

Educator Resilience: Experiences of Inclusive Education Educators During the COVID-19
Pandemic

by

Catriona E. Stewart
Honours Bachelor of Arts, McMaster University, 2022

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

© Catriona E. Stewart, 2024
University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This thesis may not be reproduced in whole or in part,
by photocopy or other means, without the permission of the author.

We acknowledge and respect the Ləkʷəŋən (Songhees and Esquimalt) Peoples on whose territory
the university stands and the Ləkʷəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples whose historical relationships
with the land continue to this day

Supervisory Committee

Educator Resilience: Experiences of Inclusive Education Educators During the COVID-19
Pandemic

by

Catriona E. Stewart
Honours Bachelor of Arts, McMaster University, 2022

Supervisor Committee

Dr. Jillian Roberts, Supervisor
Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Dr. Lucinda Leanne Brown, Committee Member
Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Abstract

In a study focused on the experiences of inclusive education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, six inclusive educators participated in phenomenological interviews. Interview data and other research studies provided insight into the lived experiences of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic, including social isolation, loneliness, wellness, and resilience. Responses were analyzed using a descriptive phenomenological approach, resulting in four meta themes, and nine themes. Findings indicate that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the participants' experiences, roles as educators, and overall resilience have significantly altered alongside the support and communication from administrators and community members. Recommendations for education administrators by the participants were also discussed.

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables.....	vii
Acknowledgements	viii
Dedication	ix
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review	4
Impacts of COVID-19 on Wellness, Social Isolation, and Resilience	4
<i>Defining Wellness.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Components of Wellness.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Defining Social isolation and loneliness.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>Defining Resilience</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Reports of Wellness and Social Isolation During the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	<i>7</i>
Wellness, Social Isolation, and Resilience of Positions of Childcare during COVID-19....	9
<i>Defining Positions of Childcare.....</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>Burnout and Resilience in Childcare</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Reports of Educators Experiencing Negative Wellness and Social Isolation</i>	<i>10</i>
<i>Reports of Inclusive Education Educators Experiencing Negative Wellness and Social Isolation During COVID-19</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>Reports of Educators Experiencing Resilience.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Reports of Educators Experiencing Resilience During COVID-19.....</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Reports of Resilience of Inclusive Education Educators Experiencing Negative Wellness and Social Isolation During COVID-19 and the Response of Educational Institutions.....</i>	<i>18</i>
Gaps in the Research and Guiding Framework.....	21
<i>Need for Studies Focusing on Resilience, Wellness, and Social Isolation of Inclusive Education Educators.....</i>	<i>21</i>
<i>Need for Studies Focusing on Inclusive Educator Resilience in the Face of Trauma</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Informing Education Institutions Policy and Planning and Maintaining Resilience</i>	<i>23</i>
Ann Masten’s Resilience Model.....	24
Summary.....	25
Present Study and Research Questions.....	26
Chapter 3 Methodology	28
Research Approach	28

Research Design	28
Entering Assumptions of the Author.....	30
Participants.....	32
Participant Recruitment.....	34
Data Collection	34
Informed Consent	37
Data Analysis Procedures.....	38
Rigor.....	41
Research Reflexive Journaling	43
Ethical Considerations.....	43
Chapter 4 Results.....	45
Participant Background Information	45
Meta Themes and Themes.....	47
Essential Structure of the Experience	47
Table 1. Findings presented by meta themes and themes	49
<i>Redefining the Role of Educator</i>	<i>49</i>
<i>A New Standard to Educator Wellness.....</i>	<i>51</i>
<i>Shifts in External Supports.....</i>	<i>52</i>
<i>Seeking Resources and Balancing New Educational Norms During the COVID-19 Pandemic.....</i>	<i>53</i>
Redefining the Role of Educator	55
<i>Shifts in the Expectations and Duty of Educators.....</i>	<i>55</i>
<i>Educators as Essential Workers.....</i>	<i>58</i>
A New Standard to Educator Wellness	60
<i>The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators' Well-being.....</i>	<i>60</i>
<i>Feeling Blindsided</i>	<i>63</i>
<i>Changes in Classroom Dynamics</i>	<i>64</i>
Shifts in External Supports.....	67
<i>Employer Support and Communication During the COVID-19 Pandemic.....</i>	<i>67</i>
<i>Response of the Community</i>	<i>70</i>
Seeking Resources and Balancing New Educational Norms During the COVID-19 Pandemic.....	72
<i>Following COVID-19 Guidelines</i>	<i>72</i>
<i>Available Resources</i>	<i>76</i>
Chapter 5 Discussion	79
Discussion of Meta Themes and Themes	80
<i>Alignment with the Current Research</i>	<i>80</i>

