St. John's University
St. John's Scholar

Theses and Dissertations

2022

# CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING TEACHING KINDERGARTENERS HOW TO READ DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mary Carney Hagan

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.stjohns.edu/theses_dissertations

Part of the Education Commons

# CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING TEACHING KINDERGARTENERS HOW TO READ DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION SPECIALTIES

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
at
ST JOHN'S UNIVERSITY
New York
by
Mary Carney Hagan

Date Submitted November 10, 2021

Mary Carney Hagan

Date Approved January 30, 2022

Adam Clark

**© Copyright by Mary Carney Hagan 2022**

**All Rights Reserved**

# ABSTRACT

## CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING TEACHING KINDERGARTENERS HOW TO READ DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Mary Carney Hagan

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a variety of problems around the world, including isolation, school closure, contact restriction, and economic shutdown; these problems have completely changed the psychosocial environment and physical well-being of children everywhere (Fegert et al., 2020). Education underwent tremendous changes almost overnight: As a result of the pandemic, students were forced to embrace virtual learning to finish the 2019–2020 academic year and begin the 2020–2021 academic year. This change caused anxiety and trauma to adults and young children. DC Public Schools (2020) described the experience of virtual learning as a “shared traumatic experience” (p. 1).

Virtual learning has many negative consequences, including isolation, loneliness, and a sense of detachment. These consequences were bound to affect education and have implications for the future learning of students, particularly those students learning fundamental reading skills in kindergarten. Kindergarteners are rapidly developing reading skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. This study investigated what literacy instruction looked like during a period of virtual learning.

This study took place in a kindergarten classroom in a public school in Washington, DC. I studied the class of kindergarteners I taught during the 2020–2021 academic year because they were learning virtually. The class included 23 students: 13 girls and 10 boys. One student had an individualized education plan, and seven students spoke English as a second language. The study relied on a constructivist grounded theory approach to address the research question.

The findings provide meaningful insights for practitioners in early childhood education.  They let educators know that there is work to be done surrounding the explicit teaching of phonemic awareness. We can see some of the immediate effects of COVID-19 in our early childhood education classrooms across the city of DC and elsewhere but more in-depth longitudinal data will need to be collected to see the lasting effects on children.

# DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving husband, Will. There really aren’t words that can capture my gratitude for you and our marriage, but I’ll try. Thank you for all the time you spent watching Maggie so that I could write, attend classes, and meetings. Thank you for all of the support you’ve given me through my days as a teacher, time as a new mother, and late nights trying to be a writer and researcher. I could not be the person I am doing the countless things I do without you by my side. This dissertation would not have been possible without your support. You’re just the best and I love you all the world.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the love and support of my husband Will and daughter Maggie. I hope Maggie and her soon to be twin brother and sister will all learn to have a love of reading. No matter what happens in life and what adversities may come your way, there’s always a book to learn more from or to escape in. Read, read, and read some more!

I’d like to thank and acknowledge all the teachers I’ve had throughout the years who helped instill in me a love of education, trauma informed practices, and literacy: Sr. Mary Alice Kane, Mrs. Hickey, Mr. Lyons, Msgr. Bergamo. The countless professors in college and graduate school who made education come alive through their stories and for cheering me on along the way. Specifically, Anne Tewksbury (Tewks). For the teachers who taught me how to teach and loved me along my teaching journey: Susan Brooks, Bonnie Norton, Althea Hodgson, Graham Clark, and the wonderful Ms. Owens. For the teachers who have worked besides me in DC and beyond, including my loving and supportive mother-in-law. I have learned so much from you. Monique Webber for teaching with me through COVID-19. Mr. C. a principal who lifts up his teachers and listens to their voices- who has made me believe in myself and my teaching.

Finally and importantly, for my parents. Thank you for helping me get to where I am. Always cheering me on from near or far away. A special acknowledgement for my father, who during the completion of this dissertation sustained a traumatic brain injury. You’ve always been my biggest cheerleader, dad. I’m so grateful you knew I would see this project to completion. Many children go their whole lives without knowing the love of a father and mother. I’m so grateful to have known this love.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ..... ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... iii

LIST OF TABLES ..... viii

LIST OF FIGURES ..... ix

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ..... 1

  Purpose of the Study ..... 1

  Grounded Theory and Personal Context ..... 1

  Constructivist Grounded Theory—Historical Context ..... 7

  Constructivist Grounded Theory in This Study ..... 8

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH ..... 10

  Purpose ..... 10

  Reading in Kindergarten ..... 10

  Social and Emotional Impacts of COVID-19 ..... 13

  Trauma Informed Teaching Practices ..... 14

  Explicit Instruction and Phonemic Awareness ..... 16

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS ..... 19

  Significance of Study ..... 19

  Research Question and Aims ..... 21

  Methodology ..... 22

  Research Setting ..... 22

  Theoretical Sampling ..... 22

  Participant Selection and Data Collection ..... 23

Research Design and Data Analysis ........ 23
Instrumentation ........ 28
Limitations and Ethical Considerations ........ 30
  Beneficence ........ 31
  Respect for Persons ........ 31
  Justice ........ 31
  Informed Consent ........ 32
  Selection of Subjects ........ 32
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS ........ 33
Introduction ........ 33
Finding 1 ........ 35
Finding 2 ........ 41
Finding 3 ........ 43
Finding 4 ........ 45
  Amy ........ 49
  Cori ........ 52
  Bean ........ 58
  Herman ........ 61
Finding 5 ........ 65
Chapter Summary ........ 67
CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS ........ 69
Introduction ........ 69

Analytic Category Development ........................................ 70

Analytic Category 1: The Importance of Explicit Literacy Instruction—Specifically, Phonics—and Examples During COVID-19 Virtual Learning ........ 71

Analytic Category 2: Relationships Are Paramount for Any Student to Learn ........ 76

Analytic Category 3: Trauma-Informed Instruction in a Virtual Environment was Necessary ........................................ 77

Analytic Category 4: Building Relationships With Families Needs to Be Built Into the School Year ........................................ 78

Conclusions and Actionable Recommendations ........................................ 79

  Conclusion 1: Longitudinal COVID-19 Studies ........................................ 80

  Conclusion 2: Yearly Home Visits ........................................ 82

  Conclusion 3: Longitudinal COVID-19 Studies on Phonemic Awareness ........ 85

  Conclusion 4: Professional Development ........................................ 85

Limitations of Grounded Theory ........................................ 86

Concluding Remarks ........................................ 88

APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS ........................................ 89

APPENDIX B: WRITTEN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY ........ 90

APPENDIX C: DIBELS LETTER NAMING FLUENCY EXAMPLE ........ 92

APPENDIX D: DIBELS END OF THE YEAR DATA (BY INDIVIDUAL SECTION) ........................................ 93

APPENDIX E: DIBELS MIDDLE OF THE YEAR PHONEMIC AWARENESS DATA (CLASS SUMMARY) ........................................ 94

APPENDIX F: DIBELS END OF THE YEAR DATA (CLASS SUMMARY) ........ 95

REFERENCES ........................................................................................................ 96

# LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Analytic Category Development ........................................................ 72

Table 2 Consistency Between Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions .................. 81

# LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Steps of a Constructivist Grounded Theory Study ........................................ 28

Figure 2 Responses ........................................................................................ 37

Figure 3 Washington Post Article.................................................................. 53

Figure 4 Density of Bullet Casings in Washington, DC, Police Districts .................... 54

Figure 5 FUNdations Writing Grid.................................................................. 75

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## Purpose of the Study

My intention in conducting this study was to use an approach based on constructivist grounded theory to understand teaching kindergarteners foundational literacy skills during a period of distance learning for over a year followed by a return to in-person instruction. By conducting the study, I amplified the voices and experiences of parents and students in one particular kindergarten class within DC Public Schools (DCPS), the public school system in Washington, DC.

## Grounded Theory and Personal Context

Grounded theory, as defined and developed by Glaser (1978), Glaser and Strauss (1967), and Strauss and Corbin (1998), is a methodology that involves construction of theory about important topics and issues in people's lives. Those following this methodology attempt to construct this theory via an inductive data collection process (Morse, 2001). By applying grounded theory in this study, I was therefore not setting out to prove or disprove anything. Issues important to the study participants came up in the stories they told about their lives. These issues intersected with the topic of the study (see Mills et al., 2006, p. 27).

I needed to identify the intersection between my interests as a literacy researcher and the experiences of my students as they attended kindergarten in a virtual setting and then transitioned back to a classroom. To begin to draw out this intersection, I begin by giving a brief account of my history in education and how I view literacy in my kindergarten classroom. In Chapter 2, I further develop my research interests.

I have been a kindergarten teacher, in some form or another, for 9 years, and I have worked in education for a total of 10 years (during the 1 year I was not in a kindergarten classroom I taught reading to over 60 third-grade students). I first worked in a kindergarten classroom in Burlington, Vermont, as an educational aide for 2 years. While in that position, I realized I wanted to focus my career mainly on early childhood education—specifically, early childhood literacy.

During my 1st year as a kindergarten aide in Burlington, I met Jared (pseudonym). Jared was a Black boy in a predominantly white and middle-class school who had recently moved to America from Somalia, Africa. This classroom was Jared’s first experience with the English language and being in some type of formal school system. The teacher I was paired with that year had very little patience for Jared. She (a white woman) was thrown off by his behavior and what she perceived as an apparent lack of interest in learning; she did little to foster a relationship with him. That year I saw Jared struggling to assimilate into an educational system designed to fail students like him. By the end of the year, his peers were reading at a Fountas and Pinnell Level C, but Jared was struggling to stay in the classroom for 15 min at a time. He knew his primary teacher had given up on him and did not want to stay in the classroom to watch his White peers access materials he had not received an opportunity to learn. However, as Ladson-Billings (1995) said, “student ‘success’ is represented in achievement within the current social structures extant in schools” (p. 467). The structures that existed in education were inherently racist, created to prevent students like Jared from “succeeding,” even in kindergarten. What Jared deserved that year was a teacher who not only learned to love him for where he was in his life journey but also could come to understand culturally what it meant to be a Black boy living in one of the least diverse states in the country. Jared did not need the teacher he had, who dangerously categorized him as a “behavior issue” at such a young age.

Jared is just one of the students who has helped form my belief that literacy instruction requires educators to be culturally responsive in their practice (a belief shared with Ladson-Billings, 1995). Jared’s kindergarten teacher unconsciously deemed him to have behavior issues and did not put much time or thought into trying to teach him any aspect of literacy. Jared left kindergarten without basic phonemic awareness and without knowing the letters of the alphabet. Furthermore, Jared was a victim of an inherently classist and racist educational system. As a first-generation American student learning English who also lived in poverty, Jared would likely be categorized as at risk (even as early as kindergarten). This categorization would likely have lasting effects on Jared. I could no longer just stand by and watch such injustice happen. At the end of that year, I made a decision to teach in Washington, DC. I wanted to teach specifically in a Title I school in Ward 8 in the southeast of the city. This neighborhood has historically been underserved, even though it is within the nation’s capital and just a few miles from some of the best resourced people in the world.

As a both a researcher and someone who has taught kindergarteners facing growing pressure to perform well on standardized tests, I have become interested in understanding why the educational systems that children take part in while very young have been pushing children to become readers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I have been witnessing families burdened by the effects of a very serious trauma. Lives have instantly changed, particularly the lives of the youngest learners, among them my kindergarteners. Parents have been losing their jobs, students have been moving from house to house, and some have been barely able to access the internet. Although students' lives have been changing, school districts have continued to pressure students to attend to standardized tests and succeed on them, despite being physically out of school for months. I wanted to know why this has been happening and what the experiences of my students have been during this time.

In the remainder of this section, I describe the history of grounded theory and how I used it in this study. Grounded theory came to exist because of tensions between qualitative and quantitative researchers in sociology (Charmaz, 2014). In the 1960s, graduate students and other researchers began to create a field of thought that resulted in case studies and life histories (Charmaz, 2014, p. 5). Mead (1929/1960) and Dewey (1919/1948) laid the foundation for grounded theory; Strauss, one of the founders of grounded theory, was inspired by these foundational studies.

With regard to the historical progression of grounded theory, Charmaz (2014) said, "What researchers did in the field and afterwards remained opaque" before grounded theory (p. 5). This theoretical deficit led to actualization of grounded theory by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Grounded theory formalizes the idea that researchers must become emersed in field research. The earliest works of Glaser and Strauss were

> successful collaborations that studied death and dying in hospitals. … In the U.S. during the early 1960s, hospital staff seldom talked about or even acknowledged death and dying with seriously ill patients. Glaser and Strauss's research team observed how dying occurred in a variety of hospital settings; they looked at how

> and when professionals and their terminal patients knew they were dying and how they handled the news. (Charmaz, 2014, p. 5)

What distinguished grounded theory from other theories of the time, particularly quantitative ones, was that grounded theory involved collecting data explicitly and methodologically. Glaser and Strauss (1967) took the conversations they had documented with patients, doctors, and staff members and organized these conversations so that the researchers could analyze the conversations in a formal way. This resulted in a very new and different theory: "Glaser and Strauss (1967) first articulated strategies and advocated developing theories from research grounded in qualitative data rather than deducing testable hypotheses from existing theories" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 6).

Social science research up to that point had generally been positivistic, and researchers often set out to replicate other studies scientifically. Social scientists believed in a very scientific and logical way of researching. They reduced the complexity of human experience to quantifiable data points that could be explained logically. Furthermore, researchers separated themselves from their research: "Positivism led to a quest for valid instruments, technical procedures, replicable research designs, and verifiable quantitative knowledge" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 6). Such positivistic research connotes a level of definitiveness. Positivist researchers set out to prove something, followed a prescribed methodology, and reached a conclusion.

In my study, nothing was positivistic, or definite. My study occurred at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic had rendered literacy instruction very fluid, and my research practice therefore needed guidance from a methodology capable of responding to constant flux. This is why grounded theory alone was inappropriate for this study, which also required an element of constructivism. I return to this point in the Constructivist Grounded Theory in This Study section.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) expanded on their methods and made discoveries using those methods that challenged existing methods of social science research and led to increased interest in qualitative methods. Charmaz (2014) said the work of Glaser and Strauss stood as “a major force in igniting the qualitative revolution” (p. 10). Before this work, the emphasis in social science had been firmly on quantitative research. The defining components of grounded theory are as follows:

- simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis;
- construction of analytic codes and categories from data, not from preconceived logically deduced hypotheses;
- use of constant comparison methods, which involve making comparisons during each stage of the analysis;
- advancement of theory development during each step of the analysis;
- use of memos to elaborate categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps;
- use of sampling aimed toward theory construction (theoretical sampling), not population representativeness; and
- review of literature after development of an independent analysis (Charmaz, 2014, p. 8).

In this section I gave a brief historical description of grounded theory and shared the personal context for this study. Grounded theory was a part of the theoretical lens that guided this research; however, my use of constructivist grounded theory, with its deeply personal nature and emphasis on reflection, added to the validity of the study. Grounded theory alone was inadequate to answering the research questions.

**Constructivist Grounded Theory—Historical Context**

In the early 1990s, a growing number of students, researchers, and scholars sought to “move away from the positivism in both Glaser & Strauss’ (1967) earlier versions of grounded theory” (p. 12). Charmaz was one of the major theorists who shaped constructivist grounded theory. Many features differentiate constructivist grounded theory from grounded theory. The following discussion summarizes these differences.

> Constructivist grounded theory
>
> adopts the inductive, comparative, emergent, and open-ended approach of Glaser and Straus’ 1967 work. It includes the dual emphasis on action and meaning inherent in the pragmatist tradition. The constructivist answers numerous criticisms raised about earlier versions of grounded theory. Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory emphasizes the high flexibility of this particular theory and methodology. Additionally, constructivist grounded theory researchers understand that reality is constructed socially, my understanding of reality, privileges, and perspectives must be an inherent part of the research. … The constructivist approach perspective shreds notions of a neutral observer and value-free expert. (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13)

When applying constructivist grounded theory, a researcher must be aware of the social situations, perspectives, and circumstances that surround the research conducted. Although the researcher may not control these aspects of the research, it is important to explicitly talk about and explain them because they form a part of the construction of the data: “The researcher and the researched co-construct the data—data are product of the research process, not simply observed objects of it” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 402). For this study, I was aware of the intricacies of DCPS and created trusting and meaningful relationships with the participants, my students.

### Constructivist Grounded Theory in This Study

The specific qualitative research inquiry method used in this study was constructivist grounded theory, which researchers have discussed as a popular conceptual framework for social sciences (Charmaz, 2014; Mills et al., 2006). Constructivist grounded theory is a systematic methodology and a version of grounded theory that emphasizes the subjectivity of researchers and posits that researchers construct data and theory through interactions with social processes (Charmaz, 2014). Researchers have used constructivist grounded theory historically in qualitative nursing studies and sociological studies.

To ensure the study was relevant to literacy education and qualitative research, I had to use a paradigm that aligned closely with my views about reality and the nature of reality (Mills et al., 2006, p. 26). Using constructivist grounded theory helps researchers build informal theories to describe their research topics (Charmaz, 2014). In this study, I built informal theories about teaching reading to a group of kindergarten students in a virtual setting. A key component of constructivist grounded theory is that a researcher taking this approach participates in the research as fully as possible and not merely as an “objective observer” of the process (Mills et al., 2006, p. 26). This meant that I interacted personally with the participants and directly impacted the research results.

A few “sensitizing concepts” and “disciplinary perspectives” (Charmaz, 2014, p. X) helped me begin this study. After analyzing and coding memos, I discarded some of these concepts that proved irrelevant. However, a constructivist grounded theorist must understand the similarities between their initial interest in a research topic and their emergent data (Charmaz, 2014). My research interests included how to teach reading to students in kindergarten, the effects (if any) of trauma due to online schooling in the 2020–2021 school year, and academic differences encountered in virtual public school kindergarten classrooms, as judged by the parents of the participants. I discuss these three research interests at greater length in Chapter 2.

# CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH

## Purpose

Researchers who have investigated the use of grounded theory and constructivist grounded theory have recommended reviewing related research later rather than earlier during the course of a study (Qureshi & Unlu, 2020). Several themes of interest emerged before I collected data, and several others emerged after I collected data. In this chapter I review research relating to the themes that emerged before data collection.

