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# **Pedagogy and the Pandemic: Views from a New South Wales School**

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of society, including the delivery of teaching and learning in primary schools. This study will investigate the insights offered by the teaching staff and school executive from a New South Wales (NSW) school in terms of their experiences and pedagogies implemented in 2020 as schools shifted from face-to-face to emergency remote teaching to adjust to the health crisis. Addressed in this study are the perspectives and experiences of teachers and school executive members, which in this emerging field of research has not been as prevalent a perspective as those of students and parents. As a study that looks at the insights of the participants within their school context, a social constructivist and phenomenological mindset was adopted towards the data collection. Through a questionnaire and semi-structured interview, participants reflected on the pedagogies utilised to address specific student circumstances and adapt to the ever-changing circumstances. The data found that the school utilised a sole adoption of asynchronous learning through learning management platforms with adjustments made to cater for all student needs. These results also show that teachers have gained further understanding of technological processes and resources which may develop into pedagogies that may evolve into incorporating more elements of remote learning.

## Introduction

Since December 2019, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has continued to affect the lives of people and societies in Australia and beyond, including in education. Due to the volatile nature of the situation, some governments have responded to the medical emergency by imposing 'stay-at-home' orders which have led to the abrupt move from face-to-face/traditional learning in the classroom to remote/online learning at home. Similarly, many countries, including Australia, moved to a period of emergency remote learning, with schools open for children of essential workers from March 2020 to May 2020 (OECD, 2021, p. 8). Existing research in this field lists an abundance of studies into the experiences of students and parents in this time (e.g. Nusser, 2021; Mælan, et al., 2021; Flynn, et al., 2021),

however, more research on the perspectives of teachers and school executives in different contexts were recommended (Moorhouse & Kohnke, 2021, p. 286). It is the teachers and school executives that “offer direct and long-lasting impact on students” (Stinson & Burton, 2016). Some envision in the post COVID-19 era that a “new normal classroom” will emerge, however, the capacity that this will take is unknown (An, et al., 2021, p. 5) and will need to be explored. Regardless of the switch to remote and online learning in this time, the impact of technology on the daily lives of students and teachers has increased and will be one of the focuses of this review, in terms of its impact on pedagogy. As a result, this study considers the perspectives of teachers before, during and after the move to remote learning, with a clear focus on the different types of teaching pedagogies that were implemented.

\*In NSW due to the stay-at-home orders from late June 2021 to mid-October 2021, schools have had to move to remote learning. Due to the timing of this report, the perspectives, and experiences of teachers during this time were not considered.

### **Theoretical Framing through Social Constructivism**

This study adopted a social constructivist framework through a phenomenological approach. Social constructivism emphasises the constructed nature of the social world, and knowledge differs according to the contextual factors influencing the participants. Gergen (1996 as cited in Leavy, 2014, p. 85) postulates that “research findings don’t have any meaning until they are interpreted, and interpretations result from a process of negotiating meaning in the community”. Likewise, Tracy (2012, p. 42) suggests that “to understand any text, one must also simultaneously consider its cultural and historical context”. Additionally, the phenomenological approach as the “study of how things show or give themselves” (Jean-Luc Marion, 2002 as cited in van Manen, 2017, p. 775) and the elements of “capturing experience in its primordial origin or essence, without interpreting, explaining, or theorizing” (Husserl, 2014 as cited in van Manen, 2017, p. 775) is necessary for an authentic representation of the events and actions experienced during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath when face-to-face learning resumed. The participants in this research study as educators have unique professional identities that are contingent on their personal histories and experiences that have shaped the person and the teacher they are (Ewing, et al., 2014, p. 172). This and the “social construction of reality and

its constantly negotiated and renegotiated meanings” (Punch & Oancea, 2014, p. 289) is cause for the approaches taken to consider the diverse views of the participants shaped by the pandemic and the move to a remote form of learning within the context of the school. Due to the scope of this study, these will be employed analytical lenses in the understanding that I was not able to conduct a full phenomenological inquiry.

## Literature review

This review examines face-to-face learning (pre-existing classroom pedagogy and technological integrations) and emergency remote teaching (ERT) (impact on teachers and school executive, parental roles and equity). I will also consider dimensions relating to existing contexts for the equitable provision of education, with reference to the current pandemic.

### **Equity**

Teachers need to consider issues of equity affecting students and parents even more closely in this time of change, including the availability of technology for use beyond the classroom (Ana-Paula, 2020, p. 19), ‘gaps’ in digital literacy, and/or linguistic equity. These are thought to be some of the prevalent issues experienced in general, in times of face-to-face learning and learning in any remote setting. As a result, the issues of technological availability and low levels of digital literacy had been exacerbated due to the pandemic. Equity considerations have, therefore, been an over-arching concern for this research.