<i>Impacts to the Educator Role</i>	81
<i>Impacts to Overall Well-Being</i>	83
<i>Importance of Administrative & Community Supports</i>	84
<i>Educator’s Experience and the Emphasis on Available Resources</i>	85
Recommendations	87
Table 2. Recommendations to improve the response of education administrators	88
Conclusion	90
Possible Limitations	91
Recommendations for Future Research	92
Competing Interests	93
References	94
Appendices	111
Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Advertisement	111
Appendix B. Criteria Inclusion Questions	112
Appendix C. Semi-Structured Interview Guide	113
Appendix D. Certificate of Ethical Approval	114
Appendix E. Participant Signed Consent Form	115
Appendix F. Verbal Informed Consent Process in Participant Interviews	122
Appendix G. Verbal Follow-Up Care and Debriefing	124
Appendix H. Reflexive Journal Entry Samples	125
Appendix I. Phenomenological Thematic Analysis Procedure	127

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Findings presented by meta themes and themes</i>	49
Table 2. <i>Recommendations to improve the response of education administrators</i>	88

Acknowledgements

My deepest gratitude goes to the participants of this study for their bravery in sharing their heartfelt stories and experiences, which may have been challenging to discuss. They not only took the time out of their busy schedules for this research but also opened themselves up with utmost honesty. Their vulnerability is what made this research possible. Thank you.

I would like to extend my appreciation to my supervisor, Dr. Jillian Roberts, who has guided me throughout this process. I am grateful for her enthusiasm in accepting me as a thesis student and for the constant support she has provided me along the way. I would also like to thank Dr. Rose Vukovic, who has served as a committee member of my thesis. I appreciate her insightful and detailed feedback, which have enhanced the quality of my writing and the clarity with which I present my research. A very special and heartfelt thank you goes to Dr. Lucinda Brown for stepping in as committee member for my oral defence. I sincerely appreciate your time and dedication to make my defence possible.

This endeavour would not have been possible without the unconditional support of my parents, Alan and Elizabeth Stewart, whose unwavering guidance and motivation have been crucial throughout this process, and my educational journey thus far. Words cannot fully express my gratitude for everything you both have done for me. I am deeply grateful to my brother, Andrew Stewart, and sister, Emma Stewart, for their constant inspiration every day. Thank you for always believing in me and encouraging me to pursue my passions. I would also like to extend my sincerest appreciation to my partner, Justin Smith, whose continuous emotional support and words of encouragement have been instrumental in the completion of this project. Thank you for everything you do.

Lastly, I am extremely grateful to my colleagues, cohort members, and friends of both Educational Psychology and outside of the University of Victoria. I am immensely appreciative for the supportive environment that each one of you has contributed to. A special thank you to Jessica Lund for being on this journey alongside me. I could not have done this without your guidance and encouragement.