## Reading in Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a pivotal year in a child's development academically, emotionally, and socially. This has been true since its creation in Germany over a century ago. Friedrich Frobel, the founder of the kindergarten movement, imagined his school as a place where teachers would care for children from the earliest ages and help them learn through experiences and play. The German word "kindergarten" translates into two English words: "plants" and "gardeners." Frobel envisioned school as a place where teachers (the gardeners) help students grow like plants into well-rounded humans. Frobel explicitly created his kindergarten as a play-based school. In 1860, the first kindergarten in Boston, Massachusetts, opened thanks to Elizabeth Pebody (Muelle, 2005, p. 87). Soon kindergarten classrooms were becoming popular throughout the country.

Kindergarten remained a play-centered learning environment throughout most of the 20th century. When the Soviet Union successfully launched Sputnik in the late 1950s, there was a call to look more closely at the American education system, especially in the lower grades. Many parents and policymakers thought the Soviet achievement was a call to "accelerate academic skills" in the lower grades (Muelle, 2005, p. 90). By 1969 two schools of thought had emerged regarding the structure of early childhood learning. One group advocated for kindergarten and early childhood education to remain a time in a child's life focused on the child experiencing the world and playing to learn more. The other group advocated for an increase in academic tasks with the hope of improving the education system.

This debate continued through the publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the Department of Education in 1983. By this time, over 96% of 5-year-olds were enrolled in some type of public kindergarten (Muelle, 2005, p. 91). This study helped bring to light the importance of education at a young age.

Academic work at the kindergarten level has greatly increased. According to Miller and Almon (2009)—in a report for the Alliance for Childhood, which advocates for kindergarten remaining a play-based institution (as originally designed)—stated:

> Too few Americans are aware of the radical changes in kindergarten practice in the last 10 to 20 years. Children now spend far more time being instructed and tested in literacy and math than they do learning through play and exploration, exercising their bodies, and using their imaginations. (p. 15)

If this claim is correct, children in kindergarten classrooms have been spending less time than they once did developing important lifelong social and emotional skills such as self-regulation and cooperation. COVID-19 has caused students to spend even less time interacting in person and building these skills. Rather than developing such skills, children have been spending more and more time developing their abilities to take standardized tests. Further research is needed regarding the long-term implications of such academically focused kindergarten, particularly in a virtual setting.

Bassok and Rorem (2016) stated, “Recent accounts suggest that accountability pressures have trickled down into the early elementary grades and that kindergarten today is characterized by heightened focus on academic skills and a reduction in opportunities for play” (p. 1). Their statements suggest that use of high-stakes testing in later grades has led to an increase in demand for academic performance that has made its way into lower grades, such as kindergarten.

Shifts in what students learn in kindergarten have occurred over the past decade at an alarming rate. One reason for this may be implementation of the Common Core State Standards. The promoters of these standards had good intentions and set out to create an equitable learning experience throughout the country, regardless of students’ geographic or socioeconomic backgrounds:

> Given its equal conception, the Common Core cannot close achievement gaps, any more than the same icing will transform different cakes. Policies and resources aligned to an expansive view of equity are needed to foster more equal chances of school and life success for children from disparate circumstances. (Kornhaber et al., 2014, p. 20)

However well-intentioned policy makers and educators involved in the creation and implementation of the standards hoped to be, it has remained unclear whether the standards have achieved their original goal, and the effects of exposing kindergarten students to such academic rigor at a young age have also remained unclear. One of my aims in conducting this study was to understand the implications for some of the youngest and most vulnerable students of continuing this level of rigor despite school being completely virtual.

## Social and Emotional Impacts of COVID-19

Childhood trauma is common and can have an overwhelming effect on a child's brain development, ability to learn, and behavior. The National Institute of Mental Health (2021) defined childhood trauma as the "experience of an event by a child that is emotionally painful or distressful, which results in long-lasting mental and physical effects" (p. 3). Childhood trauma has a range of causes. Trauma may result from a singular event or continued persistent events. All classroom teachers have students in their classes who have experienced or are experiencing trauma. Between one half and two thirds of all school-aged children experience trauma (Felitti et al., 1998). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (2016), many different events can induce trauma, such as a medical crisis, neglect, abuse, instability resulting from homelessness, and family separation. It can be difficult to pinpoint whether a child has experienced trauma, because trauma is so individualized; that is, what is traumatic for one student may not be for another student (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). Schools need to provide students with safe environments, and those working in schools need to be understanding and sensitive to students' lived experiences. Little has been discovered about how to do this in a virtual setting.

Many researchers have investigated the effects of trauma on students' academic skills, such as literacy, and social and emotional well-being; researchers have also investigated strategies to address these effects in classrooms (Hertel & Johnson, 2020; Minahan, 2019; Ridgard et al., 2015; Thomas et al., 2019). Their findings have become particularly relevant because of how rapidly the kindergarten learning environment has been changing since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research is needed to understand the journeys kindergarteners have been experiencing during distance learning and the associated “shared traumatic experience” (DCPS, 2020, p.1 ) of COVID-19.

## Trauma Informed Teaching Practices

According to Ko et al. (2008), educators must take trauma into account when planning their teaching methods: “Trauma confronts schools with a serious dilemma: how to balance their primary mission of education with the reality that many students need help in dealing with traumatic stress to attend regularly and engage in the learning process” (p. 398). Minahan (2019) found eight small changes educators could quickly make in their classrooms to better equip themselves to teach students with traumatic backgrounds: expect unexpected responses, employ thoughtful interactions, be specific about relationship building, promote predictability and consistency, teach strategies to “change the channel,” give supportive feedback to reduce negative thinking, create islands of competence, and limit exclusionary practices (pp. 30–35). These strategies take place in physical spaces, and Minahan made no mention of how to apply these strategies in a virtual setting.

Ridgard et al. (2015) identified several physical indications that a student may be experiencing trauma, including withdrawal from relationships with friends, repetitive play reenacting traumatic events, and decline in school and academic performance. In a virtual classroom, it is hard to determine whether a child is withdrawing from friendships or reenacting trauma because teachers have a limited view of their students. Teachers may be able to observe a decline in school performance or literacy in a virtual setting, but it is unclear what that would look like in an early childhood setting.

The Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) described a number of activities and strategies to help students increase their achievement in interpersonal relationships and academic performance. One strategy is to build relationships—the responsive classroom strategy is a holistic approach that builds a positive classroom culture and community. Starting on the first day of school, a teacher can put into place morning meetings and closing circles, which help all members of their classroom feel welcome, valued, and respected. This is particularly important for students coming to the classroom with a complex history of traumatic events.

The teaching environment plays a huge role for all students (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). It may help students who have experienced trauma to have a dimly lit classroom or relaxing music playing in the background. This helps to reduce stress-inducing stimuli to students' brains. Choice-based activities can be essential. Students who struggle with different classroom triggers may be experiencing a lack of control. To help students build their confidence and love of learning, teachers should create many opportunities throughout the day for students to choose their own literacy activities. One way to do this is by creating literacy stations.

Collaboration is another strategy that can benefit students (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). The classroom teacher of a student with a traumatic history should not be the only one involved in planning for the needs of the student. The mental health team, social workers, special educators, and the student's family (if possible) should all be involved in ongoing communication about the student. Consistency is key for many students, because students with traumatic histories often attract labels such as "students with problems" or "tricky kids." When constructing these students' narratives, teachers ask, “What happened to this student to cause them to behave this way?” Having a teacher or team of teachers and mental health professionals who show up consistently for a student and have routines in place ultimately benefit the student’s ability to feel safe at school. When a student feels safe and has a trusting relationship with a teacher, they can learn how to read.

Educators must capitalize on student strengths (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). As educators work to build their relationships with all students, not just students who have experienced trauma, they must create spaces in their classrooms where students can engage in topics and activities of interest to them. In a virtual setting, it may be challenging to help students set up particular spaces where they can engage in their interests. The strategies proposed by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2016) seem like a good place to start; however, they fail to take into account virtual learning environments.

## Explicit Instruction and Phonemic Awareness

The beauty of constructing grounded theory is the ability of the researcher to return to the literature at any point in the research process. Kathy Charmaz (2014) says, “The constant comparative method in grounded theory does not end with completion of your data analysis. The literature review and theoretical framework can serve as valuable sources of comparison and analysis (p. 305). It’s interesting to note that originally in grounded theory Glaser and Strauss suggested that the literature review be left until after the data analysis. Constructivist grounded theory, however, depends on the constant looking at and revision of the literature review throughout the dissertation process.

As this project went on, I needed to add to the literature review to correctly capture what it was that was coming up in my research and to highlight scholars in the field of literacy who have already grappled with similar theoretical perspectives and issues. I quickly learned in the virtual modality, that explicit instruction was a necessity for teaching in an equitable way.

One researcher (Iwai, 2016) looked at 18 K-8 teachers who were taught to use explicit reading interventions in a methods course at their school. All these teachers at the end of their intervention reported out that they were going to use explicit methods while teaching reading to their students. There was an increase in their perceptions about using explicit interventions due to being involved in an explicit intervention themselves.

I identify with the teachers in this study. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, I was an advocate for open ended, project-based teaching because students always had physical access to materials and that was something within my control. As this dissertation took place virtually in the beginning, I had to shift my understanding of teaching and adapted an explicit teaching model to teach my students early foundational reading skills.

Two different curricula were used as explicit ways of teaching kindergarteners phonemic awareness during this study. They were the FUNdations literacy curriculum and the Heggerty phonemic awareness curriculum.

As Al-Bataineh & Sims-King state in their research (2013), “Some children will enter a classroom with a variety of experiences that will help them to read and comprehend exactly what they have read. Other students will enter a classroom with limited academic experiences and because of outside circumstances, may struggle in their efforts to become a fluent reader” (p. 59). It was exactly this problem that led me to using the two explicit curriculums mentioned above. Due to the virtual nature of part of this project, it was hard to gain an understanding of what experiences my students were bringing with them into the virtual classroom. Rather than make assumptions, I had to adapt to an explicit model of teaching.

If students do not have some type of phonemic understanding and mastery in kindergarten it will be “increasingly more difficult as the years progress to make gains in their reading abilities” (Al-Bataineh & Sims-King, p.65). As the modes of instruction continued to change throughout the school year it remained critical that I continue to use explicit instruction in literacy. The results of student’s end of the year literacy assessments can be seen later in this dissertation. All indicate that there was success using explicit instruction.

# CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

## Significance of Study

Childhood trauma has been one of the leading causes of incarceration, severe medical issues, and death later in life (Wolff & Shi, 2012, p. 1). According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2015), nearly 35,000,000 children have experienced one or more events in their life that could lead them to experience childhood trauma. Seventy-two percent of children experienced a traumatic event, such as a natural disaster, war, neglect, violence, sexual misconduct, or emotional abuse. Trauma can result from a single instance, such as a fatal car accident involving a family member, or from sustained activity. Ongoing trauma may have "harmful and pervasive effects on students, including cognitive, academic, and social-emotional functioning" (Hertel & Johnson, 2020, p. 27). Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, students have been becoming traumatized, worried, and anxious about the future of their learning and friendships. In a matter of days, their lives dramatically changed. Schools have thus had to meet these students' social–emotional needs.

In-person instruction plays a critical role in reaching students with trauma because many of these students may not be able to access needed care and therapy otherwise (Ridgard et al., 2015, p. 2). During in-person instruction, teachers and staff members can see students and serve as first reporters of suspected abuse or neglect. Counselors can then provide access to mental health resources, and teachers can provide emotional support as mentors. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic teachers have had to become familiar with other signs of trauma and emotional issues in their students. They have had to look for cues such as body language and issues arising in students' home environments that indicate a need for additional support.

In early childhood classrooms, trauma can manifest itself as behavioral issues in students because those students find their classrooms feel "unsafe" (Knight, 2019, p. 82). Trauma may also manifest as students constantly seeking perfection in their work or withdrawing socially (Hertel & Johnson, 2020, p. 28). Children can only learn in safe and secure physical and emotional environments. Teachers must engage in professional development to understand how to implement trauma-informed practices that allow students to heal from traumatic events and feel safe in their classrooms. These practices include building physical environments in which students feel safe (Knight, 2019, p. 82). The physical environment of a student healing from trauma should feel like a "sanctuary" (Bloom, 1995, p. 1). These practices also include creating emotionally safe environments full of consistent relationships with trustworthy adults (Knight, 2019).

Human brains, particularly those of small children, are not well equipped to handle ongoing stress or traumatic events (Hertel & Johnson, 2020, p. 32). Children in such situations may have difficulties in many areas of learning, including "diminished concentration and memory, loss of focus or perspective, confusion, rigidity, self-doubt, … and impaired thinking" (Hertel & Johnson, 2020, p. 24). For these reasons, some teachers may find working with students with traumatic histories particularly stressful and overwhelming. This makes the need for teachers to create safe and consistent relationships and spaces for children even more pressing: "Fostering a … classroom climate that supports a diminished need to activate survival strategies provides students with access to improved cognitive functioning and the ability for deeper and more effective learning" (Hertel & Johnson, 2020, p. 32).

Many scholars have proposed ways of teaching and reaching students with traumatic histories when teaching in person; however, COVID-19 has changed education and the way teachers teach. Furthermore, I identified a gap in existing research regarding how to equip teachers to continue to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of their students during virtual instruction. With this study, I aimed to identify strategies for teaching literacy to students impacted by trauma during distance learning. I specifically focused on a group of kindergarten students within DCPS during pandemic-driven distance learning. The unique contribution of this study derives from its inclusion of students dealing with the effects of trauma due to the pandemic or virtual learning, which permitted comparisons with existing findings regarding students dealing with trauma during in-person instruction.

## Research Question and Aims

Through this constructivist grounded theory study, I sought to understand how literacy practices in one particular kindergarten class changed as a result of virtual learning, COVID-19, and the transition back to in-person learning after a substantial time learning virtually. A single research question guided this study: What do literacy practices and instruction look like in a hybrid and virtual setting in a kindergarten classroom? The study had three specific aims:

- to understand how practices of early reading instruction changed as a result of students being in a virtual classroom setting, according to the experiences of students in one particular classroom and their parents;

- to understand trauma-informed teaching practices during virtual learning; and
- to understand how students, parents, and teachers perceived differences in literacy practices in a virtual setting.

## Methodology

This study relied on a theoretical model that also serves as a methodology. Data were collected from the participants and analyzed to help answer the single research question that guided the study: What do literacy practices and instruction look like in a hybrid and virtual setting in a kindergarten classroom?

## Research Setting

The focus of this study was a group of kindergarten students within DCPS during distance learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of the study, DCPS consisted of 63 elementary schools in 4 different quadrants of the city. I limited my inquiry to students in the school where I taught in northwest Washington, DC, because they were students with whom I had been able to form trusting relationships, which is a key requirement of constructivist grounded theory.

## Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is a process by which a researcher decides which additional data are necessary for theory generation (Charmaz, 2014, p. 206). It allows the researcher to produce more data to confirm or oppose categories identified in previous coding (Charmaz, 2014; Noble & Mitchell, 2016). I used convenience sampling to obtain a sample of kindergarteners who I happened to have professional contact with at the time of the study (see Terrell, 2016, p. 75).

## Participant Selection and Data Collection

The participants were 22 kindergarten students in my class and their caregivers or family members. Out of these 22 students, seven were learning English as a second language. It was hard to discover how many students were receiving free or reduced-price lunch due to the nature of virtual learning. Four of the students were categorized as high risk because of their traumatic histories or socioeconomic factors.

To collect data, I used virtual interviews with the participants and analytic notes. Researchers applying constructivist grounded theory use these two forms of data to obtain facts to help construct a sequence of events (Charmaz, 2014, p. 57).

Virtual interviews were conducted on March 5, April 23, and June 28, 2021. During these virtual interviews I answered the questions in Appendix A. The interviews happened later in the school year, so I had time to develop trusting relationships with the participants and their family members, despite the limitations of teaching in a virtual setting. Each virtual interview lasted approximately 15–20 min. I planned to allow participants and their families to sign up in advance sign up for interviews well in advance. No data collected prior to institutional review board approval were used in this study.

## Research Design and Data Analysis

A constructivist grounded theory researcher begins with awareness that participants will entrust them during interviews with details of scenarios and events happening in their lives (Charmaz, 2014). Such a researcher must ground their relationships with their participants in trust from the beginning:

> Our respect for our research participants pervades how we collect data and shapes the content of our data. We demonstrate our respect by making concerted efforts to learn about their views and actions and to try to understand their lives from their perspectives. (Charmaz, 2014, p. 19)

This study began after I had established trusting relationships with participants and their family members for half a school year. This gave me the maximum time possible to build relationships with the participants.

Collecting data is key to a constructivist grounded theory study. Unlike grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which typically involves researchers taking notes while interviewing participants, constructivist grounded theory involves recording conversations and later transcribing them for analysis. The data derive from “observation, interactions, and materials that we gather about the topic or the setting” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 3).

Observations of literacy instruction were made daily and recorded meticulously using video. These observations were of me teaching my students during morning meetings and literacy times. I wanted to see and understand what the students’ experiences were during these particular times of the day. During these video recordings of morning meeting or literacy lessons, I looked at the dialogue between myself as the teacher and my students. I want to see whether they were learning their letter names and sounds at an appropriate pace for kindergarten students. Virtual learning made routines in literacy very different. When teaching in person I could see and hear students very clearly. This was very valuable when listening to students learning their letter sounds. It was important in the video documentation of lessons to pay close attention to students' comprehension of letter sounds.

I also recorded observations and any other useful information about literacy lessons in dated notes to myself that I wrote at the end of every school day. Interactions between myself, the kindergarteners, and their family members were also documented using informal interviews. These interviews were transcribed for later coding.

Because the video of the interviews and lessons was recorded, I could go back and write down, sentence by sentence, what was said during interviews and lessons. I then then reread my notes to see whether any sentences came up multiple times. For example, I had several virtual conferences with parents. I took descriptive notes during these conversations and quoted information pertinent to literacy learning in a virtual setting. One sentence that emerged several times was "My student is having a hard time focusing on the computer." I coded this particular sentence as "HTF" (short for "hard time focusing") and determined how often this particular code emerged in the interviews. Later in the data analysis, I began to develop a theory of why students were having difficulty focusing. I suspected that this was due to the virtual school environment. Through the process of identifying codes that led to development of themes, I used the notes to self, recordings of lessons, and recordings of interviews with participants and their family members to answer the research question.

According to Charmaz (2014),

> All grounded theorists, we study our early data and begin to separate, sort, and synthesize these data through qualitative coding. Coding means that we attach labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding distills

> data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data. Grounded theorists emphasize what is happening in the scene when they code data. (p. 3)

Early data collection began at the beginning of the school year. These notes were preliminary analytic notes. I made these notes so that I could follow best practices in education and examine the growth my students were making in kindergarten.