The ‘digital divide’ had been recognised more fully as many parts of the world - including those identified as ‘developed’ economies, such as Australia - have yet to be able to access basic and reliable internet services (Vijayan, 2021, p. 11). This limitation, alone, shows the scarcity of equitable learning with teachers and classmates as the student is impaired from accessing “meaningful and engaging interactions among learners” on synchronous platforms such as Zoom during this time (Bakir & Phirangee, 2021, pp. 386, 388). Additionally, the gap in linguistic equity among students and parents cannot be ignored wherein an Elementary school context with 47% of the students considered “economically disadvantaged” (p. 42),

“one third of the class did not have a family member who was fluent in English, limiting the support for assignments” (Watson, 2020, p. 45). Importantly, the families of culturally and linguistically diverse students are willing “to help their children in school”, however, may be hesitant because “they may not be confident in speaking English and about their own educational, social and cultural backgrounds” (Conteh & Kawashima, 2008, p. 123). This will be further explored in a later section of this literature review. That the socio-economic context of this data does not mirror that of the school participating in this study, however, presents a real issue as more than 90% of the school population have a first language or dialect other than English.

## **Face to Face learning**

### Technology use in teaching pedagogy – Pre-pandemic

Before the onset of the ‘stay-at-home orders’ in 2020, mainstream schooling in NSW had predominantly taken place in “the physical learning environment” (Faulk & Evanshen, 2013, p. 41) where “instructors engage their students in real time (synchronous learning)” (Chisadza, et al, 2021, p. S115). As the use of technology in society increases, teachers have had to employ technology in their pedagogy. Prensky (2001, p. 1) understands this to be related to the idea that “our students today are all “native speakers” of the digital language of computers...and internet”. On the contrary, Kolikant (2019, pp. 287-288) inadvertently challenges this, as he writes about the “non-transformative use of ICT” in the classroom by the teachers who were students in 2001. Teachers do use technology in the classroom, however, feel they are not ‘pedagogically supported’, supported in terms of technical support and feel constrained by the limited resources (e.g. software, hardware, connectivity) (Olivares, et al., 2018, p. 2312; Beschorner & Woodward, 2019, p. 325; Vanderlinde, et al., 2010, p. 445; Tondeur, et al., 2008, p. 221). Through the many different studies conducted on this subject, it can be determined that the knowledge of the meaningful use of technology in the classroom is something affecting teachers and has become all the more pressing in light of the rapidly changing social circumstances.

Considering this context of technological revolution, as previously mentioned this study will hope to bring insights into the experiences of teachers with regards to the use of technology in an NSW classroom before, during and after the lockdowns in

2020. In Australia, the rollout of Interactive whiteboards (IWB) has been supported by the government financially and through curricula (Kearney, et al., 2017; Bennett & Lockyer, 2008, p. 289). However, despite the maturity of this technological revolution, widespread enthusiasm for the implementation of the IWB had been attributed to the belief that “IWB’s can replicate traditional teaching methods and enable teachers to maintain control of their learning” (Schack & Kearne, 2008, p. 402). ‘Traditional’ (teacher-centred, transmissive) teaching is seen as the main teaching method where “teachers speak and students listen” (Yi, et al., 2021, p. 464). This form of teaching has been criticised in terms of its ‘non-conductive’ development of students and assumes that the students have little to contribute to the learning process (Yi, et al., 2021, p. 464; Hargeaves, et al., 2020, p. 87). For teachers and students to engage in student-centred learning requires more than enhanced professional development but also a change in views of “the nature of knowledge, of the learner and his/her role, and of classroom organisation in general” (Guthrie, 2017, p. 63). This exposes part of the complexity associated with adapting pedagogies to be used in meaningful ways that address student needs. Overall, evidence shows that the presence of an interactive whiteboard in the classroom does not confirm the assumption of the effective use of technology by a teacher in the learning process and could foreshadow the negative implications of some teachers in negotiating changes from face-to-face to learning in a remote setting.

## **ERT**

The closure of schools may be necessitated by other extreme events (e.g. climate disasters – heatwaves, floods, etc.) (United Nations, 2020, as cited in Mankki, 2021, p. 2), however, for the purposes of this study, the closures will be analysed within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to government-mandated ‘stay-at-home orders’ in 2020, NSW schools had to opt to switch to emergency remote learning (online or remote – synchronous or asynchronous). Contrary to the terminology used in some related literature, there remain differences between distance education, online learning, and ERT (See Table 1). Elements of ERT can be characterised by the delivery of learning through means that are appropriate for the needs of students in a crisis. This may involve elements from online learning *or* distance education. Some of the common themes identified to be associated with ERT includes (1) the impact of ERT on teachers and school executives, (2) the concerns for equity

particularly those that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, (3) the role of parents/guardians in the ERT period, and (4) the efficacy of ERT in learning and development of students.