Acknowledgment of AI Assistance

During the final stages of the editorial process, my supervisor utilized Grammarly Premium to assist with refining the language and style of my thesis. The tool provided suggestions for improving clarity, coherence, and grammatical accuracy. All intellectual content, research, and analysis remain my original work.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to inclusive education educators, whether new grads or veterans in the field, who have dedicated days, weeks, months, and years to bettering the education system for all students. I would also like to dedicate this thesis to inclusive education educators who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic, who were faced with immense unknowns and were able to keep classrooms and students as safe as possible while being handed a new reality of education at face value. My heart goes out to all educators who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic, and I would like to extend my sincere appreciation, support, and applause to you all.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Uncertainty in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant factor influencing individual, community, and global resilience (Ferreira et al., 2020). Initially discovered in December 2019, the COVID-19 virus was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020 (Rosli et al., 2022). As a respiratory RNA virus, COVID-19 spreads through respiratory droplets and aerosols (Rosli et al., 2022). Consequently, governments across the world implemented lockdown measures, mandatory mask or facial coverings, and mass migration to virtual interactions, resulting in social distancing measures to reduce transmission rates (Aurini & Davies, 2021; Debata et al., 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). As such, across the world, social gatherings were prohibited, stay-at home orders were enforced and social events such as sports, religious gatherings, cultural events, and political meetings were postponed (Cheng & Chen, 2024; Debata et al., 2020). Businesses closed, travel restrictions were implemented, and non-essential activities were halted (Debata et al., 2020).

The rapid global spread of COVID-19 led countries, including Canada, to react swiftly to meet the increased demands of medical professionals and healthcare systems to aid infected individuals (Desson et al., 2020). As countries across the world developed testing capabilities, the strain on the medical system increased significantly. Elective surgeries were canceled, and government funding was reallocated towards COVID-19 efforts (Desson et al., 2020; Kamath et al., 2022). As provinces and territories began lifting social distancing and lockdown measures during the various pandemic waves, sectors of society struggled to interpret and adapt to these new restrictions (Desson et al., 2020; Elmer et al., 2020).

One sector severely impacted by the ever changing policies and protocols throughout the COVID-19 pandemic was the education system (Elmer et al., 2020). At the height of the

pandemic, over 190 countries initiated school closures, affecting close to 2 billion children, youth, educators, and parents worldwide (Aurini & Davies, 2021). In Canada, provinces and territories were responsible for shifting to emergency-response remote learning, distributing technology and resources, and developing contingency plans based on evolving COVID-19 information (Aurini & Davies, 2021; Diebel & Boissonneault, 2021). The swift transition to remote learning left educators with limited preparation time, facing unknowns about the new ways of education and under immense pressures to maintain pre-pandemic education standards (Elmer et al., 2020; Kamath et al., 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021). The varying policies and protocols across countries resulted in increased stress, anxiety and challenges for those in leadership roles, further straining vulnerable populations in times of uncertainty (Kim & Ashbury, 2020; Pokhrel & Chhetri, 2021).

Social isolation emerged as one of the most prominent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Debata et al., 2020). Defined as the lack or absence of social contact or relationships, social isolation significantly affected wellness during the pandemic (Lades et al., 2020; Newall & Menec, 2019). Wellness, encompassing emotional, intellectual, physical, occupational, social, and spiritual dimensions was adversely impacted by increased uncertainty, fear of contagion, illness, death, heightened stressors, and limited access to protective factors (Anderson, 2016; Ferreira et al., 2020; Manderscheid et al., 2010). These factors, coupled with social isolation, negatively affected individuals' wellness during these uncertain times (Debata et al., 2020; Ferreira et al., 2020).

Resilience is a crucial factor in mitigating the long- and short-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ferreira et al., 2020). Resilience, defined as the capacity of an individual to adapt successfully to disturbances, is essential for individuals' wellness during trauma, including the

COVID-19 pandemic (Masten, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Resilience is vital for maintaining wellness and satisfaction during traumatic events and is linked to various stressors in professions such as education (Crompton et al., 2023; Masten, 2019; Rekha Francis et al., 2022). Trauma is defined as any experience that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, leading to long-term psychological impact (American Psychological Association, 2015).