As the coding process began, I was able to make comparisons based on the data collected and create detailed "preliminary analytic notes," also referred to as "memos" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 3). It was important that I captured the different scenes in my virtual kindergarten classroom as early in the school year as possible and with as much detail as possible so that I could accurately portray my students' experiences learning during the pandemic.

The categories within the data and the similarities and differences identified based on the data provided the foundation of an "abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 3). These initial categories of data were further studied and expanded on as the study continued. For example, after a day of conferences earlier in the school year, one theme that emerged from my analytic notes corresponded to questions from families about why testing was still being done during a pandemic. If I had continued my study using my preliminary notes, I would have coded corresponding statements as "testing during a pandemic." This code would then have turned to "TDP" in my memos, and I would have determined whether it came up in any other interviews. These codes were important to identification of any intersection between my research interests and the experiences of my students.

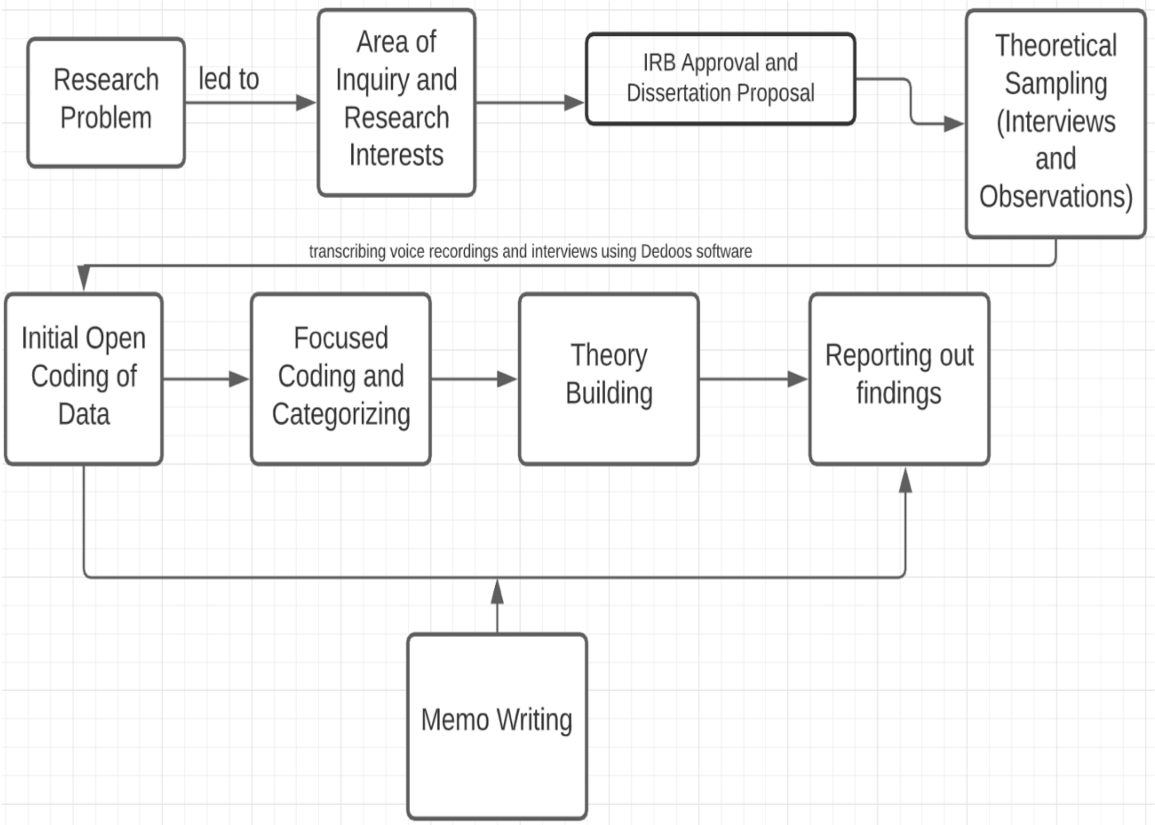
Because I transcribed 22 interviews from three virtual interview sessions, I collected a large quantity of data. I chose to use the Unlu–Qureshi instrument for grounded theory to help me organize the data systematically. I discuss this instrument in detail in the Instrumentation section.

Constructivist grounded theory builds on grounded theory and provides a way to answer “what and how questions” concerning social life complexities (Charmaz, 2014, pp. 397–398). In this study, the social life complexity studied was learning during a pandemic. Researchers applying constructivist grounded theory understand that their research participants are involved in complex life scenarios, and such researchers take great care to understand the participants’ perspectives by immersing themselves in the data gathering process. Furthermore, constructivist grounded theory “emphasizes the abstract nature of empirical phenomena and contends that this understanding must be located in the studied specific circumstances of the research process” (Charmaz, 2014, p. 398). The specific circumstances of my study include the situation in which it took place: during a pandemic when learning took place virtually. Also, “constructivist grounded theory reshapes the interaction between researcher and participants in the research process and in doing so brings to the forefront the notion of the ‘researcher as author’” (Mills et al., 2006, p. 31). In this study, I developed trusting relationships with the participants and their family members and reported on the events happening in their lives—specifically, in the classroom—within the context of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the primary researcher, I acted as researcher, coconstructor of data, and author of a story based on the data collected.

Figure 1 shows the steps of this constructivist grounded theory study.

**Figure 1**

*Steps of a Constructivist Grounded Theory Study*



Research Problem
led to
Area of Inquiry and Research Interests
IRB Approval and Dissertation Proposal
Theoretical Sampling (Interviews and Observations)
transcribing voice recordings and interviews using Dedoos software
Initial Open Coding of Data
Focused Coding and Categorizing
Theory Building
Reporting out findings
Memo Writing

*Note*. Adapted from *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Vol. 2, p. 18), by K. Charmaz, 2014, Sage Publications. Copyright 2006 by Sage Publications. Adapted with permission.

**Instrumentation**

It was important to use thoroughly reviewed instrumentation capable of organizing the gathering, analysis, and synthesis of data. For these reasons, I used the Unlu–Qureshi instrument for grounded theory during this study. The authors of this instrument stated that, if used properly and in a specific order, the instrument enhances data collection and analysis in many ways (Qureshi & Unlu, 2020, p. 9). The authors gave three specific ways in which the instrument enhances data collection and analysis:

> First, the analytic process becomes organized, and the researcher is aware of the required steps. Second, the initial line-by-line codes usually tend to run in hundreds, and at a glance, their huge volume may hamper researchers' thought process as well as adding researchers' block similar to what writers' experience during writer's block, thus affecting the research process. Using the Ünlü–Qureshi instrument may be useful in such situations as it helps in organizing data in manageable sections while ensuring saturation in each step. Third, the data are reviewed and revised multiple times to enable researchers to reflect on codes. This reflectivity later helps the researcher in theoretical coding stage when the researcher is urged to look beyond the obvious while also adding to the transparency of the research. (Qureshi & Unlu, 2020, p. 9)

The instrument benefited this study because of the large quantity of data collected for the study via interviews, analytic notes, and observations. It was also important to have an appropriate tool to aide my research because keeping themes organized and knowing what to do with themes once they emerge from preliminary analytic notes and interviews often challenges researchers. This instrument provided me with a structured way to analyze the data. The data collected were revised multiple times, which allowed me to reflect on the different codes personally. This reflection time was necessary when so many new things were emerging about distance learning and how to teach reading virtually.

As the study continued, it became apparent that this instrumentation was not a meaningful way that I could capture and analyze the massive amounts of data that were collected. The beauty of constructivist grounded theory is that the research can accommodate and adjust to the project. It seemed like a good idea while I began to analyze data that I pivot to another way of analyzing data. I began to read the book, Completing Your Qualitative Dissertation by Linda Dale Bloomberg and Marie Volpe. What I so much appreciated about this book was that it gave me a roadmap of what to do with all of the data I collected through analytic notes, observations, and recorded lessons and interviews. It was a different way to analyze data compared to the Qureshi & Unlu instrumentation. Bloomberg and Volpe offered many matrixes and visual representations of how to organize data that to me made a lot of sense because I'm a visual person. Later in the dissertation you will see these matrixes and how I analyzed the data using these tools.

## Limitations and Ethical Considerations

The sampling method chosen for this study, convenience sampling, may have limited the study. Participants were not chosen randomly because they were in a specific place at a certain time. Although I could easily access this population, its composition limited the generalizability of the findings (Terrell, 2016).

Grounded theory, particularly constructivist grounded theory, is one of the most difficult qualitative methodologies with respect to writing up results (Waring, 2017), which is one of its limitations. This is because it is an ongoing form of research, and its continuous nature requires constant collection, coding, and synthesis of data (Waring, 2017, p. 108). My ability to write and rewrite as research progressed was integral to the study (Charmaz, 2014). This may have been a limitation, however, because it consumed a lot of time. I was dedicated to the study and saw it through to completion, despite the heavy workload.

Theoretical sensitivity was another potential limitation of this study (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss, 1987; Waring, 2017). As the researcher, I brought my own background and experiences to the study, which created a context for the study. However, as the researcher, it was of utmost importance during analysis to let the data coding speak and reveal the research story without injecting my own bias.

The participants were chosen and treated ethically, which increased the reliability of the research. Terrell (2016) defined five components of ethical treatment: beneficence, respect for persons, justice, informed consent, and selection of subjects. The subsections that follow address these components in detail.

### *Beneficence*

A researcher must treat participants in their study ethically by respecting their decisions, protecting them from harm, and ensuring their well-being (Terrell, 2016, p. 89). To respect participants, I required them to sign a waiver that clearly stated my intentions.

### *Respect for Persons*

Participants incapable of acting autonomously are entitled to protection (Terrell, 2016, p. 89). To make sure the kindergarteners participating were fully protected, their parents or guardians were included in all conversations pertaining to the study and gave their written and verbal consent to participation of the kindergartners in this study.

### *Justice*

Participants in a research study should review all benefits to which they are entitled, with no burdens (Terrell, 2016, p. 89). In this study, all participants benefited from participation because I worked very closely with them and, both as their teacher and researcher, cared for and loved them.

### *Informed Consent*

Saint John’s institutional review board approved my research proposal. In addition, all parents and guardians were fully informed about the study and either provided written consent for their kindergartners to participate or did not (Appendix B).

### *Selection of Subjects*

To maintain fairness when choosing participants, all students in the class were asked whether they wanted to participate. No willing students were excluded from this study unless their parents or guardians did not want their children to participate.

# CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand through the lens of grounded theory how literacy practices and instruction looked like during hybrid and virtual kindergarten instruction and after a transition back to in-person instruction. I believed greater understanding of this phenomenon would lead to understanding of how to teach kindergarteners foundational literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness and decoding. This chapter presents the main findings derived from 20 interviews, one survey, three classroom observations, and hundreds of pages of observational notes. Five major findings emerged from this study:

1. Participants and their parents overwhelmingly agreed that the virtual setting had negative social and emotional effects on children's learning experiences—particularly literacy.
2. Parents felt stretched thin by their many responsibilities in addition to managing their children learning on computer (which kindergarteners could not manage independently).
3. By the end of the school year, 80% of participants met their kindergarten benchmarks on Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessments, indicating that many students learned foundational literacy skills despite the virtual setting.
4. Participants needed explicit instruction in social and emotional skills before continuation of literacy instruction once half of the students returned to in-person instruction in February 2021 and the other half returned in May 2021.

5. Literacy instruction differed in virtual, hybrid, and in-person settings.

The findings addressed the research question that guided the study: What do literacy practices and instruction look like in a hybrid and virtual setting in a kindergarten classroom? The findings also addressed the three specific aims of the study:

- to understand how practices of early reading instruction changed as a result of students being in a virtual classroom setting, according to the experiences of students in one particular classroom and their parents;
- to understand trauma-informed teaching practices during virtual learning; and
- to understand how students, parents, and teachers perceived differences in literacy practices in a virtual setting.

Finding 1 answered the aim regarding understanding how early reading instruction changed as a result of the virtual classroom setting. Finding 2 answered the aim regarding understanding of how students, parents, and teachers perceived differences in literacy practices in a virtual setting. Finding 3 answered the research question and provided guidance regarding what kindergarten teachers' next steps should be in terms of teaching foundational literacy skills. Finding 4 answered the aim regarding understanding of what trauma-informed teaching practices looked like during virtual learning and as students returned to in-person learning. Finding 5 also answered the aim regarding understanding of how literacy instruction changed as a result of the virtual classroom setting.

The next five sections discuss the findings in detail and how the findings directly supported the purpose of the study. Presenting a variety of details and experiences of the participants aids comprehension of the reality and stories of the participants, a critical element of grounded theory research (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 262). I hope that I accurately captured the participants' stories in the following discussions. Before I elaborate on the findings, I should note that family members of three of the 20 participants, who spoke English as a second language, did not participate in the survey.

### Finding 1

Participants and their parents overwhelmingly agreed that the virtual setting had negative social and emotional effects on children's learning experiences—particularly literacy. First, I consider in greater detail what participants said the effects of virtual learning were. In May 2021, in the context of an informal morning message question, I asked my students, "What do you like more—learning on a computer or learning in-person? Why?" All 20 students agreed that they liked learning in-person better. Some of their responses to the "why" part of that question were as follows:

- "I like to be with my friends."
- "I missed using art materials for drawing."
- "I like playing outside."
- "I like recess with my friends."

Next, I consider in greater detail what parents found the effects of virtual learning to be. In April 2021, I sent a survey out to participants' parents (see Appendix A). Although I initially intended to hold virtual interviews, the time constraints of the school year made it more practical to employ a qualitative survey instead. The survey asked, "How did distance learning go for your student?" The following responses to this question indicated that parents thought their students had negative experiences with distance learning:

- "A mix of engagement and total meltdown."

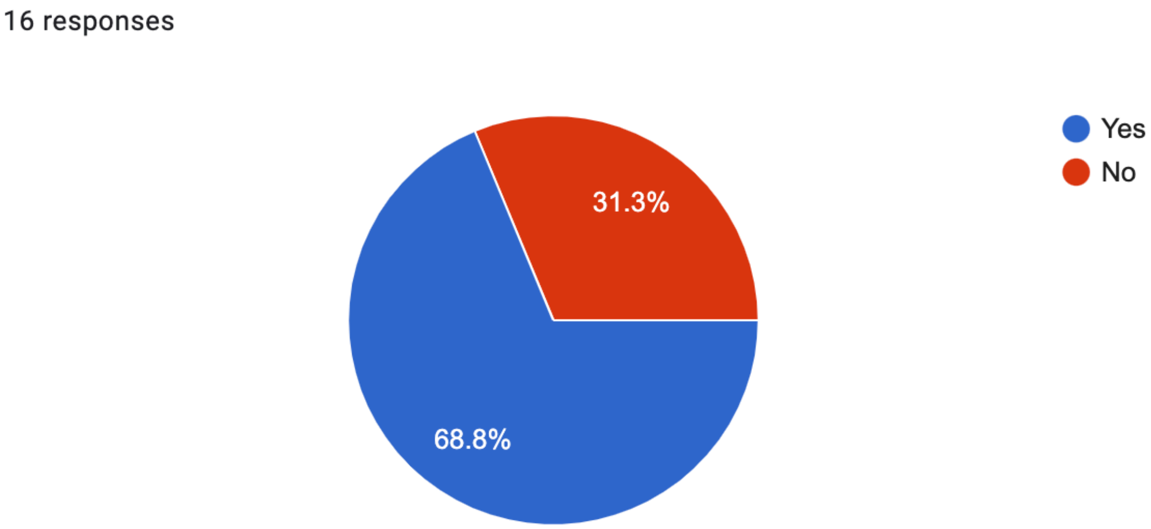
- “I was really unable to devote the time needed.”
- “We are not native speakers it was hard for us.”
- “Distance learning in kindergarten was challenging- mostly because at this age it feels like the social-emotional development work that happens in person was unable to take place, for the most part.”
- “Morning meeting was torture, listening to each kid report out.”
- “It was ok, although she prefers in-person classes.”
- “Some kids did not do well.”
- “Our little one seemed bored and I don’t think was intellectually engaged through a screen as in the classroom.”
- “She attended a formal pod where she received social interaction, structure, and a combination of her online classes and offline supplemental instruction … I’m so relied that the children are back in the classroom.”
- “Good, but keeping her focused was a bit challenging.”
- “As for online learning (live instruction via teams) it went very poorly, but not because of the teacher.”
- “He was definitely more subdued and quiet and less excited about learning than normal.”
- “It was not an ideal situation for my child.”

Although the list does not record all responses received, 16 of 20 caregivers (80%) responded to the question. The responses captured some of the negative effects of virtual learning, including the inability of English language learners to access lessons and students’ decreasing intrinsic motivation to learn virtually.

In connection with the period of virtual learning, the survey asked, “DCPS referred to the time of distance learning as a ‘shared traumatic experience.’ Do you agree?” The pie chart in Figure 2 shows the proportions of “yes” and “no” responses. Eleven parents agreed that the change in learning environment caused their children to experience some sort of trauma.

**Figure 2**

*Responses*



The survey went on to ask about what exactly made this time traumatic for students. One respondent said:

> Our kids just needed basic social interaction and daily screen time for school and everything else was too much. As parents, we felt guilt for not being able to provide one of their most basic needs and for not being able to provide our full attention to them because of work. The built up of guilt over time was traumatic.

Another respondent said:

> Very unfamiliar dynamic; stress of isolation; missing friends/family; being stuck indoors; having to balance distance learning with demanding work schedules. And I realize that this was the best case scenario! For many, the economic hardships caused poverty and hunger and even greater uncertainties.

A third respondent said:

> When I think about the use of the word trauma, I guess I think about it as something that one will always remember, and something that will always be reflected upon as less than ideal. Trauma can also be in the form of mental vs physical health trauma. Trauma could have been a loss of a job, loss of space, stress and anxiety about children not having the tools at home to learn. … For our family, trauma has more to do with mental health - anxiety and stress that was created for all of us around distanced learning. I think the stress and anxiety that was created around kids falling behind, not having access to what they need etc. speaks most to "trauma" that was experienced. The kids felt stressed when they didn't understand something and were embarrassed to ask on a screen for help; not seeing friends was very isolating and made them feel disconnected; not meeting the teacher in person was difficult; fear of getting sick.

A fourth respondent said:

> I think it was difficult to be all the time with parents and lack the usual interaction they usually have at school with other people. For parents, it was still worse, nothing changed for us in terms of -pre-pandemic responsibilities but we needed to also adjust to the learning experience, with a huge demand in terms of

> following schedules and having to be all in the calls, making noises and being interrupted all the time by the kids.