Table 1: Remote learning approaches

Learning approach	Definition
Emergency Remote Teaching/Learning (ERT)	<p>“temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances”            (Hodges, 2020 as cited in Hodges &amp; Fowler, 2020, p. 119)</p>
Distance education	<p>“non-contagious communication between the supporting organisation and its students”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simulated communication – sending pre-prepared materials to the student(s)</li> <li>• Two-way communication via sophisticated media (e.g. email)</li> </ul> <p>(Holmberg, 1995, p. 2)</p>
Online learning	<p>“facilitate distance education by making course material accessible anytime anywhere” (Volery &amp; Lord, 2000, p. 217)</p> <p>“do not present themselves in a classroom and do not have the opportunity to interact face-to-face with their instructors and classmates.”            (Wang, Shannon &amp; Ross, 2013, p. 303)</p>

A study seeking the perceptions of primary school teachers of the online learning program of School from Home in Indonesia was conducted by Rasmitadila, et al. in 2020. In this study, prior to the semi-structured interview, participants in the selected five Indonesian provinces were offered a questionnaire (survey) with ten short answer questions through Google Forms. After the submission of the survey, participants who have expressed interest participated in a 1.5-2 hour interview via WhatsApp. The interview guides were created from initial coding obtained from the

questionnaire data to gain meaningful data from the interviews. The results from this study presented a detailed recount into the themes of instructional strategies, challenges to online teaching, support and teacher motivation. A similar approach was applied for this study, due to the alignment of inquiry aims and practical considerations.

### Impact of ERT on teachers and school executives

The abrupt nature of the switch to ERT had impacted teachers and school executives as they redesign the content to be delivered in this way. Unsurprisingly, some of the challenges identified for teachers in existing research related to “insufficient technological and pedagogical support or by inexperience in using online tools on a daily basis” (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021, p. 4). A study in England analysing the impact of COVID-19 on teachers found that some felt stress was relieved after finding a method to facilitate remote learning whilst some, including school executives, remained stressed due to the clarity and level of consultation into the government’s short and mid-term plans for the education sector (Kim & Asbury, 2020, p. 1076). The ERT needs to involve “a humanized approach by becoming cognizant of the challenges the students face and implement a pedagogy that is more inclusive and sensitive to learning needs” (Karakaya, 2021, p. 298). Therefore, decisions should be made by individual teachers and schools in the distribution of work through online or distance means. This study will not seek to establish or generalise benefits exhibited by the learning approaches utilised but will provide an insight into experiences, remote learning approaches and pedagogies that have been considered for the participants’ select group of students and context.

### Parental roles

The impact of the closure of schools had shone a light on the increased roles of parents as teachers to assist in ERT, because “in the event of home confinement, parents are the closest and best resource for children to seek help from.” (Wang, et al., 2020, p. 946). In some situations, this is not always the case and presented a significant equity concern. COVID-19 has forced “families and schools to work more closely together” however, this was difficult, as some families have little to no trust in their schools, or minimal capacity to assist in school learning (Seymour, et al., 2020, p. 244). Above all, matters relating to the duty of care that teachers are legally bound

by during school time, and its distortion in the ERT setting needs to be focussed on, as the pandemic affects job stability and mental health in parents and students. Thereby, resulting in the need for teachers to be aware and develop practices in identifying signs of “abuse or neglect, despite the limitations of the remote learning environment” (Li, et al., 2020, pp. 40, 42) as a high priority to ensure this issue of equity does not impact on the wellbeing and academic outcomes of the students.

### Efficacy of ERT in student learning and development

Schools are more than purely academic institutions but a place for supporting the wellbeing and social development of students outside the home. Contrary to the implementation of ERT due to the ‘stay-at-home orders’, König (et al., 2020, pp. 618-619) does not recommend “distance learning of any nature” be considered for the education of students, particularly in extended lockdowns. A school is a place of social development with friends and, ideally, as a result, improve “economic development, social cohesion and enhanced life chances for individuals” (Raffo & Gunter, 2008, p. 400). This idea is reinforced by education sociologist Raewyn Connell (2012) who sees “encounter[s] between people, and encounter between groups, is the means of building culture; and just education becomes a means by which culture regenerates itself from below, rather than through commercialization or the strategies of power” (p. 682). Scarpellini (et al., 2021, p. 12) acknowledges, from results of their closed questions questionnaire presented to mothers of primary and middle school students, the efforts of teachers, but concludes that distance learning is “ineffective in replacing physical presence in school..., insufficient cognitive stimulation, and absence of social interactions created a gap that will be hard to fill, especially for young children, who have lost almost one year of school”. Juxtaposed with results from a Likert questionnaire given to Higher Education students, Lyubetsky (et al., 2021, p. 7) determined from their 154 participants, that the majority of participants showed that “depressive symptoms have manifested” whilst undergoing distance education compared to the same period of face-to-face learning. The select literature examined formed part of the basis of material informing the complex discussions that officials must balance in considering the wellbeing of all stakeholders and the short-term and long-term educational impact of the move to ERT.