Inclusive education, which refers to creating equitable access and opportunities of education and learning for students of differing abilities, is one of many educational practices requiring high levels of resilience (Rayner, 2007). Educators in inclusive education, often underpaid, undervalued, and overworked, experience lower wellness levels and higher stress, necessitating resilience (Baker et al., 2021; Berson & Baggerly, 2009). After a trauma like the COVID-19 pandemic, children look to caregivers for stability and support, adding significant mental, emotional, and physical demands on these individuals (Berson & Baggerly, 2009). Creating structure, routine, and being well-equipped in childcare professions adds immense pressure and stress, heavily relying on resilience to increase positive outcomes of overall wellbeing. (Berson & Baggerly, 2009; Miller-Karas, 2022; Presnell, 2018). The current study takes a descriptive lens to examine how inclusive education educators' overall wellbeing, and resilience has been affected by the trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

Impacts of COVID-19 on Wellness, Social Isolation, and Resilience

Defining Wellness

Wellness is commonly understood as a holistic approach to achieving optimal health and well-being, integrating the spirit, mind, and body within the human and natural community (Meyers et al, 2000). While primarily influenced by the individual, well-being is also socially interconnected, where individual satisfaction can positively impact others, fostering a collective sense of well-being (Margolis et al., 2014). Therefore, disruptions in any aspect of wellness can significantly affect overall balance and fulfilment. For the purposes of this study, wellness is defined as the active pursuit of overall health and well-being, encompassing physical health, mental well-being, and other dimensions of personal health with a goal of achieving overall balance and fulfilment in various aspects of life.

Components of Wellness

Wellness and well-being can be further categorized into several dimensions, including emotional well-being, psychological well-being, and social well-being (Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2020). Emotional well-being involves the evaluation of life domains and experiences through emotional lenses, characterized by the presence of positive emotions and the absence of negative ones (Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2020). Psychological well-being, as identified by Ryff (1989), consists of self-acceptance, purpose in life, autonomy, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, and personal growth. Social well-being, according to Keyes (1998), encompasses optimal social functioning through engagement, societal contribution, and integration, with dimensions such as social coherence, acceptance, actualization, contribution,

and integration. Together these dimensions form mental well-being, which signifies not only feeling well emotionally but also living in meaningful and socially connected ways of life (Bohlmeijer & Westerhof, 2020).

Defining Social isolation and loneliness

Social isolation is defined as the absence of meaningful social connections (Hortulanus et al., 2006). Further, the term meaningful refers to fulfilling the individual's social needs, whether through a broad network of relationships or a few contacts that provide sufficient comfort and support (Hortulanus, 2006). The lack of meaningful connections can significantly impact individuals, leading to diminished social support, feelings of discomfort, and limited access to social resources (Hortulanus, 2006). Therefore, individuals lacking meaningful social contacts may experience reduced quality of life and impaired personal functioning placing them in a state of social isolation (Hortulanus, 2006). Social relationships provide a sense of security, self-esteem, and identity derived from personal interactions within one's immediate social environment (Hortulanus, 2006).

For the purposes of this study, social isolation is defined objectively based on the quantity of relationships, indicating a lack of social contact and limited consistent personal interaction (Rumas et al., 2021). Conversely, loneliness refers subjectively to the feeling of disconnection or solitude, stemming from a disparity between desired and actual levels of social contact (Manderscheid et al., 2010).

Perlman and Peplau (1981) differentiate between objective and subjective isolation, highlighting that feelings of loneliness are central to subjective well-being. Loneliness is the unpleasant emotional state arising when a person's social network lacks essential connections (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). The social network perspective on social isolation emphasizes the

formal structure of the network and the relationships within it (Hortulanus, 2006). This approach focuses on characteristics such as network closeness, diversity, extent, and the multifunctionality of relationships, rather than simply the size of the network (Hortulanus, 2006).

Thus, social isolation and loneliness are critical psychological factors influencing overall well-being, as illustrated in models proposed by Bohlmeijer and Westerhof (2020), underscoring the importance of further exploration into these dimensions of social and emotional health.