A fifth respondent said:

> Although we fared better than the vast majority of people (total job security, no health issues, access to basic resources and economic and professional security), we all have had heightened stress, anxiety, tension, and depression. My husband has severe asthma, allergies, and other issues that make him high-risk. His doctor told him that if he contracted the virus, he likely would have a "very poor outcome." That knowledge hung over everything and every decision we made for months.

A sixth respondent said:

> We live far from almost all of our family, and it has been a very long time since we have seen any of them. We normally see both sides of our family at least two times a year, if not more. Even though we talk on the phone and through FaceTime often, the separation has been tough. It is hard not to feel that precious time with grandparents has been stolen, but we try to stay forward looking.

A seventh respondent said, "Loss and struggle permeate our network. We know many people who have lost family members and friends to Covid-19, and we also know many people who have lost their jobs or businesses." An eighth respondent said:

> I already have issues with depression and anxiety, and it has been a struggle to stay level in the midst of this time. I cried after I received my first vaccine. I was jubilant after the second. I had no idea how tight and tense I was until that relief finally crashed over me.

A ninth respondent said:

> A silver lining is that I think that this time was far more traumatic for the adults in our household than the children. Spending time with us, off-screen, was a delight for our young one but it took a fearsome toll on us. I shared with my husband that our children thrived at our own expense; but I am of course relieved that they have weathered the situation relatively well.

A 10th respondent said:

> For our child, the structure and socialization provided by a school environment would have been really important. Without it, our child was frequently sad, bored, and lonely. For us, to see our child go through this, while doing our best (and often failing) to help, while also trying to keep our jobs, was often frustrating and depressing.

In one of my notes, from May 17, 2021, I wrote about a family who had dealt with loss of a family member from COVID-19:

> For the first time in a few weeks, I saw a parent of one of my students who just lost her father to Covid. Their family is Argentinian, so she was unable to make it home to say goodbye to him. This mom was clearly in mourning and I asked if I could give her a hug and expressed my condolences. I tell this story about this interaction to reemphasize the resilience of my students during this traumatic time. They are incredible.

These data regarding trauma illustrate that learning literacy skills, especially for children whose parents reported their experiences, often became secondary to checking in with children and their family members to make sure everyone was okay. Children are very perceptive, and often when a child cannot focus on learning the reason is something serious going on at home.

**Finding 2**

All 16 parents who responded to the survey felt some type of strain from managing their children and virtual learning. Parents felt stretched thin by their many responsibilities in addition to managing their children learning on computer (which kindergarteners could not manage independently). The survey asked parents, “How was adjusting to distance learning for your whole family?” All 16 caregivers who responded described how they were stretched thin and the ultimate effects of virtual learning on their families. One respondent said, “The first couple of months were tough … fatigue set in.” Another respondent said, “Very difficult, we handled it but for a while, I (mom) needed to stop working to take care of the virtual classes and kids.” A third respondent said, “My child adjust to distance learning quickly although I don’t think she is learning so well like in school.” A fourth respondent said:

> We have a lot of space in our house and full time child care to support distance learning so while it was certainly an adjustment, we had a relatively easy time. I’d say we had two issues worth noting- the biggest issue was IT [information technology]- having the right equipment and hardware set up, and then maintaining it and addressing numerous operational issues (from links not working to mouse not working to etc.) Even though the kids are scheduled fully, at the kindergarten level my kid wasn’t able to function independently b/c [because] of the IT needs (unlike my 3rd grader who could manage and troubleshoot a lot of her problems on her own). Also, because we were new to the

> school our kids didn't know any of the other kids and so had no basis for trust/ friendship to form when they started virtual learning.

A fifth respondent said:

> Hard. I work about 10-12 hours a day with meetings about 7-8 hours a day in the 9-5 hours. It was stressful and patience was difficult to muster. I felt sorry for the kids. Being unable to socialize and be with other kids/ friends. We worked hard to make it work.

A sixth respondent said, "This was difficult. Both parents work and we had no babysitter/ nanny to help with facilitating either online learning or teaching/ playing during asynchronous learning. This was stressful for bot us as parents and for our child." A seventh respondent said, "Adjusting initially was tough- balancing two kids in virtual school and a full-time job was very challenging." An eighth respondent said, "Challenging at times, since both parents had to work and at the same time during breaks find fun activities to do." A ninth respondent said, "It was difficult to balance for me with my work and remote school." A 10th respondent said, "Difficult. The distance learning itself was hard for our 6 year old (tho our 16 year old was by and large fine with it), but managing all the family-work logistics was an ongoing low-grade nightmare." An 11th respondent said, "The beginning was tough for families, especially with stamina and independent kids." These 11 responses convey an overwhelming sense that participants' family members found helping their kindergarteners learn and attend to classes on computer extremely challenging. Many mentioned their jobs and their inability to balance multiple children and responsibilities.

### Finding 3

Finding 3 was that by the end of the school year, 80% of participants met their kindergarten benchmarks on DIBELS assessments, indicating that many students learned foundational literacy skills despite the virtual setting. At the end of the school year, all kindergarten students within DCPS took DIBELS assessments. These assessments measure the following early literacy skills: letter naming fluency, phoneme segmentation fluency, nonsense word fluency (correct letter sounds), nonsense word fluency (words recoded correctly), word recognition fluency, and reading comprehension. Although these data were quantitative in nature, they were necessary to address the aim of the study regarding understanding of how practices of foundational literacy changed as a result of virtual learning. The school year of the study was unique because it included virtual learning, hybrid learning, and in-person learning. The quantitative data collected contributed profoundly to the qualitative story of the study. My school's principal permitted me to access the data from all kindergarteners in the school, not just those in my own class. First I consider the DIBELS data collected for my class, and then I consider the data for all kindergarteners.

A child's letter naming fluency is their ability to identify the names of letters. Appendix C gives an example of an assessment of letter naming fluency. Kindergarteners at the end of the year need to be able to identify all upper- and lowercase letters of the alphabet. The end-of-year goal for students was to identify 42 letter names in 1 min. Eighteen of 20 (90%) participants met this benchmark for letter naming fluency. One of the two students who did not meet the benchmark identified 27 letter names in 1 min, and the other identified 28 letter names in 1 min, indicating they were well below the benchmark.

The end-of-year goal for phoneme segmentation fluency, which measures phonemic awareness, was for students to identify 44 phonemes in 1 min. Fourteen participants (70%) met this benchmark. This part of the assessment indicated that the other three participants (30%) ended the school year struggling with phonemic awareness despite my use of the Heggerty curriculum, specifically designed to support students' phonemic awareness. This suggests that kindergarteners may need additional support with phonemic awareness in future.

The end-of-year goal for nonsense word fluency (correct letter sounds), which measures a student's ability to decode individual sounds in nonsense words, was seven sounds in 1 min. Sixteen participants (80%) met this benchmark.

The end-of-year goal for nonsense word fluency (words recoded correctly) was for each student to read 10 nonsense words in 1 min. Only 10 participants (50%) met this benchmark. This was another datum that told a powerful story about literacy instruction throughout the year. Half of the participants left kindergarten struggling with the early literacy skill of blending sounds together to read a full word. This is one of the most important early literacy skills a child can learn before entering first grade.

The end-of-year goal for reading comprehension was for each student to be reading at Level C. Thirteen participants (65%) met this benchmark. Two participants (10%) were at Level B. This is encouraging because they were almost at the text comprehension level needed by the end of the year. Five participants (25%) were reading and comprehending texts significantly below a kindergarten reading level. This is a powerful piece of information for guiding the next steps teachers need to take when trying to help students catch up in reading. For a more comprehensive look at these data, refer to Appendix D.

Many students struggled with phonemic awareness for the duration of the school year. One student in particular struggled with phonemic awareness in a virtual setting. This student went on to participate in a 6-week intensive phonemic awareness intervention group where she worked on the following skills: rhyme production, rhyme recognition, onset fluency, blending syllables, isolating final sounds in words, segmenting words into syllables, isolating medial sounds in words, blending phonemes, segmenting words into phonemes, adding initial phonemes, deleting initial phonemes, and substituting initial phonemes. All of these skills are included in the Heggerty phonemic awareness curriculum. After the end of the 6-week intervention, this student made progress in almost all areas, although she continued to struggle with segmenting words into syllables. This student represented a more widespread phenomenon among this particular class of kindergarten students. Many students who learned virtually struggled with phonemic awareness (including all of the skills mentioned above). In the middle of the year, 10 participants (50%) were not meeting the benchmark in phonemic awareness. See Appendix E for more details.

### Finding 4

My observational notes and the survey data indicated clearly that participants needed explicit instruction in social and emotional skills before attending to literacy lessons or instruction in general. I asked family members about the effects on the social and emotional skills of their children of being in front of screens so much. The survey asked, “What are some ways in which you’ve seen distance learning affect your little one?” One respondent said, “Our son loves school and learning. However with distance learning, he saw school as a chore and was just going through the motions vs. interacting with friends and being engaged.” Another respondent said:

> They have to see parents under a lot of stress, when you deal with work or other issues and kids are at school, parents try to accommodate their emotions before kids are back. The pandemic didn’t allow us to do so.

A third respondent said, “She has more anxieties, she is not anymore concentrated.” A fourth respondent said:

> A lack of social interaction has been tough, and as the months wore on, the kids fuses were shorter and they were less understanding about the need to keep it up, try hard, stay engaged online. I think there were some good affects between siblings in that they only had each other and so learned to enjoy spending more time together. The ubiquitous nature of screens has certainly had an impact as well.

A fifth respondent said, “Desire for more TV and screen time; irritable more often; sometimes clingy in a way she wasn’t before.” A sixth respondent said:

> On one hand, our child would have benefitted from a more typical school year with structured learning and social activities. Without that, and with the amount of extra screen time they would not have had in a normal school year, I think their attention span definitely decreased and they have become more introverted. On the other hand, they were very interested in a lot of the educational apps (Lexia, ST Math) and seemed to learn a whole lot by using them.

A seventh respondent said, “Falling behind in basic things like reading and writing.” An eighth respondent said, “He was less excited about school than normal. He got addicted to a screen. He was happy to spend more time with me though.” A ninth respondent said:

> Because of our resources and the geography (both in DC and the odd geometry of our block), he was able to play outside the whole time, and we were able to mitigate his social isolation via a pod, and then in-class + a “CARES”-style classroom, and then back in school. I have little reason to think there will be any long-term impacts on our kid, at least.

A 10th respondent said:

> Pros: she has become a whiz with screens and navigating tech platforms. It is mind-blowing to me that she has been able learn to read and do math on a Teams meeting. I have been impressed by her resilience throughout these new challenges. Cons: I am slightly concerned that our kindergartner has forgotten basic manners in a social setting as she has not been living within the latter boundaries. She is accustomed now to our own family boundaries we have established at home. For the past year, her peer-like social club was her two younger sisters, with whom she mostly is able to direct and have them obey her every whim so she will need to adjust to others non-sibling peers and their own independent thinking.

An 11th respondent said, “He became very defiant about not doing his work online. When he was isolated from friends, he was not able to play the active and imaginary games I’ve seen him enjoy since he got more social time.” A 12th respondent said:

> Our child has not been able to make close friends given the extent and length of distance learning. He is just developing those friendships now. We had come to Murch in Pre-K [prekindergarten], and he made a couple friends, who were then not in his class. We tried to stay connected with those friends outside school but one moved and for the other it was hard with covid restrictions and schedules. Our little one is naturally shy and doesn't approach other kids he doesn't know at the playground. This social element was one of the hardest parts as a parent. Our child also was less able to focus on distance learning, and it showed in learning progress. Lastly, our child has more screen time than ever would have been allowed.

A 13th respondent said:

> She was indifferent to tablets and most technology before. Now, she refers to her school IPad as the "tablet of death." I have no idea where that came from, but now that she's in the building she refuses to look at or touch her tablet.

A 14th respondent said:

> She developed care and affection for Mrs. Carney-Hagan and Mrs. Webber even though she did not meet them in person until recently. They did create warmth and a real bond even though classes were virtual. She did learn information and develop skills while participating in classes, but I think that progress was cemented by the supplemental instruction and follow up she received at her pod.

A 15th respondent said:

> My daughter has zero interest in doing any school work or tablet work with me at all. She is highly resistant and refuses to answer questions or chat about anything

> school related. She used to be better about it, but over the past few months her position has hardened, and we came to an understanding that she can do art or other projects at home and leave the school work for the school building. This has greatly reduced our stress and her frustration. She does better with little or structure during home down time.

Six participants (30%) expressed to me in personal conversations that they were experiencing some type of traumatic personal event at home. I obtained written consent from the family members of five of these six students to discuss their stories using pseudonyms. In the subsections that follow, I talk about the experiences of these five students in detail. These stories are powerful and emerged from the notes I took and lessons I recorded during the study. The stories of these children indicate that before learning any foundational literacy skills they needed to have a trusting relationship with their teacher. The names of the children used in the following subsections are pseudonyms.

### *Amy*

Amy was a student who spoke English as a second language and who had just moved to the United States from Argentina. Her mother had been assigned to work for the Argentinian ambassador as his administrative assistant. Amy was also an only child, which made it hard during the pandemic for her to socialize with other children. From the first day of school, Amy's parents made sure to help me understand that Amy was struggling to speak English and that they were concerned she would not pick any up by attending school virtually. Lessons were hard for Amy to attend to—even lessons that only introduced one letter of the alphabet and its sound at a time. She consistently needed a parent next to her to translate the content or help her speak conversationally with others. It became apparent to me that I had to create some type of nonacademic environment, in addition to morning meetings, in which Amy could play with her friends or express herself without the constant help of a parent. This led me to create virtual play groups in afternoons 5 days a week. Every day would be a different play theme for the children. For example, on Monday the theme may have been Legos, and the children could log on, play Legos together, and talk about anything they wanted. The purpose of these groups was to give students like Amy, who were isolated by distance learning, opportunities to talk with peers and make friends. At first, Amy attended these play groups at least one or twice a week; however, as the virtual school year went on, I noticed Amy's attendance diminishing, not only in virtual play groups but also during academic lessons. I began to sense that something else was going on in this child's life that was preventing her from attending virtual literacy lessons or play groups. Amy's English teacher also reached out to me, concerned about Amy's attendance. Both of us started to wonder what could be going on at home. I, Amy's English teacher, and the educational aide who worked in our classroom asked to hold an informal check-in with Amy's family. We received an email from Amy's mother shortly after the check-in:

> I wanted to let you know what we talked about at the parent-teacher conference that I have to go through a series of procedures as they found something on my chest that does not appear to be right. I will keep you posted, and I thank you and Mrs. W and Mrs. P for your understanding.

My heart dropped. As the school year went on, the health of Amy's mother continued to worsen. One excerpt from her correspondence with me read, "I'm writing to you because tomorrow I have to do a biopsy and unfortunately Amy won't be able to connect to classes." Another excerpt read:

> Tomorrow I have another appointment early in the morning and another at 2:00 pm but when we return from the first appointment Amy will be connected and in the last class of the day she can connect from the car.

A third excerpt read:

> Dear teachers, I want to let you know that I was diagnosed with cancer. I ask for the utmost confidentiality since no one knows about it, not even at my job. I have to do some studies and according to the doctors told me to operate. I thank you for your understanding and patience.

As Amy's mother's health continued to deteriorate, so did Amy's attendance at school. Amy's mother said that Amy was becoming increasingly aware her mother was ill and was staying up late into the night to make sure her mother was okay. This resulted in Amy missing many more days of school. Her class was able to get together and bring groceries and meals to Amy's family, and I remained in touch even after the school year ended. At the time of writing, Amy's mother was continuing her battle with cancer, and Amy had become increasingly aware that her mother could be forever affected by this battle.

The purpose of including Amy's story is to emphasize that one of the findings was that some students were not okay during virtual learning. Their struggles took a toll not only on their academic performance but also on their social and emotional abilities. Virtual learning meant Amy lost the opportunity to be physically present at school every day and thus missed out on important opportunities to practice English with classmates.

### ***Cori***

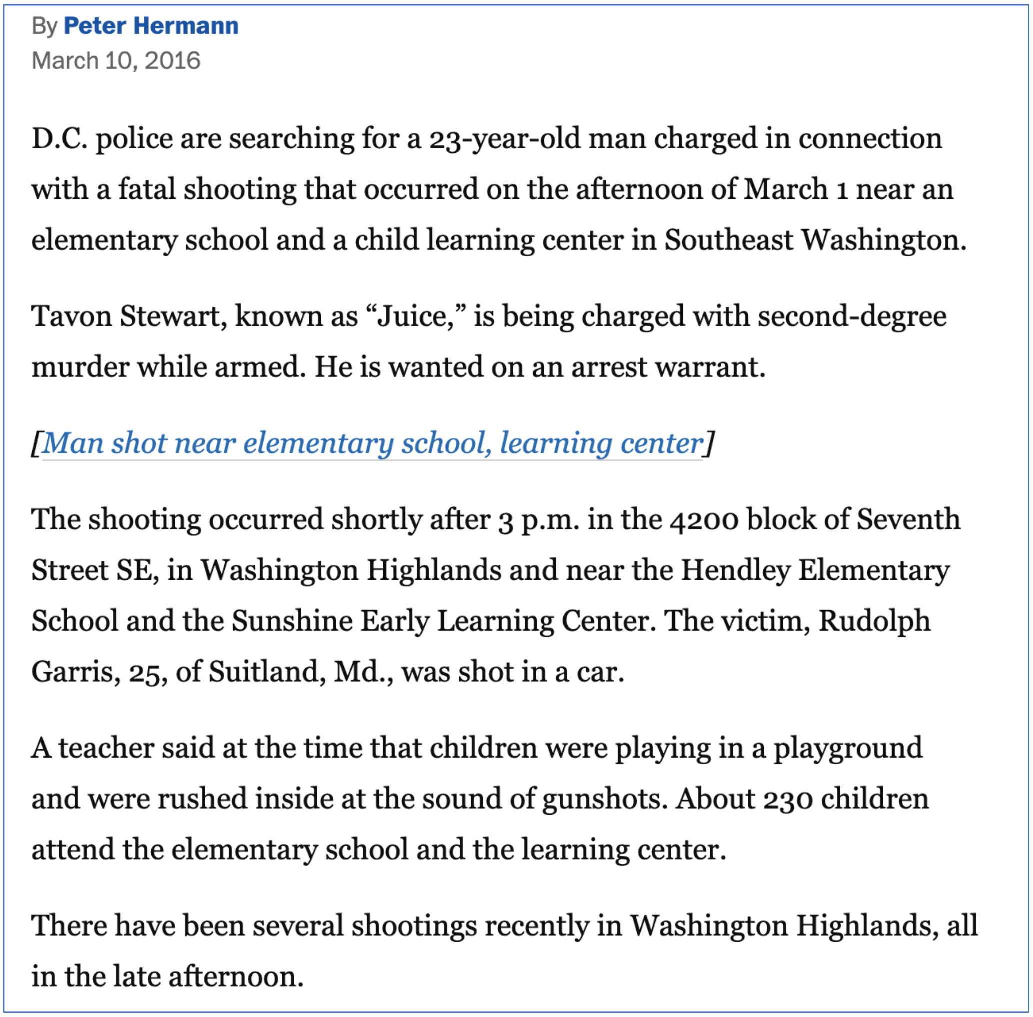
I only had the pleasure of meeting my friend Cori later in the school year. In February he transferred to my school from another public school in Washington, DC. Like any other teacher receiving a new student so late in the year, I was admittedly not excited at the prospect. However, I received a call the same day from the school registrar about Cori, which changed my mind. The registrar told me a little about Cori's story. Cori had just gotten out of a custody battle between his mother and father. His father had won custody, and so the children (Cori was one of three) had moved into the neighborhood to live with their father and grandmother. The school registrar let me know that communication with this family had been challenging. She had called, emailed, and texted Cori's father but had barely received a response. She also wanted me to know that Cori had missed approximately 30–40 days of virtual school, so his attendance was something to be aware of.

