not going away. Since March of 2020, many districts throughout the nation have transitioned back and forth to ERT in response to health, weather, or other emergency issues so that students can continue to learn. While the length of the remote learning varies by district, the fact remains that districts are seeing it as a viable form of instruction. In order to improve the quality of teaching and learning
during any move to ERT, districts need to begin by understanding how teachers experience these moves to ERT.

There has been much research done on the effects of teacher self-efficacy on students' achievement. This study attempted to add to that research by examining the experiences of teachers themselves during the move to ERT beginning in March of 2020. By understanding those experiences, those involved in education can learn how to assist teachers in developing their self-efficacy with any subsequent move to ERT.

This study finds the experience of ERT to be one of great instability for the participants. Lacking the stability typically associated by the participants with in-person learning, the participants struggled in varying degrees in their ability to build a foundation that would allow them to feel efficacious.

Implications for Research

While this study adds to the literature, it also identifies a number of different areas that warrant future research. First, this study focuses on the experiences of secondary school teachers during ERT. However, the experiences of elementary school and middle school teachers may have been different than the ones expressed by the participants in this study. Therefore, more research needs to be done in understanding the particular experiences of elementary and middle school teachers to provide a foundation for future research relevant to those teachers. Second, further studies should be done into the experience of teachers that takes into account more variables than the ones considered in this study. For example, race and socio-economic status were not considered when selecting the participants of this study, but would be worth including in any future research. Case studies of teachers with children at home, or with financial challenges, or with family members dealing with health issues during ERT would also be useful. Third, the participants in this study all expressed concerns over the effectiveness of their methods during ERT. More research should be done on remote teaching and learning in order to
provide practical tools and resources that teachers can use to assist in their specific content areas. In addition to that, more research needs to be done on ways to ensure student accountability on assessments when operating remotely. Finally, most of the participants in this study expressed some level of emotional distress at some time during ERT. Studies should be done on ways to assist teachers with their own emotional issues during any subsequent move to ERT in order to assist in preventing any feelings of burnout. This should include access to mental health professionals and to child-care. It should be noted, however, that the participants shared many observations concerning issues such as the inherent inequities embedded in education and in society that were revealed as a result of the move to ERT. However, these issues were beyond the scope of this study.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

This study identifies needed changes in all areas of education in order to prepare for any subsequent move to ERT. The following recommendations are offered:

1. Schools of education should begin implementing policies requiring all aspiring educators to take classes that teach remote teaching as a pedagogical approach. Remote teaching has been identified by school districts as a viable alternative to in-person learning when issues arise requiring schools to close. In addition to remote teaching, these classes should also provide research-based strategies for conducting hybrid classes successfully. By requiring students to take such classes, they can experience a certain level of mastery and comfort if their districts should move to ERT at some point.

2. Districts should have clear plans in place regarding their expectations for teachers during ERT that can be distributed immediately. All of the participants struggled at first with trying to schedule their time during ERT, and some continued to struggle as it continued. Most participants felt a certain level of efficacy once their districts clearly delineated the length of the school day, the schedule schools would follow,
and the amount of time for each class. These changes should be made reflective of the conditions found in their respective collective bargaining agreements already established. District expectations need to be shared with the teachers and with the community as well so that parents and other stakeholders will not place unreasonable demands on teachers, such as expecting teachers to be reachable at any time of the day.

3. Districts should increase funding to ensure that all teachers and students have access to and support for the same technology, both at school and at home. This means ensuring students have access to WI-FI at school, are provided the same equipment, and have quick access to tech support when needed. Many of the participants spoke of feeling frustrated for their students who were unable to get online during ERT or who had problems with their devices. Participants spoke of their inability to help those students and accepting their constant absences to be the result of their technological issues. This limited opportunities for learning as well as for connecting with students, connections that are even more important during difficult times.

4. If districts are able to open schools safely so that teachers only can return to them while their students remain remote, they should do so. Bandura’s triadic reciprocity shows how the environment plays an important role in social learning. While districts may not be able to assist teachers in addressing the personal factors identified in triadic reciprocity, opening schools may address the environmental and behavioral factors. Simply having teachers operate in an environment that places them in a professional frame of mind, away from the responsibilities of home, with the possibility of talking with colleagues may improve their chances of feeling efficacious during times that require ERT.