Defining Resilience

Resilience can broadly be defined as the capacity of an individual to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten its function, viability, or development (Masten, 2019). In the context of individuals, resilience refers to the developmental phenomenon where individuals experience severe stress or adversity without being significantly harmed, and often emerge stronger as a result (Masten, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). Resilience manifests in various contexts, including global events like the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as in response to individual or collective trauma, stressful work environments, and other challenges such as those faced in professions like education. According to researchers, educator resilience specifically pertains to educators' ability to cope with the inherent uncertainties of their profession, driven by their educational goals and values (Crompton et al., 2023; Rekha Francis et al., 2022). It enables educators to sustain their commitment to teaching and adapt their practices despite difficult conditions and setbacks.

For the purposes of this study, resilience is defined as the capacity to adapt to challenges and stress that threaten function, viability, and development, maintaining purpose and often result in individuals emerging stronger (Masten, 2019).

Mansfield et al. (2012) identified four dimensions of teacher resilience: professional, emotional, motivational, and social. These dimensions encompass teachers' abilities to navigate

personal, professional, emotional, social, and environmental stressors, utilizing strategies to achieve their professional goals and maintain their dedication to teaching (Mansfield et al., 2012; Papazis et al., 2023). In the demanding field of education, characterized by high responsibility, daily stressors, emotional demands, and the care of children, resilience is crucial for sustained success (Harry et al., 2022).

Reports of Wellness and Social Isolation During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the daily wellness of individuals worldwide (Debata et al., 2020). Moore and James (2021) surveyed 213 participants across Australia during the initial phase of social isolation mandated by the Australian government. The researchers were investigating a model of individuals' psychological stress during social isolation. The participants, with an average age of 37.8 years, reported heightened levels of psychological distress, including increased feelings of loneliness and anxiety. Factors such as concerns about personal finances, the health of themselves or their families, and the stability of the economy and government exacerbated these distress levels (Moore & James, 2021). The study also revealed that activities known to enhance wellbeing, such as social support, healthy eating, and exercise, decreased significantly during social isolation, further contributing to psychological distress. However, the researchers found that maintaining a positive attitude played a crucial role in promoting active coping, self-care, and reducing psychological distress among participants (Moore & James, 2021).

Before the pandemic, loneliness was already recognized as a significant public health concern, but its impact has been magnified since the onset of COVID-19 (Bu & Fancourt, 2020; Debata et al., 2020). Loneliness has been associated with heightened risks of both mental and

physical illness, including declines in cognitive function and increased suicidal tendencies (Bu & Fancourt, 2020; Debata et al., 2020).

Social distancing measures implemented during the pandemic have created an environment where negative wellness indicators, loneliness, and social isolation have become critical psychological variables requiring further exploration (Bu & Fancourt, 2020; Debata et al., 2020). An Irish study by Lades et al. (2020) examined the daily emotional wellbeing of 604 participants, 191 men and 413 women, from a large market research company during lockdown periods. The participants wrote diary entries documenting five sequential, randomly allocated sections of their day. The collected positive affects scores from the participant sample exhibited that most participants, including many who were caring for young children, reported significant disruptions to their daily routines and emotional states. Activities associated with enhancing wellbeing, such as spending time outdoors and exercising, were significantly constrained, while activities like social media use and childcare responsibilities increased (Lades et al., 2020). The study highlighted that a substantial portion of participants spent most of their day at home, often in the company of household members, reflecting the impact of isolation measures on daily life and emotional wellbeing (Lades et al., 2020).

In the Canadian context, Cameron-Blake et al. (2023) investigated the relationship between the stringency of public health measures and self-reported mental health, physical health, stress, and wellbeing among 6,647 survey respondents. The study found that areas with stricter public health measures, such as school and business closures, restrictions on gatherings, and stay-at-home orders, were associated with increased stress levels and mental health outcomes and decreased overall wellbeing (Cameron-Blake et al., 2023). Individuals reporting feelings of loneliness, stress, depression, or suicidal thoughts were more likely to reside in

regions with stringent public health measures (Cameron-Blake et al., 2023). Particularly vulnerable were professionals in high-stress occupations, such as educators in inclusive education settings, whose wellbeing has been consistently identified as a concern during the pandemic (Gadermann et al., 2023).