The registrar also let me know where in the city Cori had been attending school. Because of my previous teaching work in this part of the city, the name of the school immediately rang a bell. Cori had moved from a neighborhood in the southeast of the city where I had taught a few years earlier.

I think to understand Cori's background, and his move to the northwest of the city, it is important to know about the stark differences between the southeast and northwest of Washington, DC. Figure 3 displays an excerpt from 2016 newspaper article describing a fatal shooting in the Washington Highland neighborhood in the southeast of the city. I taught at the school mentioned. Fatal shootings have been a common news topic in this particular neighborhood. When I taught in this neighborhood, my students dealt with neighborhood shootings as part of their collective trauma. Cori's old school was right down the road from Hendley Elementary School, so I could imagine what he had been experiencing while living with his mother before moving to the northwest of the city.

**Figure 3**

*Washington Post Article*



By **Peter Hermann**
March 10, 2016

D.C. police are searching for a 23-year-old man charged in connection with a fatal shooting that occurred on the afternoon of March 1 near an elementary school and a child learning center in Southeast Washington.

Tavon Stewart, known as "Juice," is being charged with second-degree murder while armed. He is wanted on an arrest warrant.

[*Man shot near elementary school, learning center*]

The shooting occurred shortly after 3 p.m. in the 4200 block of Seventh Street SE, in Washington Highlands and near the Hendley Elementary School and the Sunshine Early Learning Center. The victim, Rudolph Garris, 25, of Suitland, Md., was shot in a car.

A teacher said at the time that children were playing in a playground and were rushed inside at the sound of gunshots. About 230 children attend the elementary school and the learning center.

There have been several shootings recently in Washington Highlands, all in the late afternoon.

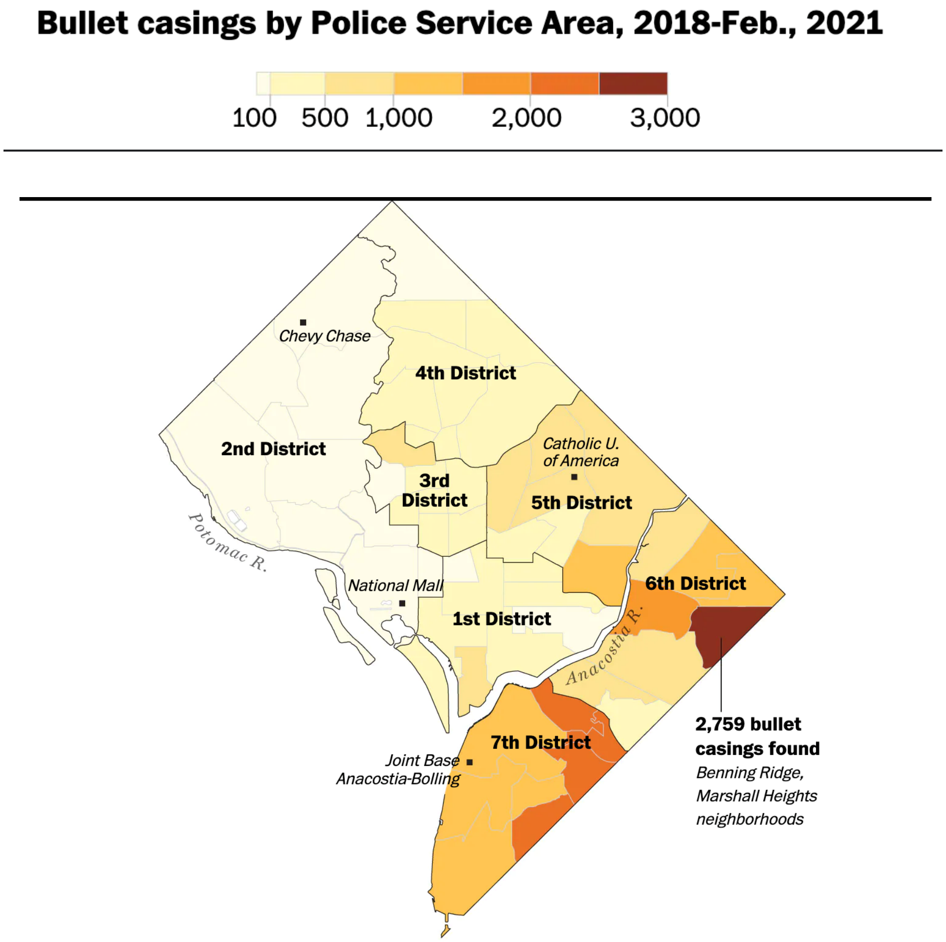
*Note*. From "Police search for suspect in shooting of man near elementary school in Southeast," by P. Hermann, 2016, *The Washington Post* (https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/police-search-for-suspect-in-shooting-of-man-near-elementary-school-in-southeast/2016/03/10/7331bf92-e6bd-11e5-

bc08-3e03a5b41910_story.html) . Copyright 1996-2001 by The Washington Post. Reprinted with permission.

More recently, *The Washington Post* has included discussion of the prevalence of gun violence in the southeast of the city. Figure 4 appeared in July 2021 in an article titled “Thousands of Bullets Have Been Fired in This D.C. Neighborhood. Fear Is a Part of Everyday Life” (Hermann & Harden, 2021).

**Figure 4**

*Density of Bullet Casings in Washington, DC, Police Districts*


Bullet casings by Police Service Area, 2018-Feb., 2021
100
500
1,000
2,000
3,000
Chevy Chase
4th District
2nd District
3rd District
Catholic U. of America
5th District
Potomac R.
National Mall
6th District
1st District
Anacostia R.
7th District
Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling
2,759 bullet casings found
Benning Ridge, Marshall Heights neighborhoods

*Note*. From “Thousands of Bullets Have Been Fired in This D.C. Neighborhood. Fear Is Part of Everyday Life,” by P. Hermann and J. Harden, 2021, *The Washington Post* (https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/07/22/shooting-increase-dc-gun-violence/). Copyright 1996-2001 by Washington Post. Reprinted with permission.

The purpose of providing this information is to justify my claim that Cori joined my kindergarten class as the student in the class furthest from opportunity, having come from a place where people had a very different understanding of physical safety. Cori had not had the classroom time or life experiences that many of my other students had. I recognized that the most important thing to do as Cori's teacher was to build a relationship with him and his family. It was initially extremely hard to get Cori online to attend classes. I found that he did not have a device or reliable access to the internet. With the help of school administrators, I was able to get Cori his own device. Once Cori had his device, I was able to use the call function of Microsoft Teams to call him into lessons. However, this also proved challenging because Cori was often left on his own to try to understand technology. His father was always working, and his grandmother was very busy trying to help all three children with their schoolwork. When Cori was online, I made a point of doing one-to-one lessons with him in literacy and math while my instructional aide led the rest of the class in their lessons. I knew that any minute I could get with him online was very valuable time.

This proved to be the most important time I spent with a child throughout the period of virtual learning. In these one-to-one sessions with Cori, I learned valuable information about him. I learned that he loved basketball, and El Greko and King James were his favorite players. I learned that he fought with his brother and sister while they were together, and this often prevented him from being fully present during virtual learning because the fights ended in tears. I learned that Cori's home life was turbulent.

He was not always sure which adult he could ask for help, so he relied heavily on the support of his third-grade sister, fourth-grade brother, and fifth-grade cousin. Slowly but surely, Cori learned he could trust me and that the classroom (even though only virtual in the beginning) was a safe place for him to be with peers and teachers.

My initial more formal assessments also taught me a lot about Cori and the toll that missing 30–40 school days had taken on him academically. I learned that in February, Cori was able to identify one of the 26 letters of the alphabet and none of the 26 sounds. I recognized that the one-to-one time needed to evolve into some type of academic time. In early March, Cori and I began daily phonics sessions, and I began to explicitly teach Cori the names and sounds of letters of the alphabet using the FUNdations curriculum. I delivered the materials he needed for instruction to his apartment, and he logged on daily faithfully to attend his literacy lessons.

There is another element to Cori's story in that relates to my findings surrounding social and emotional learning. On February 1, 2021, teachers returned to physical classrooms in Washington, DC, to resume in-person instruction and continue virtual instruction. On Mondays and Tuesdays, I had 10 students in person and 10 students online. These "cohorts" were limited in size, but students who spoke English as a second language and students who were struggling in a virtual setting were supposed to receive priority for inclusion in in-person cohorts. The following is an email the principal shared with staff members, which mentions how administrators prioritized students for in-person instruction:

> Stating the obvious, there is so much information being shared throughout DCPS and we are feverishly planning for in-person learning which will start on February

1st. Because of our strong Murch community, families, and committed staff members, I am confident about our ability to make a plan that addresses the needs of our most vulnerable students and our staff's ability to deliver a quality in-person learning plan.

First, if you chose for your child to continue "virtual" on the term 3 survey, he/she will be.

Second, if you chose for your child to be enrolled in a CARES classroom, that request will be honored.

If you chose in-person learning, (not CARES) there are a several things we are currently working on which will determine final class rosters for in-person learning.

- All students in the prioritized group who accepted an in-person seat for term 2 and have and completed the term 3 survey stating you wanted an in-person seat, will receive one.
- Next, we call all other parents who are in the prioritized group to see if they would like to accept a seat as well. Once we have completed these two stages of the process, we move into the general pool of students whose parents requested in-person learning but are not in the prioritized group.
- Every student, prioritized and general pool, receives a lottery number. Per class roster, we highlight the first eleven names of the students who have the 11 highest numbers in the lottery.
- If this initial group of eleven select in-person, that class becomes a cohort and we are done with that class.

• Then we move on to the next class roster.

• For students who were not selected for in-person learning, they will remain on a waitlist.

• If all seats are not filled using the first eleven lottery slots or for whatever reason a seat becomes available, we go to the waitlist, the next number, and contact parents of that student to see if the in-person seat will be accepted.

• When the process has been completed for each classroom, you will know what your placement is. We are determining the best way to communicate this to everyone.

With social distancing and masks, the hybrid model was challenging for kindergarteners. My in-person students often had to play independently for 30–40 min while I led an online lesson with my virtual students. Cori (as well as Amy and other vulnerable classmates discussed later) remained virtual for all of February even though he needed, more than any other student, to be present in person.

### *Bean*

Bean, like Amy, was one of my students who spoke English as a second language. His father, who had sole custody of Bean, was working in the Laotian embassy. In the beginning, Bean joined classes faithfully and was always enthusiastic about seeing his classmates and making new friends, even if only in a virtual setting. As time went on, Bean's attendance became irregular for both me and his English teacher. We both reached out to Bean's father about what was going on, but we were met with reluctance to talk and a definite language barrier that prevented us understanding what was happening at home.

One day, in the middle of small group instruction, I received a text message from Bean's English teacher. She said that Bean had told her he was alone at home, was hungry, and did not know what to do. Bean's English teacher did not know how to help and asked me to log on to their session to try to help Bean figure out what was going on. I abruptly ended my small group lesson and joined Bean and his teacher. Bean was noticeably frightened and said he had only eaten one piece of candy that day and had been alone since morning. By this time, it was early afternoon. As a mandated reporter, I judged that this incident was something we would have to call child protective services about, although I was unsure because of the virtual setting. We had Bean give us a tour of his apartment to show us that he was alone. We verified his story was true because his father was nowhere in the apartment. We then asked Bean to show us inside his fridge, hoping that we could help him make a cheese sandwich or something easy for him to eat. The fridge was bare, and neither Bean's English teacher nor I knew what to do next. We remained online with Bean reading books and watching him play Legos for 2 hr, hoping that his father would return. When Bean's father did not return, we decided we needed additional help.

I called my principal and asked for his help. The principal immediately got in his car and drove to the student's home. He waited outside the door (in their apartment building) until Bean's father returned home and then had the necessary conversations with the father and child protective services. I wish I could say this was the only time this happened with Bean, but I documented four other occasions when he was home alone during virtual learning. Bean's father began to get very frustrated with me and with Bean's English teacher. He had a job at the embassy to do, and at times he needed to be on call and away from Bean. This was out of his control. He said that he left Bean with a phone in case Bean needed a trusted adult, and he added that the embassy was a short two-block walk away from the apartment in case of an emergency.

I became aware through multiple conversations with other staff members that the embassies in Washington, DC, are subject not to U.S. laws but to the laws of the countries they represent. Conversations with Bean's father indicated the existence of a cultural difference regarding understanding of childcare. In Laos, it was normal to leave a 5–6-year-old at home alone. I and other staff members tried to express that in American culture this was unacceptable and viewed as dangerous. I do not think Bean's father understood this point of view, because he continued to leave Bean home alone at least once a week.

At one point the educational team came together with a Laotian translator so that I could make sure Bean's father understood my concern about him leaving Bean home alone to learn on the computer. Even with the translator, it was hard to develop mutual understanding. At one point I wrote in my notes that I was holding back tears because of the lack of understanding between Bean's father and myself. As much as I wanted an adult to supervise Bean, his father did not agree that this was necessary.

When February 1 came along, I recommended that Bean return to in-person learning so that he could be at school all day and not left alone at random times. Bean's father was reluctant to send Bean back and said that his embassy had asked that students of working parents continue to learn virtually until there was more scientific evidence that children were safe learning in person. Bean thus continued to learn virtually until his father agreed to send him back for in-person instruction in May 2021.

By May 2021, Amy, Cori, and Bean were back in the physical classroom. Cori, as mentioned earlier, was the first to return, in early March 2021. Both Amy and Bean returned for the fourth term, which began in May 2021. It was immediately evident how little conversational English Amy and Bean had been practicing at home. Amy was minimally conversational but very happy to be at school in person with her classmates. Bean's conversational English was a bit better, and he could participate in lessons. Bean was able to make friends. He made one close friend with whom he spoke, sat with outside at lunch, and played with at recess. Cori also quickly made friends, although at times conflicts arose with respect to Cori having a safe body and being kind to his classmates. Amy had the hardest time making friends. I often observed her sitting alone or coloring by herself. Teachers and other staff members worked hard with the children to talk about inclusion and what it means to make sure everyone in the classroom community is valued for who they are.

### ***Herman***

Herman, "H," was one of the best academically performing students in the kindergarten class; however, he came up frequently in teacher notes. He began the year fluently reading kindergarten-level texts and comprehending them. Although Herman shone academically, he was clearly having a hard time emotionally and socially at home. Herman's mother reported that because of the virus Herman's family rarely left their house, even to play outside, and childcare for Herman and his younger sister was not something they were comfortable with during the pandemic.

Herman had frequent meltdowns during lessons when he was not called on, and he often took himself off mute while having these meltdowns, interrupting the whole class and the lesson. This was particularly challenging when there were only 15–20 min for each lesson because the class was split into two groups to make lessons smaller and more effective. Herman also struggled with the timing of his participation in virtual lessons because he frequently did not raise his hand but did come off mute. With regard to friendship, Herman did not seem interested in making friends. He often attended the afternoon social play groups but would not engage in conversation with other children about their interests or what they were playing with, pretending to be, or building. Herman's world revolved around him and his immediate needs, and he had a difficult time understanding himself in a bigger classroom community.

In February, Herman was due to start back in person. He immediately struggled with wearing his mask and staying socially distanced, which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention had recommended students do. Although I reminded Herman many times that he must always wear his mask, it always ended up below his nose, and he was unhappy when reminded to pull it up.

Herman struggled with strong emotions. When he felt upset or unable to do something, he would begin to cry hysterically and sometimes would hide below his desk in the fetal position. I immediately realized that I needed to talk to his mother on a regular basis. Classroom management was different in February 2021 from the way it had been before. I was teaching in a hybrid setting, which meant teaching in-person students 20–40 min at a time (Herman was part of this group); at other times the in-person students had to solve their problems without my help. This was not an ideal way to teach, and it was especially bad for building relationships and Herman and students like him with their social and emotional skills. Herman's mother and I began a communication journal and went back and forth two or three times a week. I wrote in this journal about Herman's struggles with social and emotional skills throughout the day. The following quotes are excerpts from this journal. On March 30, 2021, Herman's mother said, "H had a bit of a meltdown after school. … It took a while to get him collected … he kept saying that he felt like a person in jail." On April 5, 2021, I said:

> There are a lot of changes happening from term 3→ 4. Class size for the in-person cohort is increasing, more desks will be in the classroom, and ultimately less time for the kids to move around as freely as we can now with only 11 kids in the classroom. I think thee changes may be hard for H.

On April 27, 2021, I said that Herman "was poking classmates with sticks at recess and saying inappropriate sexual things to a teacher (I'm happy to have this person when I see you at pickup)." On May 24, 2021, Herman's mother responded:

> I am so sorry about this. We actually talk a lot about respecting other people's bodies that are private, and what's not appropriate outside of family (and even withing family). I talked with him about this when we got home and he did seem to understand that it wasn't okay, and appeared to be embarrassed that he had done this. Please let me know if it seems like he doesn't take this to heart.

By this time, Herman was having massive meltdowns (his mother's own terminology) almost daily and inappropriately talking about his body and the bodies of those around him while also making sexual gestures. My aide and I were clearly unequipped to help Herman with all of his behaviors during the school day. We included the school counselor to help Herman work through his feelings and also kept communicating with Herman's mother. Managing Herman's behaviors added substantially to the difficulty of hybrid teaching. I was thankful when my aide returned to my classroom at the start of Term 4 (having been reassigned in the meantime) so that she could help with the management of different students.