5. Discussions among policymakers should be had regarding the role of grades at the
secondary level as a valid way of evaluating student work. When the move to ERT initially occurred, the participants found administrators trying to provide direction on how to grade students during the pandemic. The participants spoke of administrators sharing ideas such as grades no longer counting for students and scores of 55 as opposed to a zero being used whenever students do not submit work. The participants found themselves no longer connecting attendance with grades. Instead, the participants were evaluating students based upon the quality of work they were producing. ERT reinforced to the participants the importance of having students understand the content more so than just completing the material. Demonstration of mastery mattered more than grades. Reimagining grades and assessments in traditional school settings will make any future move into ERT more seamless for teachers, students, and parents.

6. Moratoriums on implementing any new initiatives at the school, district, or state level should be considered upon returning from ERT in order for students and teachers to become reacclimated to traditional schooling. All of the participants shared various levels of anxiety over returning to their schools after ERT. Yet upon their return, the participants shared that they were confronted with various initiatives and were never given time to process the experience with their colleagues or their students. ERT revealed the importance of some form of self-care. Many participants shared how developing relationships with students and colleagues is a form of self-care. By providing time to re-establish relationships, teachers may be better able to address needed initiatives at a later date.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The experiences chronicled in this study remain very much relevant today. At the time when I began the study, I had hoped that ERT and the pandemic of 2020 would be a distant memory. I thought this study would provide an interesting glimpse into the past
experiences of teachers in order to provide insight to those in the educational field into ways to assist teachers when the need to move to ERT would arise again. Sadly though, the pandemic is not over. While teachers have not returned to emergency remote teaching on a consistent basis, the final reflections by my participants show how they view the current situation at the time of my writing in February, 2022 to simply be an extension of their experiences with ERT in March of 2020.

The participants in this study expressed their love for the profession and the high standards to which they hold themselves. Despite the toll the move to ERT took on each one of them in some form, they all expressed a sense of hope that public education can learn from the lessons of ERT. ERT revealed the need for changes in education for them and they spoke of how ERT provided an opportunity for all stakeholders to take some time and reassess the traditional American educational system. Yet when asked to reflect at the end of this study, most of the participants expressed a level of frustration at being unable to reflect with their colleagues and share their stories. Instead, they returned to their schools to face new initiatives, hybrid teaching, new educational platforms, and pressure to make up for “learning loss.” The push is to return to normal. Yet this study shows that there is much to be learned from the teachers who went through the COVID-19 shutdown about teaching and learning. They have stories they want to share. They simply need all the stakeholders in education to listen.
Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

STUDY TITLE
Chronicling a Pandemic: Using Hermeneutic Phenomenological Methodology to Understand the Meaning of Teacher Self-Efficacy during the COVID-19 Pandemic

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS
Principal Investigator: Diane Kern, Ph.D.  Office: (401) 874-9490  Email: dkern@uri.edu
Secondary Investigator: Timothy Kenney  Cell: (401) 742-6669  Email: timkenneyeghs@msn.com

INVITATION

You are being asked to participate in a research project through the University of Rhode Island that will chronicle the experiences of secondary school teachers engaged in emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This research has been approved by The University of Rhode Island Institutional Review Board.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?
You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a secondary school teacher engaged in emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

Knowing that emergency remote teaching will continue to be an aspect of pedagogy for secondary school teachers, research needs to be done to understand the experiences of secondary school teachers who moved into emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research hopes to provide an understanding of teacher experiences in order to gain insight into the ways—if any—teachers developed their self-efficacy to meet the demands of the emergency remote teaching. Understanding these experiences may provide a deeper understanding of ways to address the needs of teachers during any future moves into emergency remote learning.

What will be done during this research study?

What will be done:

If you decide to take part in this study here is what will happen:

- **Consent process (5 min):** You and I will set up a phone/video call through timkenneyeghs@msn.com to discuss the research project and answer any questions. If you want to participate, you will then scan and email your signed consent form to me.