Understanding the psychological impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly among vulnerable populations and professions, is crucial for developing effective support strategies and interventions.

Wellness, Social Isolation, and Resilience of Positions of Childcare during COVID-19

Defining Positions of Childcare

Childcare encompasses any service involving the care, supervision, and responsibility of children aged two weeks to 18 years (Fothergill, 2013). It includes both parental and non-parental care settings such as center-based daycare, home-based daycare, in-home/day nanny, au pair, care by grandparents or other relatives, and educational institutions ranging from nursery schools to secondary schools (Petts et al., 2020). Notably, childcare is recognized as a complex form of labour due to its dual focus on children and familial relations (Petts et al., 2020).

Alongside the heightened responsibility and emotional demands, inadequate pay and working conditions are significant deterrents in the childcare workforce, contributing to high turnover rates (Fothergill, 2013). Fothergill (2013) identifies feeling undervalued and issues surrounding respect and boundaries from parents and administrators as additional challenges faced by childcare workers. The treatment they receive from various stakeholders—including parents, society at large, and their employers—profoundly impacts educators' overall wellbeing. Administrative and leadership styles, childcare philosophies, and attitudes toward teacher training also play critical roles in shaping the experiences of both childcare providers and parents

(Fothergill, 2013). Interestingly, guardians exert a significant influence on the experiences of educators, highlighting the crucial role of parental support and collaboration in childcare settings.

Burnout and Resilience in Childcare

In a study involving 63 participants, Decker et al. (2002) investigated burnout among full-time childcare workers in residential treatment centres in rural United States. They found statistically significant negative correlations between burnout levels and protective factors such as institutional support, supervision, and education. Burnout, characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, is prevalent among those in helping professions, notably childcare workers who are deeply committed to their role (Decker et al., 2002; Maslach, 1982).

Decker et al. (2002) emphasize that childcare is among the most emotionally, mentally, and physically demanding professions. They attribute challenges in the field to factors such as inadequate pay, lack of administrative support, insufficient supervision, and negative attitudes toward childcare workers from clinicians, community members and parents alike. Despite these challenges, the resilience demonstrated by childcare workers remains a notable factor contributing to their success in the field (Decker et al., 2002; Fothergill, 2013; Harry et al., 2022). Since positions in childcare are inherently mentally and emotionally demanding, requiring significant resilience for success, exploring the impacts on wellness, social isolation, and resilience within this field warrants further investigation (Harry et al., 2022).

Reports of Educators Experiencing Negative Wellness and Social Isolation

In their report on occupational stress, Wagner et al. (2013) highlight a significant gap in understanding occupational stress within the field of early childhood education, which includes working with children ages zero to 12. Their study, which involved a sample of 69 early

childhood workers from various primarily non-unionized agencies, utilized three stress scale questionnaires to assess the experiences of childcare providers. The researchers emphasized that despite being perceived as undervalued and challenging, early childhood education remains high demand work often compensated inadequately relative to its demands. Wagner et al. (2013) suggest that early childcare educators are particularly susceptible to occupational stress, which can have detrimental effects on their well-being. They noted considerable variability in Canada regarding organizational structures, educational requirements, quality of care, and regulatory standards, all influencing stress levels among educators. Furthermore, their research identified poor wages and benefits as primary contributors to burnout among childcare workers. Conversely, strong supervisor relationships characterized by high levels of support and encouragement were found to significantly enhance wellness and foster feelings of accomplishment among these professionals (Wagner et al., 2013).