On May 25, 2021, Herman's mother said:

> I tried to ask him about what had happened at lunch and why he would do that, and he started crying and saying that he is a selfish person who doesn't think about other people. I tried to ask more about why he would say that, but he didn't want to talk anymore, he just cried. … I actually can't remember when I've seen him life that before; not out of control angry sad, just really quiet curled-up sad. He still hasn't told me what happen, except that he won't do it again.

On June 7, 2021, Herman's mother added:

> He was pretty sad and upset when I picked him up. The first thing he said once we got to the sidewalk was that he was upset because he didn't get to be line leader. He brought this up at home a few times, that he wants to get chosen for this … He's also told me he is worried he will never be chosen as the black jaguar either, with only a couple weeks left. Mostly he just seems really disheartened. On the walk home he told me that he feels like he's just not good at anything and can't do anything right.

Overall, after reading through these conversations between Herman's mother and myself, I could see a lot of what was going on behind the scenes in Herman's life. Herman was very disruptive in school because he was having a hard time self-regulating and finding words to express what he was going through. Although his mother provided me with insight into their conversations at home, it remained upsetting to that his classroom behavior had changed little despite intervention by the counselor.

I learned that Herman’s story was in many ways not unusual. Every year there are a few students like Herman, and I know he needed some extra love and kindness during his time in the classroom. The virtual learning was what made the outcomes of his situation so different from those of similar situations in other years. For half the year, while my students learned only via Microsoft Teams, I could not see behind the screen outside the 20–25 min lessons to understand Herman’s life more fully. He hid his emotions behind the mute button whenever things got too tough to talk about. Herman’s lack of physical presence in the classroom made me slower to provide additional help for him. I could not introduce a calm corner for him or create a teacher–student communication system to help him organize his feelings and find words to overcome his struggles.

## Finding 5

Finding 5 was that literacy instruction differed in virtual, hybrid, and in-person settings. My observational notes described a variety of literacy lessons during virtual learning, hybrid learning, and in-person learning after COVID-19 restrictions began to lift. In this section, I explain how lessons differed based on the type of learning used.

In general, I reflected many times about how hard the year was. The constantly shifting schedules, the differing methods of instruction, and the many online platforms I had to master added additional levels of planning to my work for which I had received no formal training before the pandemic. While teaching virtually, I used the FUNdations curriculum and the Heggerty phonics curriculum to deliver explicit instruction in early foundational reading skills. FUNdations involves teaching students letter names, sounds, and how to write letters. Heggerty, on the other hand, focuses on phonics skills, such as identifying individual phonemes in words, medial vowel sounds, rhymes, and so on. When teaching in person in my classroom, I had plenty of resources available with which to deliver these lessons creatively. During virtual instruction, I struggled with thinking creatively, and I mainly followed the script for each lesson. Students quickly became disengaged, saying they were bored with lessons. Because children were muted, I found it hard to tell whether they were talking about lessons at home or merely playing with siblings, parents, or pets. At times, students turned their screens off and appeared to be away from lessons. So much was out of my control as a teacher during virtual instruction, and I struggled to manage.

During hybrid learning, the situation became dire. My educational aide, who had supported me during virtual lessons when I used small groups or taught differentiated lessons, was reassigned to help teach in what DCPS called a “CARES” classroom. This left me alone to manage 20 students, 10 in the in-person cohort and 10 in the virtual cohort. For the virtual students, I had to continue planning and preparing my online schedule and links for joining classes. I also had to plan and prepare lessons for the in-person students. I met with the virtual students online three times each day. Specialists, such as the English teacher and inclusion teacher, were thankfully able to hold a morning meeting with my virtual students daily, so I could lead a substantial and very important morning meeting with my in-person students to set the tone of our day together.

The virtual students received a math lesson and a literacy lesson and then read aloud, which amounted to 1.5 hr with me each day. The tricky part was managing the in-person students while I taught the virtual students. The in-person students demonstrated a degree of independence I did not know kindergarteners could have. I started by practicing what it would look like, feel like, and sound like for the in-person students to play independently for 30 min. Before they could play, they had to complete one or two academic tasks, which I explicitly explained before I went online. The students could work together (while maintaining 6 ft [1.8 m] of separation) to complete their tasks. Their academic tasks always connected to the lesson in literacy or math that I had just taught.

According to my notes, all but one student successfully completed their tasks before beginning their play time. Students then carefully navigated the room to choose their independent play materials and played for the duration of the time I was online. I rarely had to stop my lessons, and the children were able to sustain themselves without my help for 30 min at a time. I found this remarkable, and it showed that students were able to self-regulate and care for themselves in the absence of my attention.

## Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented and explained the five findings of this study. I showed how each finding connected to the overarching research question and aims of the study. Data from teacher notes, interviews, recorded literacy lessons, standardized tests, and a survey illustrated the findings. Direct quotations and in vivo annotations—typical of qualitative research in general, and constructivist grounded theory in particular—captured the direct experiences of the participants and the perspectives of their caregivers. These perspectives provided great insight into what caregivers experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, when they were responsible for their children logging in to learn virtually.

The principal impression I was left with after analyzing the data was that children are very resilient and can survive and thrive despite experiencing a variety of changes.

# CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION, AND SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS

## Introduction

The purpose of this study was to discover what literacy practices and instruction look like during hybrid and virtual kindergarten instruction and after a transition back to in-person instruction. A single research question guided this exploratory study: What do literacy practices and instruction look like in a hybrid and virtual setting in a kindergarten classroom? The study also had three specific aims:

- to understand how practices of early reading instruction changed as a result of students being in a virtual classroom setting, according to the experiences of students in one particular classroom and their parents;
- to understand trauma-informed teaching practices during virtual learning; and
- to understand how students, parents, and teachers perceived differences in literacy practices in a virtual setting.

I collected a large quantity of data to address the research question and aims. This chapter provides clear insights into the process by which I made sense of the data collected. I gathered data using a survey, by making notes of interactions with parents, and by recording literacy lessons with the 20–23 kindergarteners who participated in this study. (The class size changed throughout the school year, ranging from 20 students to 23 students.) Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) suggested that when a qualitative researcher begins to unpack data for analysis, they must “code, analyze, and organize first by research question and then by categories and subcategories guided by the theoretical or conceptual framework” (p. X).

Due to the large amounts of data collected in different forms such as observational notes and surveys, it was important that I find a way, as Charmaz (2014) says, to define the different amounts of data and condense them into smaller bite sized pieces of information: “Coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data (Charmaz, p.111). This task was laborious, but at the end of the coding process, I had made more sense of my notes and interviews and was able to begin to understand different trends that emerged. Looking back, some early examples of codes in this process were “Examples of Trauma, Explicit Instruction, and Relationships with Parents.” These topics were enough to lead me to emergent theories in the data collected and explain these theories in the subsequent sections of this dissertation.

## Analytic Category Development

This chapter and the analytic categories below were developed by Bloomberg (2010) to help the logical flow of qualitative research, specifically as it relates to analyzing data. Grounded theory and coding was pivotal in this project and this specific tool developed by Bloomberg helped me make logical sense of how I got from my research question and aims of this study to where we are now in this dissertation.

Table 1 depicts how categories emerged in this study. I based the organization of Table 1 on a tool developed by Bloomberg (2010) for presentation of the logical organization of data gathered in a study and how data leads to creation of analytic categories.

## Analytic Category 1: The Importance of Explicit Literacy Instruction—Specifically, Phonics—and Examples During COVID-19 Virtual Learning

The research question that guided this study asked what literacy practices and instruction looked like in a hybrid and virtual setting in a kindergarten classroom. The participants, although aged 5–6 years, overwhelmingly indicated that they disliked learning in a virtual setting and that it was hard for them to focus with so much going on at home. Participant Indigo (a pseudonym) said, “I hate going to school on a computer. I’m so bored all the time.” Indigo made her distaste for virtual learning clear on other occasions too. When Indigo returned to in-person learning in February 2021, she clearly struggled with phonemic awareness.

The quantitative data discussed in Chapter 4 indicates that the participants’ dislike for virtual learning translated into poor learning of phonemic awareness. Many students, even those reading beyond a kindergarten level, struggled with identification of letter sounds and hearing the individual phonemes in words. This phenomenon became especially apparent in my teacher notes after students returned to in-person learning in February 2021. Even during explicit phonemic awareness instruction, which requires children to see how a mouth should move when making sounds, I had to wear a mask, which may have prevented students from accessing the sounds taught.

**Table 1**

*Analytic Category Development*

| Source | Finding | Consequence (analytic category) |
|---|---|---|
| **Research question** | | |
| What do literacy practices and instruction look like in a hybrid and virtual setting in a kindergarten classroom? | By the end of the school year, 80% of the participants in this study met their kindergarten benchmarks on DIBELS assessments. | The importance of explicit literacy instruction—specifically, phonics—and examples during COVID-19 virtual learning |
| **Aims of study** | | |
| To understand how the practices of early reading instruction have changed due to students being in a virtual classroom setting according to the experiences of the students and parents in one particular classroom | Participants and their parents overwhelmingly agreed that the virtual setting had negative social and emotional effects on their children's learning experience—particularly in literacy. | Relationships are paramount for any student to learn. |
| To understand trauma-informed teaching practices during this time of virtual learning | The social and emotional skills of participants in this study needed explicit instruction preceding the continuation of literacy instruction once half of students returned to the classroom in February 2021 and the other half returned in May 2021. | Trauma-informed instruction in a virtual environment |
| To understand how students, parents, and teachers view the differences in literacy practices in a virtual setting | Parents felt stretched thin by their many responsibilities in addition to managing their children learning on a computer (which for a kindergartener proved virtually impossible to manage independently). | Building relationships with families needs to be built into the school year. |

*Note*. DIBELS = Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills.

Teaching virtually gave me the freedom to create lessons and teach literacy as I saw fit. There were no templates in literacy education regarding how to teach virtually in a pandemic. Therefore, I found that sticking to the prescribed literacy curricula led students to gain proficiency in literacy skills. As was described in previous chapters, the two curricula used during this time were FUNdations and Heggerty. Both were designed to be taught explicitly and had scripts for teachers to use while teaching lessons. I learned during virtual and hybrid learning to rely on these explicit curricula.

There are many benefits to using explicit strategies when teaching foundational literacy skills. Researchers have found that explicit and teacher-led reading instruction is most effective for teaching struggling students. Explicit instruction is also extremely effective for teaching students phonemic awareness (Rupley et al., 2009). The FUNdations and Heggerty curricula both allowed me to provide students in my class who were struggling with phonemic awareness with the explicit instruction they needed to gain proficiency before beginning first grade.

A few components of a lesson make it explicit for a student. The first component is that the teacher directly leads and models instruction for students. In a FUNdations lesson, the teacher begins by modeling the name of a letter and the sound that it makes, and the teacher then provides students with a picture of something, the name of which begins with the target letter sound and name. These components (letter name, letter sound, and picture) appear on flash cards presented to the class daily. This is the explicit way both upper- and lowercase letters are taught to students. With regard to explicit instruction, Rupley et al. (2009) said:

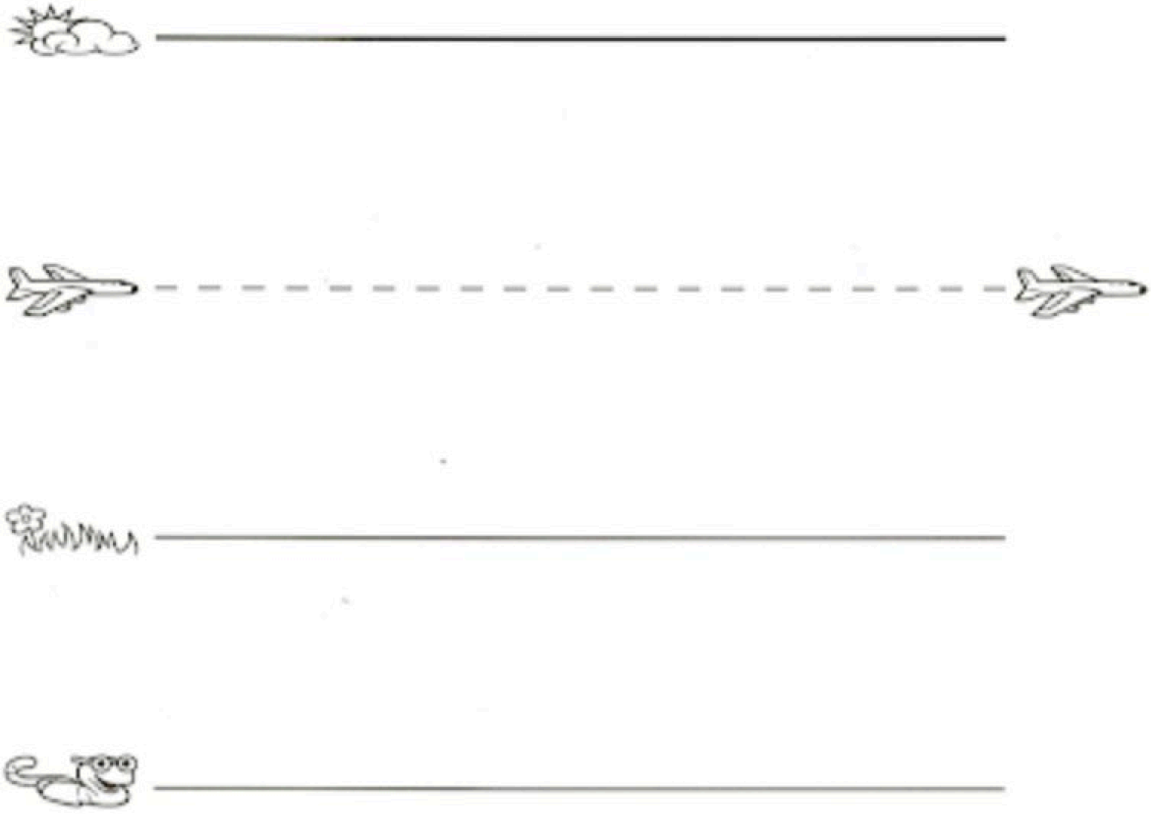
> At the heart of the method are explicit explanations, modeling, and guided practice. This stage is founded on modeling or demonstrating a reading skill or cognitive strategy and its use in an actual reading situation, and thinking aloud with students about what the skill is and how it is used. (p. 4)

When teaching students, the letter names and sounds on flash cards every day, a teacher conveys the foundational reading skills of phonemic awareness and understanding of written and printed letters. As each FUNdations lesson continues, it follows a fixed pattern. The next part of the lesson is guided practice of the skill taught. For example, at the beginning of the school year, instruction focuses on mastery of lowercase letters. Guided practice thus includes students writing lowercase letters. Although this part of the lesson is guided practice, the teacher also explicitly models the task. FUNdations does a great job of guiding the explicit teaching of writing to students and providing them with opportunities to practice. Figure 5 shows the visual that accompanies the teaching of writing.

The FUNdations curriculum uses several icons to help students learn how to write. These icons are of the sky, an airplane, grass, and a worm. When teaching students how to write the lowercase letter “a,” for example, I explicitly say to the class, “The lowercase letter ‘a’ is a plane-line letter. It starts at the plane line, curves around and down to the grass line, up to the plane line, and straight down to the grass line.” At the same time, I model this for students. After watching me explicitly model how to write the letter, students then have time to practice on their own as I circulate and help struggling students. During virtual learning, the process was similar, but I could not circulate around the room. Instead, students held up their FUNdations writing boards so that I could see how well they had learned how to write the letter taught. In conversation with a parent via TEAMS, she commented on how their family of 5 was really struggling to get it together for the academic parts of the day. She mentioned how FUNdations was the one part of the day when she actually felt like she could help "organize her child for the lesson." She mentions that this was due largely in part to all of the materials being labeled with the different signs (see below). She found that this way of explicitly teaching was helpful to her daughter's overall organization.

**Figure 5**

*FUNdations Writing Grid*



## Analytic Category 2: Relationships Are Paramount for Any Student to Learn

I was not surprised to find teacher–student relationships helped students learn, but I was surprised to find that parent–teacher relationships were equally important. This category came up repeatedly in my teacher notes, lesson recordings, and survey data. As mentioned above, once I started the grounded theory process of coding my teacher notes, one of the first themes to arise was “Parent Relationships”. I think that this analytic category was also developed due largely in part to grounded theory methodology. Charmaz so beautifully states (115) that “<Grounded Theory> is an interactive method. It prompts you to keep interacting with your data.” This was one part of the dissertation where I have found myself constantly interacting with the notes I took and revisiting them to make sure I’m understanding what parents were saying.

What’s also interesting about this analytic category is that parents never explicitly said that they wanted to work on relationships with me. It was something I had to infer by the many interactions we had throughout the school year. It was also something I had to reflect on as I saw each child either flourishing with online literacy instruction or for some reason or another, not understanding the concepts being taught, or worst of all missing time online. What I learned through my notes was, the more a parent trusts a teacher and the public education system with their child, the more the teacher reaches the child academically. Although my conclusion is not new to the field of education, I find it useful after experiencing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of children to understand the importance of the relationships teachers have with students.

### Analytic Category 3: Trauma-Informed Instruction in a Virtual Environment was Necessary

Researchers have extensively investigated the importance of educators having trauma-informed practices in place to help their students do well after experiencing adversity. According to Ko et al. (2008), educators must take trauma into account when planning their teaching methods. There was no exception for planning virtual lessons. I had to think about how to captivate my students in my virtual lessons. I had to reflect about how I could create a fun virtual screen space so that students could temporarily remove themselves from their chaotic environments. This was how I came to creating the virtual play groups. This in particular, led many students to join in the afternoon time of the day. This was because the afternoon time of virtual learning was not academic and allowed students to freely interact and talk with one another as if they were in person. It attempted to replicate a classroom and how children interact with one another while playing.

My observational notes shed light on the need for some kind of trauma-informed instruction even in virtual learning environments, despite their drastically different appearance from in-person learning environments. While Chapter 2 of this dissertation speak more in depth about different examples of what in-person trauma informed practices look like, when I attempted to find research about what virtual trauma informed practices look like, I came up without much information. This is one place where I think research could be developed surrounding what trauma informed practices look like virtually. Although many schools have now returned to in-person learning and COVID-10 restrictions are being lifted around the world, it would be interesting to understand globally how different teachers dealt with this very same issue and how they responded to their students who were experiencing trauma.