## Research Questions

Based on the review of relevant scholarship, the following questions have been devised to contribute to better understanding some of these phenomena:

1. (How) have the school and the teachers modified their teaching pedagogies since the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020?
2. (How) has equity and the circumstances of individual students affected the delivery of emergency remote teaching?
3. (How) has the teaching pedagogy adopted in the classroom changed since the undertaking of emergency remote teaching?

The overarching themes that had led to the development of these research questions were derived from research in the field specified earlier and in this section. This included the need for the modification of teaching pedagogy (also included in Folkman, Josefsson & Fjetland, 2022, pp. 6-7) and the experiences and perceptions that the teachers and school executive had during this period (also included in van der Spoel, et al., 2020, p. 631) and the impact that this will have on teaching pedagogy upon the resumption of face-to-face teaching afterwards (also included in Heikkila & Mankki, 2021, p. 2).

## Methodology

In accordance with the main tenets of the constructivist framework in a phenomenological approach where “experiences believed to be sociological phenomena of our time” (Merriam & Grenier, 2019, p. 87) are explored, the insights gained from this study will aim to offer a picture of the experiences of the teachers and school executive within the specific context of the NSW school. To achieve these deeper understandings, this research takes the form of a case study. A ‘case study’ defined as the “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 45) is “impossible to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context” (2014 as cited in 2016, p. 45). In correspondence, the data collection methods of a questionnaire and semi-structured interview had been selected. Neuman (2013, p. 192) believes that surveys are “appropriate” when the “research questions are about self-reported beliefs or behaviours”. In adherence to the social constructivist framework, the questionnaire will allow more participants to

share the multitude of experiences and insights each will have to contribute to the study. Tracy (2012, p. 133) writes about the value of interviews in “strengthening and complicating other data” with the option of asking the interviewee to “verify, refute, defend, or expand”. The verbal interactions in the interview will maximise the understanding of the pedagogies and experiences employed as part of the social constructivist framework adopted in this study. Above all, data collected using these methods will be analysed through triangulation (insights from the different mediums of collection are collated and analysed) (Neuman, 2014, p. 166) to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the data. Triangulation, in checking the “consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods” will ultimately allow for the “verification and validation of [the] qualitative analysis” that had occurred (Patton, 1999, p. 1193). Additionally, the utilisation of these methods of collection was inspired by the study conducted by Rasmitadila et al., as outlined in the section above (see p. 6).

## Methods

Due to the potential for the scope of varying opinions and perspectives, participants were divided into two streams – School Executive and Teaching staff. Each stream of participants was offered the opportunity to take part in a questionnaire and/or semi-structured interview. To consider the individual views that each participant adds to this research study, important contextual questions concerning the school and student context and the areas of professional oversight (e.g. grade, department, faculty) that the participant is associated with were asked in both the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. In the questionnaire, the remainder of the questions were focussed on constructing an understanding of the experiences and insights in accordance with the research questions. A questionnaire schedule is available in Appendices 1. In the semi-structured interviews, questions generated based on the initial data collected from the questionnaires have been introduced alongside pre-determined questions informed by the literature. Participants have been given the option of a face-to-face interview with COVID-safe procedures applied or an online interview through videoconferencing on Zoom. An interview schedule has been included in Appendices 2.

## Participants

To be eligible to participate, all participants have been required to fulfill requirements including (1) possessing an unconditional Approval to Teach, (2) was employed in a full-time or temporary capacity in 2020, (3) had oversight over an individual/group/class of students or grade/stage, and (4) was part of the School Executive (for School Executive participants only). Participation in this study was optional for all prospective participants. This stance had been supported by the obtainment of ethical approval, before any data was collected, from both The University of Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) and The NSW Department of Education NSW State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP).

Table 2: Teaching staff participant statistics

Stream / Grade or category	No. of participants								Total
	Early Stage 1	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Support Class Unit (K-6)	EAL/D	LaST	RFF (Music, ICT & Library)	
Questionnaire	5	13	4	5	1	1	3	5	36
Semi-structured interview	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2

Table 3: School executive participant statistics

Stream	No. of participants
Questionnaire	9
Semi-structured interview	1

Table 4: Participant ID code for reference in the discussion

Stream	Mode of participation	Participant number
School executive (S)	Questionnaire (Q)	Varying numerical number
Teaching staff (T)	Interview (I)	

Codes were used to signify the participants being quoted through the key above. For example, a school executive participant who is quoted from an interview will have the code SI1, whilst the third teaching staff participant who is quoted from a questionnaire will have the code TQ3.

## Discussion

This section has been organised to group the themes in their chronological order according to the relevant period in terms of pre-pandemic, during the ERT period and after the ERT period. To organise the data collected, initial coding was undertaken to identify the common themes. Afterwards, the insights from each stream (school executive and teaching staff) and data collection methods were collated and analysed in correspondence with these themes.