- **Questionnaire (10 minutes):** Once I have received your consent form, I will email you a questionnaire via Google Forms. This form will ask you a
series of demographic information. This demographic information will be used to develop a sample for the study. You will receive a follow up email within three weeks time informing you whether or not you have been selected for this study.

- **Interview One (45-60 minutes):** Once you have agreed to participate in the project, you and I will set up a time, date and form (either face-to-face or via Zoom) to conduct the interview. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. At the end of the interview, we will schedule a time and place for our second interview.

- **Interview Two (45-60 minutes):** A second interview will take place no later than one month after the first interview. This interview will build off of the data collected in the first interview.

- **Interview Three or Reflection 1 (45-60 min):** If you are willing and able, a third round of interviews may take place based upon the data collected no later than a month after the second interview. If an interview cannot be conducted, you will be asked to write a reflection based upon questions that arose during the second interview. This written reflection will be emailed to me at timkenneyverghs@msn.com

- **Total estimated time for participants: 3 hours, 15 minutes maximum**
Where will this research be conducted?

This research will be conducted via Zoom or-- if possible due to geographic proximity and both the researcher and the participant meeting the requirements of URI COVID-19 protocols-- via face-to-face interviews.

Please note that these interviews—whether in person or via Zoom-- will be recorded.
Appendix B

Survey of Demographic Information.

(The following questions will be placed into a Google form.)

1. Name

2. Address

3. Email address

4. Cell phone number

5. Age

6. Grade taught

7. Subject taught

8. Years teaching

9. Highest level of education

10. Awards/ certificates/ citations

11. Please describe your experience as a teacher during emergency remote teaching as a result of the pandemic. (1= a negative experience, 3= a neutral experience, 5= a positive experience)

12. Please describe your comfort level with technology. (5= very comfortable to 1= not comfortable at all)

13. Are you comfortable with meeting in person following social distancing guidelines without face coverings or would you prefer
that any meetings be done through the use of an online platform such as Zoom or Google Meet?

14. In order to help ensure your anonymity, I will ask that you select a pseudonym for me to use when referring to you throughout the study. What pseudonym would you like to use?
You are being asked to participate in a research project that will chronicle the experiences of secondary school teachers engaged in emergency remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This research hopes to provide an understanding of teacher experiences in order to gain insight into the ways--if any--teachers developed their self-efficacy to meet the demands of the emergency remote teaching. Understanding these experiences may provide a deeper understanding of ways to address the needs of teachers during any future moves into emergency remote learning.

Please read the following before agreeing to be in the study.

If you decide to take part in this study here is what will happen:

**Consent process (5 min):** You and I will set up a phone/video call through timkenneyeghs@msn.com to discuss the research project and answer any questions. If you want to participate, you will then scan and email your signed consent form to me.

**Questionnaire (10 minutes):** Once I have received your consent form, I will email you a questionnaire via Google Forms. This form will ask you a series of demographic information. This demographic information will be used to develop a sample for the study. You will receive a follow up email within three weeks time informing you whether or not you have been selected for this study.

**Interview One (45-60 minutes):** Once you have agreed to participate in the project, you and I will set up a time, date and form (either face-to-face or via Zoom) to conduct the interview. This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. At the end of the interview, we will schedule a time and place for our second interview.

**Interview Two (45-60 minutes):** A second interview will take place no later than one month after the first interview. This interview will build off of the data collected in the first interview.

**Interview Three or Reflection 1 (45-60 min):** If you are willing and able, a third round of interviews may take place based upon the data collected no later than a month after the second interview. If an interview cannot be conducted, you will be asked to write a reflection based upon questions that arose during the second interview. This written reflection will be emailed to me at timkenneyeghs@msn.com

Please note that all interviews will be recorded and transcribed. These recordings will be kept for seven years and then destroyed.

There are no known risks, benefits or compensation.

Your responses will be strictly confidential. The responses may be used in a research study.

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time without affecting your relationship with the investigators of this study.
or the University of Rhode Island (URI). Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the survey at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the researchers not use any of your responses.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have questions about the study, at any time feel free to contact Dr. Diane Kern from Alan Shawn Feinstein College of Education and Professional Studies at 401-874-5930.