### Analytic Category 4: Building Relationships With Families Needs to Be Built Into the School Year

Teachers need to explicitly schedule time to build relationships with families. Teachers already have such heavy workloads, which include duties before and after school such as tutoring and aftercare. It is unsurprising that teachers lack the time needed to do everything they want. For relationships, teachers should set time aside at the beginning of the school year, possibly during preservice days, to meet families they will be working with and begin to build meaningful relationships with them. If this is not begun at the start of the school year and then reinforced throughout the year, teachers will spend valuable time playing catch up with their students and their students' families. Building time in saves teachers from having to navigate the problem of when to find time to do such valuable work.

DCPS does offer an opportunity like this where teachers can partner with the Flamboyan Foundation to do home visits throughout the school year and also get paid a stipend to do so. Where I do think this partnership falls short is that it is only offered to teachers to participate in one time. Teachers can not participate in this partnership in an ongoing manner. Once they have participated, they can't again. I think that partnerships like this that add so much meaning to a teacher and their relationships with families should happen yearly. Teachers also should be compensated yearly for putting in the extra time to partner with families. It should not be assumed that teachers will add this to their already strained workloads.

During a conversation with my DCPS principal in late July of 2021, I spoke with him about my research, particularly Analytic Category 4 and building relationships with families. What I recommended to him for our grades K-1 teachers was to have some type of opportunity before school began to connect with families and begin to build these relationships. He also agreed that this would be paramount for beginning our school year in a positive way. We decided to use Zoom to connect with every family before school began. Although the time teachers spent connecting with children and their families via zoom was not scheduled during the preservice days (which I continue to believe would have been better), we all were paid for our time outside of our normal contract hours. It was a great opportunity to connect with students before meeting them in-person for the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year.

## Conclusions and Actionable Recommendations

This constructivist grounded theory study was timely given the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessity of examining in real time how the pandemic affected classrooms in the United States. The experiences described in Chapter 4 show that Washington, DC, the setting of the study, was one example of the many ways COVID-10 affected children and families throughout our country. It would be interesting to understand different perspectives from teachers globally about how the pandemic affected them and their students.

The conclusions and actionable recommendations follow logically from the findings and interpretations of this study. Table 2 summarizes how the material in Chapter 3 supports the conclusions and recommendations presented below.

### *Conclusion 1: Longitudinal COVID-19 Studies*

As was mentioned in the literature review, childhood trauma is common and can have an overwhelming effect on a child’s brain development, ability to learn, and behavior. The National Institute of Mental Health (2021) defined childhood trauma as the “experience of an event by a child that is emotionally painful or distressful, which results in long-lasting mental and physical effects” (p. 3). With this being said, specific long-term research is needed on the social and emotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, especially those with traumatic histories or who are furthest from opportunity. In-person trauma-informed practices can provide the relationships and experiences with trusted adults needed by children who have experienced trauma. A key aspect of conventional trauma-informed instruction, however, is being physically with a child and making sure that their physical needs are met by, for example, providing them with meals at school or safe places they can go if their feelings overwhelm them. The pandemic prevented any such trauma-informed instruction because it physically separated teachers and students.

One way I tried to mediate the lack of physical space was through creation of afternoon online social play groups. Each afternoon, 1 hr was dedicated solely to students coming online and playing together. There was a different theme each day. For example, Monday may be Legos; Tuesday, dress up; Thursday, watercolors; and Friday, joke club. Each day, students can come together based on their interests and spend some time with teachers building community and talking about their challenges in a safe space.

**Table 2**

*Consistency Between Findings, Interpretations, and Conclusions*

| Finding | Interpretation | Conclusion |
|---|---|---|
| Participants and their parents overwhelmingly agreed that the virtual setting had negative social and emotional effects on their children's learning experience—particularly in literacy. | The importance of explicit phonics instruction and examples during COVID-19 virtual learning | Specific long-term research is needed on the social and emotional effects of COVID-19 on students, particularly students with history of trauma or furthest from opportunity. |
| Parents felt stretched thin by their many responsibilities in addition to managing their children learning on a computer (which for a kindergartener proved virtually impossible to manage independently). | Relationships are paramount for any student to learn, including teacher-parent relationships. | Home visits need to be an expected part of back-to-school relationship building for teachers and families. |
| By the end of the school year, 80% of the participants in this study met their kindergarten benchmarks on DIBELS assessments, indicating that despite the virtual setting many students were able to learn foundational literacy skills. | The importance of explicit phonics instruction | Longitudinal data are needed about students' phonemic awareness and the possible effects of teaching phonemic awareness while wearing masks. |
| The social and emotional skills of participants in this study needed explicit instruction preceding the continuation of literacy instruction once half of students returned to the classroom in February 2021 and the other half returned in May 2021. | Trauma-informed instruction in a virtual environment | Trauma-informed instruction and professional development surrounding this topic will need to be a part of every teacher's yearly routine. |
| Literacy instruction was different virtually, in a hybrid setting, and in person after COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, from the perspective of the teacher. | | More research is needed about the school year 2020–2021 and how it has affected incoming children and their development. |

*Note*. See Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) for a description of the technique used to construct this table. DIBELS = Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills.

Another way I tried to mediate the lack of physical space was by ensuring students continued to participate in responsive classroom practices. My students and I met every morning virtually for a morning meeting, and if any important issues came up, we came together and had class meetings. We also continued to celebrate a student of the week every Friday and even though classes were virtual, students visited one another while practicing social distancing to pass the special class stuffed animal on to the next student of the week. They also passed on a special notebook in which they pasted pictures of themselves and the creative adventures they went on with the stuffed animal. As chaotic as virtual learning was at times, we intentionally created virtual spaces so that students could feel seen and heard just as they would have done if they were learning in person with their peers.

What I did find to be out of control was what went on behind the scenes in every participant's living space. I found children left home alone, hungry, fighting with siblings, or struggling to access virtual lessons due to issues with technology. The impact of my inability to mediate and help in these situations could last a long time. When students returned to in-person instruction in February 2021, they lacked self-regulation and were less independent than they should have been at that point in the school year. The meaning of this phenomenon for long-term student development deserves further study.

### *Conclusion 2: Yearly Home Visits*

Home visits should be an expected part of back-to-school relationship building for teachers and families. I reached this conclusion based on the findings in combination with the knowledge that relationships founded on trust persevere even through the toughest circumstances. If teachers have 2–3 days at the beginning of each school year for home visits, I believe they will find it much easier to build relationships with the families of their students.

Families need not necessarily host home visits in their homes. A visit can occur at a local Starbucks, a park, or anywhere a family feels comfortable meeting. The premise of home visits is that they allow teachers to informally meet students and their caregivers and talk about students outside the formal school setting. Teachers can observe and learn so much about their students when those students are comfortable. A teacher can learn about a student's interests organically and talk to the student's parents in an environment where student and parents feel comfortable. Furthermore, meeting caregivers and students during home visits that coincide with the first days of school allows a teacher to directly disseminate important papers and information to parents. Teachers often struggle at the beginning of the school year to communicate with parents because there is so much going on and so many new things for children to learn. Communicating directly with caregivers would help mitigate this problem.

Teachers do not need to plan home visits from scratch. Organizations such as the Flamboyan Foundation have emerged to facilitate home visits:

> Families are able to share their hopes and goals for their child's education. Educators have the opportunity to help families understand how to best support their student's learning at home. And students are surrounded by the support they need to excel socially, emotionally, and academically for the long term. Students do better when families and educators work together as equal partners. For students most impacted by inequity, this equal partnership—what we call

> effective family engagement—often doesn’t happen well or at all. We are working to strengthen family engagement in schools through our school partnerships and leadership development programs. … The centerpiece of our DC school partnerships work is our Family Engagement Partnership, a multi-year partnership with public schools across DC to support building a culture of effective family engagement within the school. By partnering with and supporting schools along their journey toward making effective family engagement a living, breathing part of the school environment, trusting relationships between educators and families are built. As family engagement practices are fully integrated and self-sustained within each partner school, student success increases. To support these efforts, Flamboyan provides funding, training, coaching, and tools, while schools create a family engagement leadership team to support the practice of effective family engagement within the school. (Flamboyan Foundation, 2018, p. 1)

Numerous benefits would flow from teachers completely rethinking the way they engage with children and their caregivers, acknowledging the power of trusting relationships, valuing the role of school as a loving community for all children, meeting students and their families, and hearing parents describe their struggles and concerns for the upcoming school year instead of waiting for behaviors or inorganic interactions to force teachers and parents to talk. Home visits should be best practice for all educators. Teachers should not be asked to make home visits outside what they already do. Meeting students and students’ caregivers in their own homes or in local safe places should be the first student interactions every teacher has at the beginning of each school year. This conclusion is a call to action for educators and those who administer their schools and districts.

### ***Conclusion 3: Longitudinal COVID-19 Studies on Phonemic Awareness***

Longitudinal data are needed regarding students' phonemic awareness and the possible effects of wearing masks on teaching phonemic awareness. The standardized testing data clearly indicated that the pandemic affected students' phonemic awareness; data collected over a longer period would aid reading teachers everywhere by characterizing the impact of virtual learning on the teaching of phonemic awareness and, in turn, reading.

Although the standardized test data used were quantitative in nature, and this study was qualitative, the quantitative data contributed to a powerful story about literacy during virtual learning and in-person learning when teachers had to wear masks. Even the most academically gifted participants left kindergarten struggling with phonemic awareness. Students struggled with phonemic skills such as isolating final sounds, isolating middle sounds, blending phonemes, adding additional phonemes, deleting initial phonemes, and substituting initial phonemes. These skills, although explicitly taught using the Heggerty curriculum, were nearly impossible to teach while wearing a mask. The long-term effects of this learning loss deserve further investigation.

### ***Conclusion 4: Professional Development***

Trauma-informed instruction and professional development relating to trauma need to be a part of every teacher's annual routine of preparing for the school year. I recommend the addition of a day to the start of every teacher's school year focused on building these very valuable skills. I suggest teachers receive this training in person so that they can connect and build relationships with other teachers in their districts. These friendships could prove invaluable throughout the school year when a teacher implements trauma-informed practices and needs to reflect with another teacher familiar with their district. I know that schools can differ dramatically within districts in terms of the students served; but having a district in common is important for teachers professionally. Professional development should come from educators in the field—possibly other teachers in the district—who have lived the experience of providing trauma-informed instruction in the environment of the teachers undergoing development.

I give the above recommendation with caution. Alex Venet (2021), a current researcher in the field of equity-centered trauma informed education warns that teachers already experience “initiative fatigue” (139). She states that adding one more initiative for a teacher to participate in could potentially cause more harm than good. While rolling out trauma informed professional development, it would be important for districts and policy developers to keep this in mind. Trauma informed practices should not be just another added initiative but rather best practices for teachers. Another suggestion Alex Venet (2021) gives and that I also think is important information for moving forward with teacher preparation in trauma informed practices is making sure that principals and school leaders are grounded in theory and are able to model these practices for their teachers.

## Limitations of Grounded Theory

Within the bounds of grounded theory the following are some of the limitations I found during the completion of this dissertation:

*Moving from modality to modality during the 2020-2021 school year.* During this school year teachers moved from teaching virtually, teaching in a hybrid setting, to being completely in person all during the course of a 1 year period of time. This provided for the research to feel completely out of control at times. Just when I would focus on something I was looking to ask about virtual teaching, our model changed to a hybrid setting, so I would have to adjust the aims of my study to match this modality. It was hard to keep up with the everchanging schedules, attendance of students, and lesson planning.

*The balance between being a researcher and teacher.* Although grounded theory does allow for the interchangeability of being a researcher and teacher, I found this to be a limitation of this study. I think this is very much so apparent in the different written parts of this dissertation. During the summer months, when I was able to solely wear the hat of being a researcher, my writing reflected the dedication I was able to have to honing in on the craft of being a writer and researcher. During the parts of the school year when I was much busier than normal managing being a virtual teacher, hybrid teacher, and then in-person teacher, you can visibly see in my teacher notes and writing that it was much more challenging for me to focus on being a researcher and disconnecting from being a teacher. The two are so closely related that it's hard to separate when you're in the thick of it. I especially felt this during the 2020-2021 school year.

*Grounded Theory is Laborious.* Grounded theory in itself is a laborious methodology to use. From massive amounths of teacher notes, recorded lessons, and surveys, to coding and analyzing data-It requires a constant dance with data being collected, then analyzed, and then revisited, which proved to be very challenging to manage. Again, I think this limitation is connected to my inability at times to separate myself from being a teacher and then being a researcher.

## Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, one thing I always tell my kindergarteners is “try your best”. For many little ones this always proves to be difficult as the immediate reaction to failure or making mistakes is to simply give up. I think this dissertation is a good testament to me taking my own advice of trying my best. Although at times with all the challenges that teaching through COVID-19 caused, there was so much to learn about what children were experiencing during this time. Grounded theory allowed me to intersect my own interests in early childhood foundational literacy to intersect with the topics of trauma informed practices and building relationships with families, which I never would have predicted would have happened. Grounded theory was truly a fascinating lens to view the pandemic through and I’m appreciative for the productive struggle that came from the time spent working with it. I look forward to working with children in literacy in the years to come in my career.

# APPENDIX A: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Questions were sent out to families via Google Forms in April 2021. The questions were originally intended for delivery during interviews; however, due to the time constraints on the study, a survey was the most appropriate means of gathering data. The questions were as follows:

1. How is distance learning going for you (student)?
2. How is distance learning going for your family?
3. DCPS refers to this time of distance learning as a “shared traumatic experience.” Do you agree?
4. If you do see this time as a traumatic time, what are some of the ways this trauma could be manifesting itself in your child?
5. Do you see any behavioral differences in your child?
6. What academic changes do you see through distance learning?

## APPENDIX B: WRITTEN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN STUDY

Hello Black Jaguar Families!

As many of you know I double by night as a PhD student (officially candidate) and I have some exciting news to share! I've passed my comprehensive exams, defended my dissertation proposal to faculty members at my academic institution, and am about to begin formally researching and writing my dissertation. The working title of my research is:

**A CONSTRUCTIVIST GROUNDED THEORY APPROACH TO UNDERSTANDING TEACHING KINDERGARTENERS HOW TO READ DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**
**(left in bold and upper case letters for dramatic effect)**

It has been really hard being a kindergarten teacher the past few months and I know from some of the conversations we've shared during this time parenting a kindergartener is 100 times harder than it used to be. The world has changed at a rapid pace and so has teaching. My research hopes to add to the conversation surrounding what reading instruction looks like virtually, specifically in kindergarten.

During this research I will be taking analytic notes about literacy lessons during small group time, full class lessons, or 1:1 time. I also will be adding a few questions to ask you during parent-teacher conferences about what this time has meant for your families and teaching your children how to read at home. At the end of the year, I will ask you to reflect on these same questions with me and I will use your responses anonymously to help tell our story. In my research I will refer to these as informal interviews, however, they are already on our schedule, so I thought I'd make the most of our time together. Lastly, I will be documenting observations during different literacy lessons by taking video recordings. I will alert you prior to these lessons so that you know exactly when they are happening and what I am looking for.

Maintaining the privacy of our classroom and your children is of the utmost importance to me during this time. Know I will not use any children's names in this research and the only person that will be looking at the videos taken is myself to reflect on how Covid-19 has impacted our literacy learning environment.

Participation in this research is voluntary. There are no risks with participating and your children will not miss out on anything should you decide to not participate.

Due to the nature of this project being purely virtual, I am sending you this document via regular email. If you could confirm you've read this by responding directly to this email, I'd be greatly appreciative. You may also chose to sign the bottom of this form and return it if you are able. If for some reason you do not want to participate, please let me know that as well. If I do not hear back from you, I will assume that you are okay with me collecting the data in the ways I mentioned above.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand or if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Adam Clark. Adam can be reached at ClarkA@stjohns.edu.

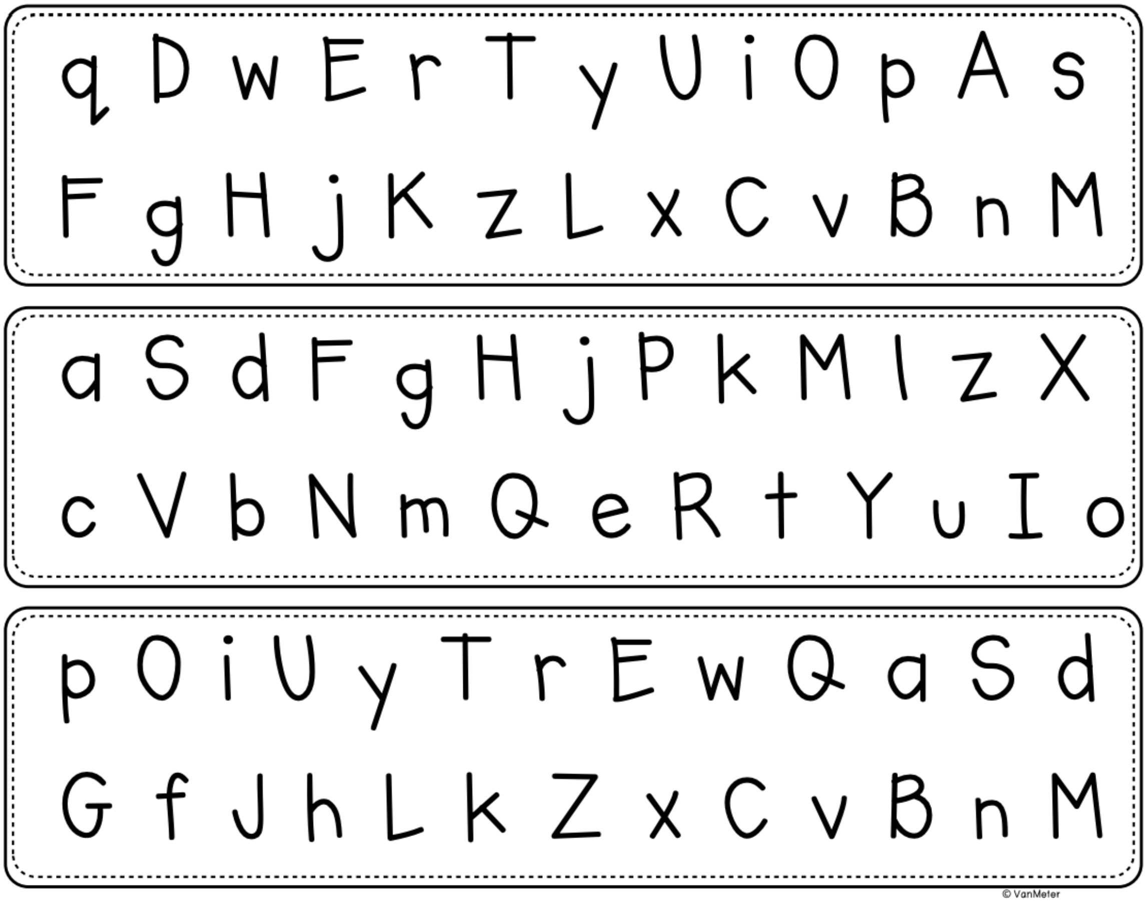
For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440.