The participants for this research study were sourced from a primary school located in the north-west of Sydney. The name of the school and its participants have not been published to ensure that their privacy and conditions of institutional ethics approval are upheld. The participants are the teaching staff and school executive. The school has a student population of more than 1200 students, 94% of students from a language background other than English with a small number of students who identify to be of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background or culture and has an ICSEA (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage)<sup>1</sup> score of 1145 (MySchool, 2021).

### **Pre-pandemic – Whole school approach**

The school website states that is committed to providing “opportunities for teachers, students and parents to develop the skills knowledge and values necessary when working in a digital world” (School [a], 2020, p. 3). This forms part of the justification for the incorporation of the BYOD (Bring your own device) policy for students in Years 3-6 and the use of other technological resources in and out of the classroom. These technological resources included the use of learning management systems (LMS) Seesaw (Years K-2) and Google Classroom (Years 3-6), class sets of devices (i.e. iPads), educational programs – Mathletics and Reading Eggs and the interactive whiteboard and projector installed in each classroom to assist in the delivery of learning programs, before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020.

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<sup>1</sup> “ICSEA provides an indication of the socio-educational backgrounds of students...ICSEA isn’t a school rating (not a rating of staff, school facilities or teaching programs). ICSEA is set at an average of 1000. The higher the ICSEA value, the higher the level of educational advantage of students who go to this school.” (ACARA, 2014, p. 1).

Additionally, the school has dedicated time (Stage 3 – 60 minutes, Stage 2 – 45 minutes and Stage 1 and Early Stage 1 – 30 minutes) in conducting ICT (Information Communication Technology) lessons with a specialised ICT teacher once a week. These lessons involved the use of iPads and computers in activities associated with “Mac and PC, Google, coding and robotics” (School [b], n.d., p. 20). We are aware from Nithyanandam’s (2020, p. 93) Teaching-Learning framework research that “teachers...must use multiple creative teaching pedagogies such a way that the students are motivated to attend classrooms and learn the required skills easily” and that the methods adopted to support pedagogy will vary from teacher to teacher. A deeper insight into the differing pedagogies will be presented in the ‘ERT period’ section, in light of necessitated changes.

### **ERT period**

The sudden switch to ERT caught teachers and school executive members ‘off guard’, mainly due to the ramifications of the ‘stay-at-home’ orders where minimal face-to-face learning interactions were required. Teaching staff participants broadly expressed feelings of nervousness, excitement, stress, overwhelm and worry due to the unknown challenges with the technology and its use as the main distribution and communication channel between the school and families (TQ1,2,4,10,12,14,15,17,18,19,22,23,24,28,32,34), student welfare and equity (TQ1,2,3,4,15,18,19,24), and excitement in the exploration of a new medium of teaching and learning (TQ1,5,25). A similar response was found among educators interviewed in Kovacs, et al. (2021, pp. 15-16). From the school executive perspective, the willingness to adjust and understanding between the school executive, teaching staff, parents, students, the community, and the NSW Department of Education [NSW DoE] received commendations as everyone worked professionally and collegially to achieve the best outcomes despite the circumstances (SQ2). The ERT is not a “robust educational ecosystem” but is a form of providing “temporary instruction during an emergency” that is not to be mistaken with traditionally online courses (Hodges, et al., 2020). The insights gained in both streams have highlighted the changes required in teaching and learning asynchronously, issues of equity, duty of care, the role of parents and caregivers and the empathy exhibited by the students, teachers, and parents to be the prevailing themes of this period.

### Asynchronous learning

Participants have unanimously specified the use of asynchronous pedagogical strategies throughout this period. It was a whole-of-school approach accompanied by the pre-established use of LMS, BYOD and technological integrations in learning environments. No synchronous (real-time) teaching and learning took place beyond the face-to-face learning arrangements for children of essential workers and other students who attended school in person. One of the reasons for the asynchronous delivery of lessons was to ensure that issues of technology availability (device and internet access), mainly in the younger Kindergarten to Year 2 (K-2) cohort was acknowledged and accommodated by school policy. School devices were loaned to students who required a device due to economic circumstances or had a limited number of devices among siblings. In Years 3-6, due to the pre-existing BYOD programs, few students needed to be provided with a school device (SQ3,6,8; TI2).

In the asynchronous format, staff members maintained contact with each student and their family through weekly phone calls to the parent or guardian. These phone calls were used to gain “an idea about the different circumstances families were battling...” (SI1) better understand their context, and plan and implement learning programs accordingly. Participants of both the teaching and executive streams have acknowledged that in certain circumstances (excluding concerns of device availability), attending school in person would be in the best interests of the student and their family (SI1; TQ9,27; SQ3,6). Although not exhaustive, this included students from wide-ranging circumstances from children of essential workers to students requiring extra support including students from an EAL/D (English as an additional language or dialect) background to students with a disability, each coming to school for the number of days necessary for them. On the other hand, for the students who had conducted their studies away from school, the main themes of concern were the impact on a student’s ability to learn and the changing nature of the duty of care that teachers and schools would have in face-to-face settings translated to ERT.