In a recent study from Alberta, Awosoga et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative study across 13 licensed daycare centers, surveying 110 childcare workers to explore factors influencing their health status. The study highlighted that factors such as control over one's health, proactive health management practices, employer awareness of stress effects, and genuine interest in employees' wellbeing were pivotal in predicting the overall health and quality of care provided by childcare workers. The findings stressed the critical role of supportive workplaces in mitigating challenges faced by childcare professionals and optimizing their effectiveness in caring for children. Similarly, Mawhinney (2008) examined educator social isolation through a mixed methods approach involving observations and interviews with 28 educators. The study emphasized the importance of congregational spaces and social support networks in providing educators with essential outlets for emotional expression and stress relief. It revealed that

collaborative environments and safe physical spaces facilitated by supportive colleagues are crucial for buffering the emotional labor associated with the profession. This support significantly contributed to educators' well-being by enabling them to manage stress effectively and maintain professional satisfaction.

Social isolation has been seen as a risk factor for a high demanding job such as childcare, which is prevalent in the positive results of well-being with the presence of physical and social support (Gadermann et al., 2023; Mawhinney, 2008; Wagner et al., 2013). Inclusive education childcare workers have been identified as an at-risk group for experiencing social isolation and the hardship of a high demanding job (Ansley et al., 2016). This area of research has received less focus around social isolation and requires further investigation in the face of a global pandemic (Johnson & Coleman, 2024).

Reports of Inclusive Education Educators Experiencing Negative Wellness and Social Isolation During COVID-19

Inclusive education is an educational practice that encompasses broad notions of educational access and recognizes the importance of catering to diverse needs (Rayner, 2007). It is viewed not as a fixed destination but as an ongoing journey towards equity within educational systems (Florian, 1998; Rayner, 2007). The concept of inclusive education has gained widespread acceptance globally, advocating for equitable learning opportunities for students with diverse abilities to pursue their educational goals (Cormier et al., 2021; Xu et al., 2023). Cormier et al. (2021) conducted a study involving 468 inclusive education educators to examine their stress levels, burnout, and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The researchers conducted multiple surveys across three waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, utilizing multiple scales for their study. Using these various scales measuring burnout, depression, anxiety, and

stress, the researchers found significant increases in these negative outcomes among educators across the multiple waves of the pandemic. This emphasizes the urgent need for mental health support tailored to this vulnerable group, whose well-being is already disproportionately affected within the educational profession (Cormier et al., 2021; Rayner, 2007).

Similarly, Kim and Ashbury (2020) explored the experiences of 24 inclusive education teachers from English elementary and secondary schools during the early stages of the COVID-19 lockdown. Through interviews, reports on low, high, and turning points identified themes such as uncertainty, resilience, and the importance of supportive relationships among educators. A strong sense of community and inclusion in policy and programming were two of the most significant factors highlighted among participants. The study highlighted how educators both negatively and positively coped with abrupt changes, especially in supporting vulnerable students and maintaining professional identities amidst uncertainty (Kim & Ashbury, 2020).

Jakubowski et al. (2021) investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on 285 Polish elementary and secondary school teachers across two waves. Their findings indicated a significant increase in stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms during both stages of the pandemic, emphasizing the prolonged negative effects of remote teaching and social isolation on educators' mental well-being (Jakubowski et al., 2021). Understanding the negative effects on well-being during times of social isolation are crucial to evaluate the resilience levels of a population such as educators who work with vulnerable populations who were severely affected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reports of Educators Experiencing Resilience

In a study of 224 Chinese inclusive education teachers, Xu et al. (2023) investigated the mediation role of resilience between competency and occupational well-being. The authors

collected a range of self-reported questionnaires from educators, finding that competence, resilience, and occupational well-being were significantly positively correlated. Inclusive education educators must balance numerous roles that require them to withstand high levels of physical and mental energy over extended periods. These demands can lead to chronic stress, adversely affecting their wellness, job performance, and student outcomes. Xu et al. (2023) found that interventions for fostering resilience, such as training and positive thinking skills, had significant effects on the resilience of inclusive education educators. Additionally, implementing these interventions and rational coping strategies, supportive mentoring systems and positive school cultures decreased burnout among educators. The authors conclude that involving educators in decision making processes by sharing their expectations and experiences promote occupational well-being and resilience in the profession.