Yes, I agree to participate in the study described above.

_______________________________________ ______________

Subject's Signature Date

# APPENDIX C: DIBELS LETTER NAMING FLUENCY EXAMPLE



q D w E r T y U i O p A s
F g H j K z L x C v B n M

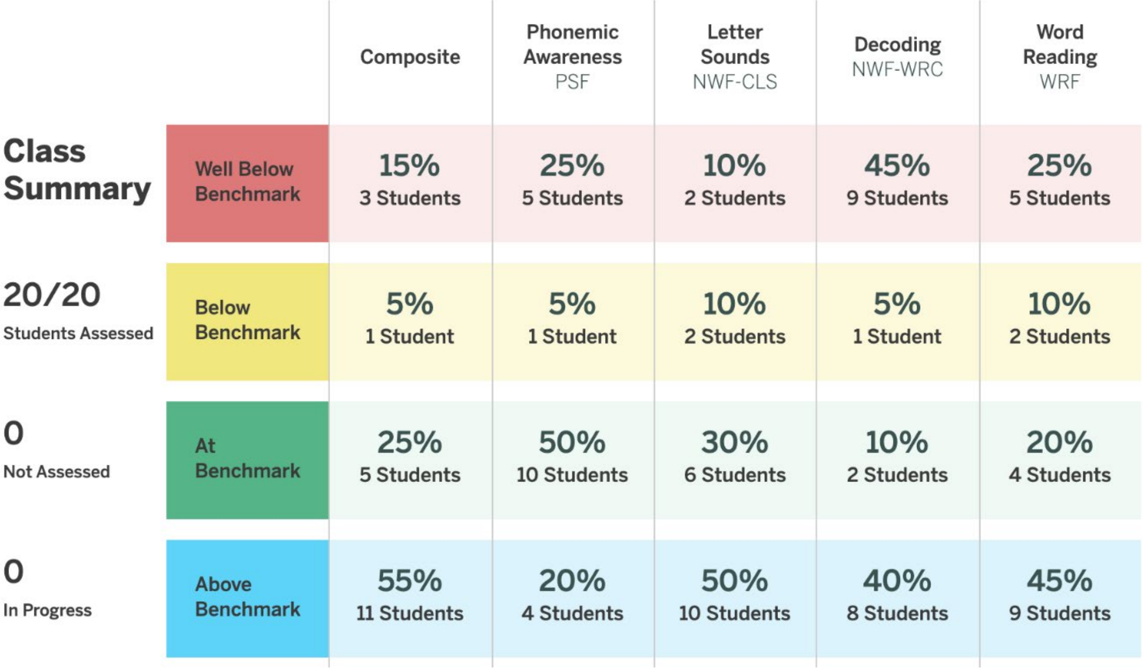
a S d F g H j P k M l z X
c V b N m Q e R t Y u I o

p O i U y T r E w Q a S d
G f J h L k Z x C v B n M

© VanMeter

*Note*. From *Name of the Page*, by X. X. Author, YYYY, Site Name (http://mrshillardfirstgrade.weebly.com/reading-3d-assessment.html). Copyright YYYY by Copyright Holder. Reprinted with permission.

# APPENDIX D: DIBELS END OF THE YEAR DATA (BY INDIVIDUAL SECTION)



**Class Summary**

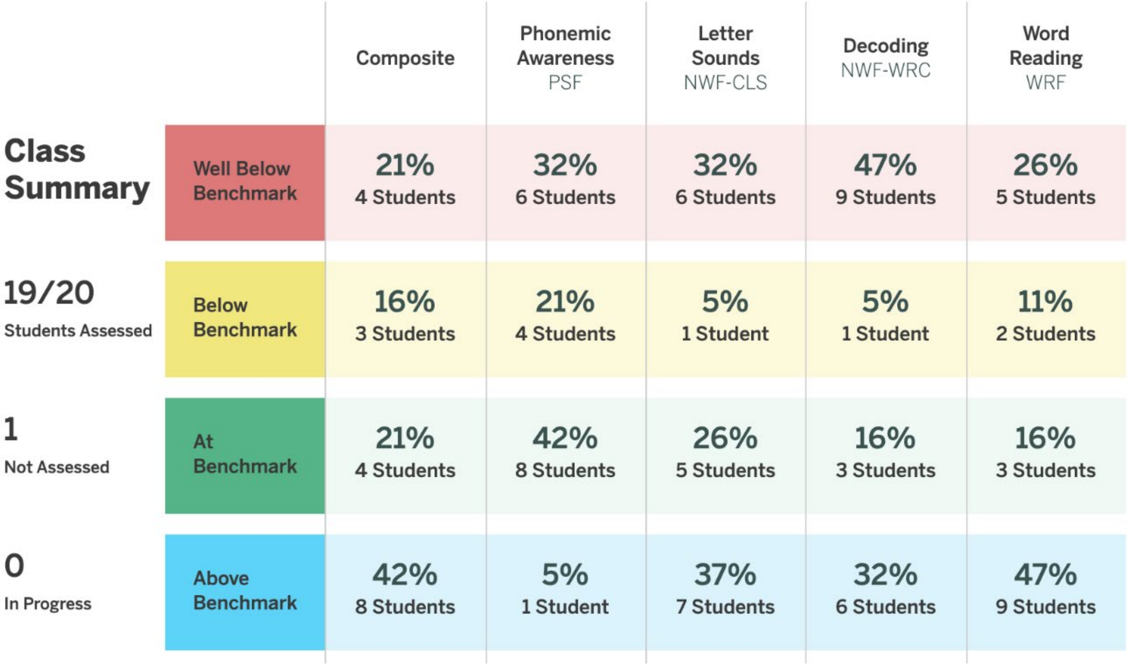
20/20
Students Assessed

0
Not Assessed

0
In Progress

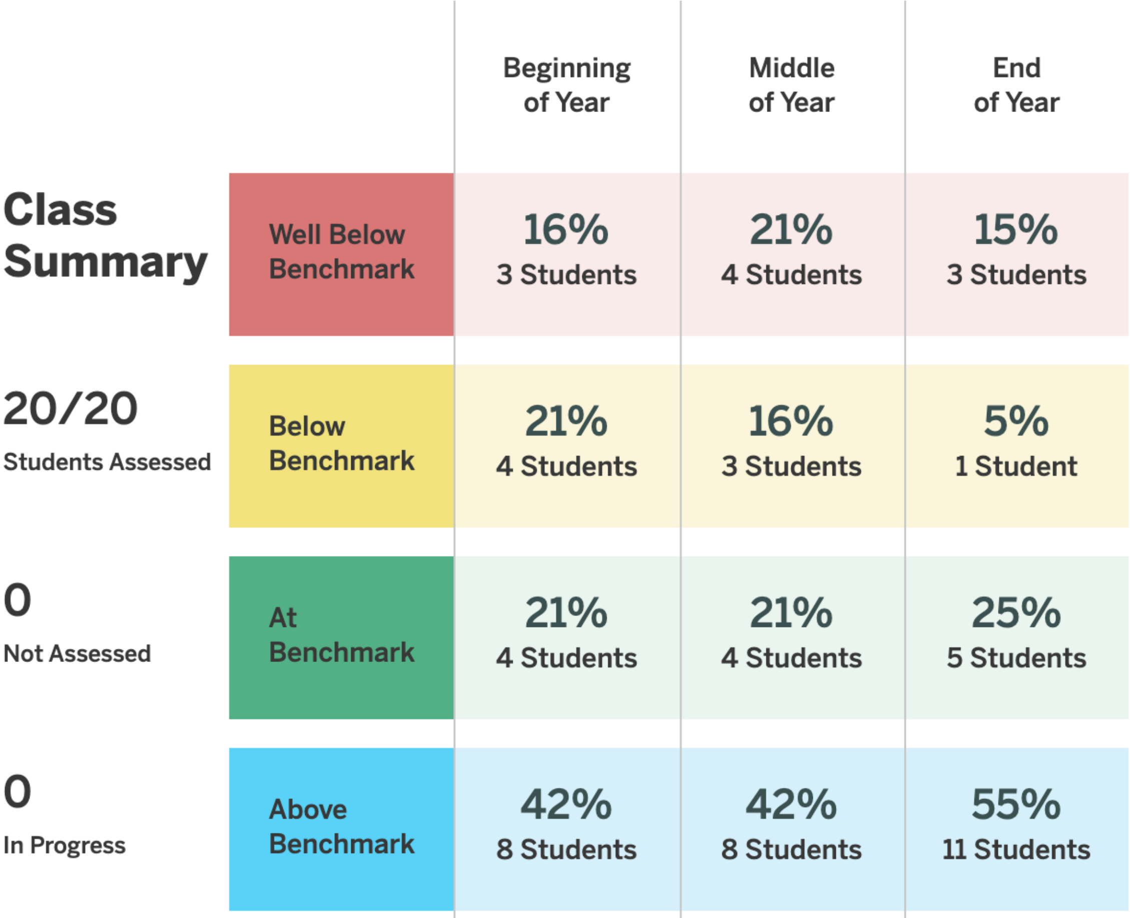
| | Composite | Phonemic Awareness PSF | Letter Sounds NWF-CLS | Decoding NWF-WRC | Word Reading WRF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Well Below Benchmark | 15%<br>3 Students | 25%<br>5 Students | 10%<br>2 Students | 45%<br>9 Students | 25%<br>5 Students |
| Below Benchmark | 5%<br>1 Student | 5%<br>1 Student | 10%<br>2 Students | 5%<br>1 Student | 10%<br>2 Students |
| At Benchmark | 25%<br>5 Students | 50%<br>10 Students | 30%<br>6 Students | 10%<br>2 Students | 20%<br>4 Students |
| Above Benchmark | 55%<br>11 Students | 20%<br>4 Students | 50%<br>10 Students | 40%<br>8 Students | 45%<br>9 Students |

# APPENDIX E: DIBELS MIDDLE OF THE YEAR PHONEMIC AWARENESS DATA (CLASS SUMMARY)



| | | Composite | Phonemic Awareness<br>PSF | Letter Sounds<br>NWF-CLS | Decoding<br>NWF-WRC | Word Reading<br>WRF |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Class Summary** | Well Below Benchmark | 21%<br>4 Students | 32%<br>6 Students | 32%<br>6 Students | 47%<br>9 Students | 26%<br>5 Students |
| 19/20<br>Students Assessed | Below Benchmark | 16%<br>3 Students | 21%<br>4 Students | 5%<br>1 Student | 5%<br>1 Student | 11%<br>2 Students |
| 1<br>Not Assessed | At Benchmark | 21%<br>4 Students | 42%<br>8 Students | 26%<br>5 Students | 16%<br>3 Students | 16%<br>3 Students |
| 0<br>In Progress | Above Benchmark | 42%<br>8 Students | 5%<br>1 Student | 37%<br>7 Students | 32%<br>6 Students | 47%<br>9 Students |

## APPENDIX F: DIBELS END OF THE YEAR DATA (CLASS SUMMARY)



| | | Beginning of Year | Middle of Year | End of Year |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Class Summary** | Well Below Benchmark | 16%<br>3 Students | 21%<br>4 Students | 15%<br>3 Students |
| 20/20<br>Students Assessed | Below Benchmark | 21%<br>4 Students | 16%<br>3 Students | 5%<br>1 Student |
| 0<br>Not Assessed | At Benchmark | 21%<br>4 Students | 21%<br>4 Students | 25%<br>5 Students |
| 0<br>In Progress | Above Benchmark | 42%<br>8 Students | 42%<br>8 Students | 55%<br>11 Students |

# REFERENCES

Al-Bataineh, A., & Sims-King, S. (2013). The effectiveness of phonemic awareness instruction to early reading success in kindergarten. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, *6*(4), 59–76. http://www.universitypublications.net/ijas/0604/pdf/M3K468.pdf

Author Hillard. (Date Unknown). *All About DIBELS.* Teacher Blog. http://mrshillardfirstgrade.weebly.com/reading-3d-assessment.html

Bassok, S. L., & Rorem, A. (2016). Is kindergarten the new first grade? *American Educational Research Association*, *2*(1), 1–31. https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858415616358

Bloom, S. (1995). Creating sanctuary in the school. *Journal for a Just and Caring Education*, *I*(4), 1–23. https://vtnea.org/uploads/files/1995%20Bloom%20Sanctuary%20in%20the%20Classroom.pdf

Bloomberg, L. D. (2010). *Understanding qualitative research: Content and process* (Part 2) [Unpublished manuscript]. Education Department, Columbia University.

Bloomberg, L. D., & Volpe, X. X. (2019). *Completing your qualitative dissertation* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory* (Vol. 2). Sage Publications.

DC Public Schools. (2020). *District Professional Development Session PowerPoint*.

Dewey, J. (1948). *Name of the book.* Publisher. (Original work published 1919)

Fegert, J. M., Vitiello, B., Plener, P. L., & Clemens, V. (2020). Challenges and burden of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic for child and adolescent mental health: A narrative review to highlight clinical and research needs in the acute phase and the long return to normality. *Child Adolescent Psychiatry Mental Health*, *12*(14), 20. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13034-020-00329-3

Felitti, V. J., Anda, R. F., Nordenberg, D., Williamson, D. F., Spitz, A. M., Edwards, V., Koss, M. P., & Marks, J. S. (1998). Relationship of childhood abuse and household dysfunction to many of the leading causes of death in adults: The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, *14*(4), 245–258. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0749-3797(98)00017-8

Glaser, B. (1978). *Theoretical sensitivity: Advances in the methodology of grounded theory.* Sociology Press.

Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Sociology Press.

Hermann, P. (2016, March 10). Police search for suspect in shooting of man near elementary school in Southeast. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/public-safety/police-search-for-suspect-in-shooting-of-man-near-elementary-school-in-southeast/2016/03/10/7331bf92-e6bd-11e5-bc08-3e03a5b41910_story.html

Hermann, P., & Harden, J. (2021, July 22). Thousands of bullets have been fired in this D.C. neighborhood. Fear is part of everyday life. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-va/2021/07/22/shooting-increase-dc-gun-violence/)

Hertel, R., & Johnson, M. (2020). How the traumatic experiences of students manifest in school settings., *Supporting and educating traumatized students* (2nd ed., pp. 27–44). Oxford University Press.

Iwai, Y. (2016). The Effect of Explicit Instruction on Strategic Reading in a Literacy Methods Course. *International Journal of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, *28*(1), 110–118.

Knight, C., (2019).Trauma Informed Practice and Care: Implications for Field Instruction. *Clinical Social Work*, *47*, 47-89. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10615-018-0661-x

Ko, S.J., Ford, J.D., Kassam-Adams, N., Berkowitz S. J., Wilson, C., Wong, M., Brymer, M. J., Layne, C. M. (2008). Creating trauma- informed systems: Child welfare, education, first responders, healthcare, juvenile justice. *Professional Psychology Research and Practice*, *39*(4), 396-404. https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0735-7028.39.4.396

Kornhaber, M., Griffith, K., & Tyler, A. (2014). It's not education by zip code anymore—But what is it? Conceptions of equity under the Common Core. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *22*(N), 4. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v22n4.2014

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. *American Education Research Journal*, *32*(3), 465-491. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/00028312032003465

Mead, G. (1960). (Original work published 1929)

Miller, E. & Almon, J. (2009). *When Kindergarten Testing is Out of Hand.* Alliance for Childhood. https://allianceforchildhood.org/fact-sheets

Mills, J., Bonner, A., & Francis, K. (2006). The development of constructivist grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *VV*(N), 25–35. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500103

Minahan, J. (2019). Trauma-informed teaching strategies. *Educational Leadership*, *77*(2), 30–35. http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx

Morse, J. (2001). Situating grounded theory within qualitative inquiry. In R. Schreiber & P. N. Stern (Eds.), *Using grounded theory in nursing* (pp. 1–16). Springer.

Muelle, C. (2005). The history of kindergarten: From Germany to the United States. *Proceedings of The Fourth Annual College of Education Research Conference* (pp. 101-114). Florida International University.

National Association of School Psychologists. (2015). *Trauma*. https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/trauma

National Institute of Mental Health. (2021). *Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Disasters and other Traumatic Events: What Parents, Rescue Workers, and the Community Can Do*. https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/helping-children-and-adolescents-cope-with-disasters-and-other-traumatic-events

Noble, H., & Mitchell, G. (2016). What is grounded theory? *Evidence Based Nursing*, *19*(2), 34–35. https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2016-102306

Qureshi, H., & Unlu, Z. (2020). Beyond the paradigm conflicts: A four-step coding instrument for grounded theory. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *19*(N), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920928188

Ridgard, T., Laracy, S. D., DuPaul, G., Shapiro, E., & Power, T. (2015). Trauma-informed care in schools: A social justice imperative. *Communiqué*, *44*(2), 4. https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources-and-podcasts/school-climate-safety-and-crisis/mental-health-resources/trauma

Rupley, W. H., Blair, T. R., & Nichols, W. D. (2009). Effective reading instruction for struggling readers: The role of direct/explicit teaching. *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, *25*(2–3), 125–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/10573560802683523

Southern Poverty Law Center. (2016, Month DD). *Responding to trauma in your classroom.* Source. https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2016/responding-to-trauma-in-your-classroom

Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative Analysis for Social Sciences*. Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage Publications.

Terrell, S. (2016). *Writing a proposal for your dissertation*. The Guilford Press.

Thomas, S., Crosby, S., & Vanderhaar, J. (2019). Trauma-informed practices in schools across two decades: An interdisciplinary review of research. *American Educational Research Association*, *43*(1), 422–452. https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X18821123

Waring, M. (2017). Grounded theory. *Research methods & methodologies in education* (2nd ed., pp. 108–307). Sage Publications.

Wolff, N., & Shi, J. (2012). Childhood and adult trauma experiences of incarcerated persons and their relationship to adult behavioral health problems and treatment. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *9*(5), 1908–1926. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph9051908

# Vita

| | |
|---|---|
| Name | *Mary Carney Hagan* |
| Baccalaureate Degree | *Bachelor of Arts,*<br>*Saint Michaels College, VT*<br>*Majors: Classics-Latin and Philosophy* |
| Date Graduated | *May, 2011* |
| Other Degrees and Certificates | *Masters Degree* |
| | *Masters Degree in Education*<br>*Saint Michaels College, VY* |
| Date Graduated | *May, 2016* |