### Student and family impact (including duty of care)

The learning environment shifted from the school to the student’s personal environment. Concerns were high as student anxiety and distress as they were

unable to interact with their friends and teachers in person (SQ4). This included a student with autism where the student could “not understand why they could not come to school after they had finally settled in for the term” (TQ2). Fortunately, teachers, students and parents had realistic and supportive expectations of each other during this time.

For example, K-2 Teachers provided students with opportunities for extension and differentiation with tasks classified as ‘must do’ and ‘can do’ and ‘easy, medium, hard’ whilst teachers of Years 3-6 and RFF (relief from face-to-face): music students maintained ‘realistic’ expectations of the work to be completed. A teacher in their response (TI1) noted the feelings of negativity in this time caused by the events of the pandemic. When asked to provide detail of the changing nature of duty of care, one interview participant specified that they would look carefully at the work and comments produced by the student, listen to the student when talking on the phone and ask the parent(s) “how they were feeling”. This is largely to create the most optimal ERT environment, where the wellbeing of parents and guardians as custodians of their children need to be considered. For the younger ages of primary school students, particularly, the importance of parental involvement in schooling as their expectations and style “may create an educationally oriented ambience” that reinforces an understanding of the support and standards in the child’s mind (Jeynes, 2005, p. 262; Zhang, 2021, p. 8) cannot be ignored. As a result, the asynchronous delivery of lessons was designed to mitigate the demands placed on parents and guardians in situations such as the need to give students their attention during working hours (TQ1,2,4,12,15,16,24,32) and in recognition of the absence of the NSW DoE’s Zoom privacy protocols and software (SI1) at the time (also as seen in Kilcoyne, 2021, p. 251).

Teachers reported that students displayed different work outputs, where some students had work completed by their parents, some did not complete any work due to wavering motivation or produced work that was of a lower quality than the work normally produced in the classroom, while some requested for extra work. Parental expectations have changed, for example, one parent mentioned that “it’s not going to be life and death if you miss a little bit of content” (TI2). In the traditionally academically driven school with high parent expectations for academic performance

in OC (Opportunity Class) and Selective Schools (High School) exams, it was unexpected that this adjustment to the slower pace of learning activities would be accepted. However, in light of the circumstances and participants answers show that teachers, students and parents displayed awareness and understanding that “learning during a crisis and is not normal” (Peterson, et al., 2020, p. 467) as was in this period.

#### Students with a disability (learning or physical) and their families

Multiple accounts from teachers from support class K-6, learning support departments and mainstream classrooms detailed the disadvantage that students with a disability have faced (SQ4;TQ2,9,15,21,22,27,30). Where students would be supported in small groups or with one-on-one instruction, parents and families did not know how best to support their learner and their academic needs, where scaffolds were provided, accessibility issues remained dominant due to poor digital literacy or device availability. “Without appropriate access to online resources, effective instructions cannot be delivered, and student learning cannot occur.” (Kim & Fienup, 2021, p. 7).

#### EAL/D learners and their families

Audio recordings, accompanying visuals alongside written text on Google Slides, PowerPoint, Google Classroom and Seesaw (contains translation tools) were used to ensure accessibility for a wider range of students with varying English proficiency and abilities (TQ2,10,14,15,16,17,21,24,27; SQ8). This was not enough for some parents. In comparison to pre-pandemic face-to-face classes where listening and speaking were routinely engaged, the “hastily assembled learning packets focussed almost entirely on reading and writing” (Sayer & Braun, 2020, p. 4). As a result, due to the limited English-speaking background that some parents/grandparents/guardians had, despite the good intentions supervision and guidance became difficult to execute.

## **Moving forward: beyond the ERT period**

School executive and teaching staff participants commented on the changes in pedagogies employed, school processes or immediate priorities to suit the needs of students after the ERT period and of how education might look in the future.

Common themes uncovered included the development/reestablishment of social skills (TQ3,8,14,17,30; SQ6,8; TI1) the redefined position of technology in the classroom (TQ2,3,7,16,22,24) and the academic impact that ERT may have had on student understanding and achievement (TQ1,28; TI2).

The return to face-to-face learning has presented teachers and students with opportunities to develop both academically and in their social relationships. Across the school, irrespective of grade, class or area of the school (e.g. Support Class K-6, LaST, EAL/D and RFF), no unanimous preference had been reached with regards to the differing use of technology in a teacher's pedagogy since pre-pandemic times. For some it had decreased, others stayed the same as previously incorporated pre-COVID, or increased, resultant of the learnings in the ERT period. A significant proportion in the K-2 years have stated the now modest use of technology for students while students covered by the BYOD policy mostly reverted to the pre-COVID adoption of technology or increased their use of LMS, online homework, PowerPoint/Google Slides or other technological based learning in their classes. An interview participant specified that despite losing "about a half year of pre-schooling..." their Kindergarten (2021) students were "academically okay" (TI1). Immediately after the return to school, participants have decided not to assess the content covered in ERT to ensure fairness for all and in recognition of student achievement reporting changes across the school, to reflect this (TI1,2; TQ1). One participant (TQ28) who did engage the students in a "paper and pencil test" found that "only three of the thirty students met [a] satisfactory grade". Interestingly, recent, emerging research analysing the outcome of the lost learning time proved less severe than first thought. This comes as Gore<sup>2</sup>, et al. (2021, p. 631) finds that due to the shorter closure of schools and the outstanding job that teachers have done to allaying the disadvantages that a student may have faced as a result of ERT by