Additionally, you may contact the URI Institutional Review Board (IRB) if you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Also contact the IRB if you have questions, complaints or concerns which you do not feel you can discuss with the investigator. The University of Rhode Island IRB may be reached by phone at (401) 874-4328 or by email at researchintegrity@etal.uri.edu. You may also contact the URI Vice President for Research and Economic Development by phone at (401) 874-4576.

By signing this consent form, I confirm that:

● I have read the information in this consent form and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
● I am over the age of 18 and know that these interviews will be recorded.
● I will be given a signed copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study.

________________________
Printed Name of Participant

________________________  __________
Signature of Participant    Date

________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

________________________  __________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent    Date
Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Below is a written protocol for the first round of interviews. The sections that have been shaded will be done before every interview. Numbered questions serve as follow up questions as needed. The questions are broken down into three categories: teaching philosophy, teaching experience, and teaching efficacy.

| Before the interview | ● Confirm the date and time of the interview with the participant a week in advance  
|                       | ● Confirm all written consent forms.  
|                       | ● Make sure that all required equipment has been charged sufficiently.  
|                       | ● Determine whether or not WI-FI is needed. If so, the researcher needs to take steps to gain access to WI-FI, such as the use of a hotspot on the researcher’s own phone.  
|                       | ● Bring all materials: laptop, microphone, journal for field notes, pens.  
|                       | ● Provide enough time to prepare before the interview to set up, time for the interview to go beyond the one hour mark, and time after the interview for immediate thoughts and reactions to be placed into memos.  
|                       | ● Once present, reintroduce myself and ask if there are any questions before beginning the interview. |
At the start of interview say:

> “Thank you very much for participating in this interview. I want to take a moment and remind you that participation in this study is voluntary. If you no longer feel like participating at any time for any reason, just let me know. I also want to remind you that all information shared with me will be kept confidential and only your pseudonym will be used. Finally, this interview will be recorded and should take no longer than 60 minutes. Only I will have access to this recording. However, I will ask later on that you review the transcript to confirm its validity. Do I have your permission to continue?

> Although I will be asking you questions, I encourage you to view this more as a discussion. There are no right or wrong answers. All I ask is that you try to be as detailed as possible in your answers.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How did you come to choose teaching as a profession?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Please describe your philosophy of teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) What would you say are the most important aspects of teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Has your philosophy changed since the pandemic? If so, how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the purpose of schooling?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) What would you say are the most important aspects of school for you as a teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Please describe any way your view of schooling might have changed since the pandemic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) What are your expectations for schools?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC: Describe a typical school day for you.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC: What is the experience of teaching at your school?

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC: Please describe the ethos of the school.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC: Describe your experience with technology at your school.

1) Describe your confidence in utilizing technology into your classroom.

2) Describe ways you incorporate technology in your classroom.

3) Describe the supports in place at your school for dealing with any technological issues.
BEFORE THE PANDEMIC: Describe how you are able to manage your responsibilities as a teacher as well as your responsibilities outside of school.

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC: How would you describe self-efficacy?

1) How would you develop your self-efficacy as a teacher?

2) How does mastering tasks affect your self-efficacy as a teacher?
   a) Can you describe a time when you felt that you felt you had mastered a task as a teacher?

3) How does watching colleagues affect your self-efficacy as a teacher?
   a) Can you describe a time when you gained confidence as a teacher when watching a colleague?

4) How does collaborating with colleagues affect your self-efficacy as a teacher?
   a) Can you describe a time when the praise from a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5) How does stress and anxiety affect your self-efficacy as a teacher?</td>
<td>a) How do you cope with stress and anxiety as a teacher?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the end of the interview say:</td>
<td>“Thank you very much for your participation. Once my transcription of this interview is complete, I will email you the transcript. Please review it and check it for accuracy. If you have any questions or want to provide some additional commentary, please feel free to email me. Do you have any questions? (Wait for questions) I would like to take some time to schedule our next interview now. (Schedule time for interview) Thank you again for your time.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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