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<sup>2</sup> On average, schools in the OECD were closed for 78 days (from a period of 1 January 2020 to May 2021) (OECD, 2021, p. 6). In Canada, schools were closed for a total period of 6 months in 2020 (Aurini & Davies, 2021, p. 180).

spending more instructional time in English and mathematics after the return to school (pp. 631-632).

The main concern detailed was the development of social skills, problem solving and important skills such as recognising letters on a page. Participants mostly in Early Stage 1, Stage 1 and 2 have specified that as students had better attainment of ICT skills and digital literacy from the ERT period, many focused on ensuring that the development of social skills (interacting with peers and teachers), fine-motor skills and hand-eye coordination, and collaborative learning (TQ5,8,11,14,17,30; SQ6,8, T11).

Educators from different contexts, after the reopening of schools, have recognised that schools are places where students develop through social engagements and interactions (Trust & Whalen, 2021, p. 151). A compilation of school executive and teaching staff responses in the Support Class Unit (K-6) category suggests that an increase in the uses of technology was facilitated in the learning system in terms of the distribution of online homework and use of PM readers (SQ4). Consideration needed to be taken in continuously implementing “multifaceted learning modes” despite, the adoption of technology, to avoid students from being “just zoned” into using technology, where any opportunities for the students to socialise with each other are eliminated (TQ30).

### The changing nature of education

Carpenter & Dunn (2021, p. 588) state that, “...a non-trivial percentage [of parents and guardians] chose virtual schools, but primarily for health concerns, not for a better education”. Likewise, a school executive participant with oversight at a whole-school level shared that “there is still a need for a teacher and contact with people for better mental health” (SQ2). In the aftermath of the 2020 ERT period, the NSW DoE commissioned a report into the lessons of the pandemic which states that “the remote learning period created barriers for some students, while removing barriers for others” (NSW DoE, 2020, p. 41), underscoring the equity concerns that have been exacerbated during the pandemic. The final question of the questionnaire for all streams asked participants about the changes they made to their pedagogies in the weeks immediately upon return to school. Most participants indicated that they would

focus more closely on the development of social skills and fine motor skills, thereby mainly pausing or reducing the use of technologies in the classroom. However, looking into the future, from a department level, the NSW DoE has released findings and next steps that they are committed to “adapt[ing] or enhan[cing] flexible learning modes to create a more inclusive education system, especially for students with a disability” (NSW DoE, 2020, p. 41). The shape and form that this may take are not yet known but “optimising its potential to teaching, learning and assessment” (Kilcoyne, 2021, p. 251) will remain possibly a high priority as is the opportunities for instruction and learning experiences to be undertaken virtually (Zhao & Watterston, 2021, pp. 8-10).

## Conclusion

The shift to ERT caught teachers, schools, students and their families by surprise. Schools have had to adapt their face-to-face programs whilst accounting for their student's context and background to mitigate as many concerns as possible of equity or wellbeing. Supported by the social-constructivist and phenomenological orientations of this research, the analysis was shaped by the school's teaching staff and executive perspectives and interpretation of existing literature, to form the insights explored.

From before the COVID-19 pandemic, the school acknowledged the changing nature of society's approaches towards technology, by using technological resources and programs to support learning outcomes and activities. This led to the main issues experienced in the ERT period to be issues of motivation and equity (personal circumstances and language), exacerbated by limited resources and real-time interactions, and uncertainties caused by the pandemic. As a result, in some cases, students were asked to attend school to ensure that those who needed the support could, alongside the students of essential workers.

In terms of the future of education, learning entirely in a remote setting was not foreseen to be part of it by these participants. However, it is possible that the pedagogies implemented in schools could be modified with elements previously associated with teaching and learning in a remote setting.

This study presents an insight into the specific pedagogies employed in the school during this period. The small participant group size provided limited perspectives confined to one school catchment/geographical area and demographic in the north-west of Sydney, NSW, meaning that broad generalisations and definitive conclusions cannot be made. Additionally, due to the limited timeframe of this study affected by the context of a global pandemic, small scale and scope of honours research, the components of a full phenomenological study could not be fully executed, however, has been designed to reflect the values that this approach holds. This research presents a limited view of the perspectives and experiences of the participants during the first stay-at-home period in 2020 and does not address the subsequent shifts to ERT during stay-at-home orders in 2021. Additionally, this research does

not actively consider both the stresses and the mediation of learning of the students in terms of their wellbeing concerns and academics (as in Willis, 2021, pp. 135-136), but the latter as student wellbeing is relatively absent in this study. Future research should focus on the effects of stay-at-home orders in terms of their social impact in larger jurisdictions or with a greater number of participants, while also accounting for different groups' experiences (e.g. EAL/D and students with a disability) and additional stakeholders (parents and students).

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## Appendices

### **Appendix 1 – Questionnaire schedules**

#### School executive – Questionnaire

1. Which areas of the school did you provide oversight to in 2020? (Select all that applies – Early Stage 1, Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, EAL/D, Support class unit, Learning support, Whole school, Other – please specify)
2. How has the school as a whole responded in light of the events leading up to and during the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020?
3. What resources and support were teachers provided with to support them in the move to remote learning?
4. How prepared did the teachers within the grade(s) you were supervising feel about the switch to remote learning? What feelings did you have in terms of the switch to remote learning?
5. Broadly, to the best of your knowledge, how did the students in the grade(s) feel about the move to remote or online learning? How have adjustments been made for students with different learning needs when undertaking remote or online learning?
6. (How) did the students' and parents' adaptations to or experiences of learning remotely reflect concerns for equity? In your response, you might consider, for example, specific groups within the school community, students with a disability, in need of extra academic support, low digital literacy, economically disadvantaged, and the age of the students.
7. As part of the lockdowns, parents have had to take the role of a teacher regardless of whether remote or online learning was undertaken by the school. (How) has the duty of care that teachers have, been upheld or monitored within the context of remote or online learning?
8. (How) was the utilisation of technology promoted within the school before the COVID-19 pandemic?

9. With the re-opening of all schools, (have) there been any wide-ranging changes to the pedagogies adopted in your school? For example, compared to the lead up of the pandemic, has the use of technology within the classroom increased or decreased as a result of the temporary switch to remote learning?

#### Teaching staff – Questionnaire

1. How many students did you have in your class?
2. Which Stage/Grade did you teach in 2020? (ES1 – Kindergarten, Stage 1 – Year 1 or Year 2, Stage 2 – Year 3 or Year 4, Stage 3 – Year 5 or Year 6, EAL/D, Learning Support, Support class unit K-6).
3. Did you have any students with a disability? Yes or no. If yes, what conditions did they have? (Please do not mention any names)
4. What cultural diversity did you have in the class?
  
5. What feelings did you have in terms of the switch to remote learning?
6. Provided that you taught lessons synchronously (real-time), (how) did students and parents adapt and engage with the lesson at the time? (What adjustments were implemented?)
7. If the lessons were taught asynchronously (not in real-time), (how) was the learning content distributed and checked for understanding?
  
8. (How) did the students' and parents' adaptations to or experiences of learning remotely reflect concerns for equity? In your response, you might consider, for example, students with a disability, in need of extra academic support, low digital literacy, economically disadvantaged, and the age of your students.
  
9. With the re-opening of all schools, have there been any changes to the pedagogies adopted in your classroom or school? For example, compared to the lead up of the pandemic, has the use of technology within the classroom increased or decreased as a result of the temporary switch to remote learning?

## **Appendix 2 – Semi-structured interview schedules**

### School executive – Semi-structured interview

**\*The following questions may be extended as necessary in light of the questionnaire results.**

1. Before the peak of COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, (how) has attitudes of teaching staff and parents towards the use of technology within the scope of parental communication and learning differed in March 2020?
2. How was the uptake of technology in online learning accepted or not accepted by the parent community in March 2020?
3. Where online learning was accepted across the stages, how were concerns of equity (digital literacy, technology availability) addressed to ensure that all students had access to an education from a School Executive level?
4. With the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions and the resumption of face-to-face learning, do you envision classrooms of the near future incorporating elements of the remote or online learning that you have seen during the lockdown period in March 2020? If so, what elements might be incorporated?

### Teaching staff – Semi-structured interview

**\*The following questions may be extended as necessary in light of the questionnaire results.**

1. How did your classroom look before the March 2020 lockdown, during and after in terms of teaching pedagogy? How did your teaching pedagogy when teaching or facilitating learning look on in remote or online learning?
2. What have been some of the reactions of students in your class/-es to the switch to remote learning? How have adjustments been made for students with different learning needs when undertaking remote or online learning?
3. As students learn from home through online or remote learning, teachers may have had a clearer indication of the students' personal lives at home. (How) has this affected the duty of care that teachers are required to provide?

4. Where you have provided online learning, (what) barriers did you find when interacting with students and parents alike? In your response, you might consider, digital literacy, digital device availability, reliable internet access or limited English abilities that some parents may have.
5. (How) were elements of these inequities addressed in your position as the classroom teacher?
6. With the lessons learnt from the abrupt implementation of remote or online learning. Do you envision the classroom in the near future to incorporate elements of remote or online learning? Please provide detail.