In a study by Beltman et al. (2011), the resilience of inclusive educators over a decade was investigated, focusing on: (a) methods used to investigate educator resilience, (b) the ways resilience has been conceptualized, (c) the understanding of risk and protective factors, and (d) the implications for pre-service teacher education programs and employers. The researchers found that resilience is a complex, cyclical, and idiosyncratic construct involving dynamic processes of interaction over time between people, environments, and events. Teachers' attitudes, practices, and views of teaching were influenced by a combination of idiosyncratic and contextual factors, such as formal mentor programs and collegial support in the workplace. These factors significantly contributed to teacher resilience. Beltman et al. (2011) suggests that the relationships between risk and protective factors are complex and vary across different settings and individuals. They emphasize the importance of enhancing teacher self-efficacy and motivation, noting that these individual factors have the greatest impact on educator resilience.

The authors advocate for incorporating these factors into pre-service teacher programs to build resilience from the beginning of educators' careers.

In a profession characterized by great stress, emotional tolls, and burnout, questions arise about how educators can build resilience while teaching in challenging school environments (Lo, 2014; Berson & Baggerly, 2009). Lo (2014) investigated the stress and burnout levels of inclusive education educators and their relationships with individual and organizational resilience in a mixed-method study. The author used survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with 146 educators of seven social development schools in Hong Kong, conducting interviews with 11 respondents who rated themselves as resilient. Lo (2014) found significant correlations between stress, burnout, and resilience in the workplace. Rational coping behaviors and positive thinking strategies were identified as personal resources that helped educators overcome stress and burnout. Additionally, both individual and organizational resilience played significant roles in mitigating the negative effects of educator burnout. Strong support from administrators was also a significant factor in supporting educators' wellbeing and resilience. Already at heightened risk for negative wellbeing and low levels of resilience, the COVID-19 pandemic's social distancing measures and lockdowns have been hypothesized to further exacerbate these issues among inclusive education educators (Cormier et al., 2021).

Reports of Educators Experiencing Resilience During COVID-19

As the COVID-19 pandemic prompted mandatory closures of schools worldwide, vulnerable populations and already stressful professions faced unprecedented challenges. Educators had to quickly adapt to help students receive a typical classroom environment in this new context (Baker et al., 2021; Cormier et al., 2021; Papazis et al., 2023). In a study involving 1,415 inclusive education educators from Greece, Papazis et al. (2023) investigated the level of

educator resilience during the pandemic and its association with attitudes toward emergency remote teaching and perceived stress. Participants completed three self-reported instruments, revealing that educators had neutral attitudes towards emergency remote teaching, moderate levels of resilience, and slightly increased levels of stress. The researchers found that teachers' perceptions of resilience predicted their attitudes towards emergency remote teaching and stress levels during the pandemic. These findings highlight the importance of resilience in coping with adverse circumstances. Building and exhibiting resilience during hardships like the COVID-19 pandemic significantly enhanced educators' stress levels and attitudes toward emergency remote teaching. Resilience was essential for sustaining full engagement in the educational process, maintaining inner motivation, and continuing professional development. Despite coping with the adverse events of the pandemic, educators were concerned with maintaining their students' wellbeing and interest, addressing the complex needs of students with learning disabilities, and managing dysfunctional relationships with parents and coworkers. These challenges were mitigated through strategies to develop mental resilience, adaptive coping strategies, and social support.

Globally, numerous studies have explored the effects of COVID-19 on educator resilience. In a US study, Fox and Walter (2022) used a quantitative survey to investigate relationships among stress, teacher efficacy, and school connectedness in 146 general and special education K-12 educators. They also conducted qualitative interviews with 16 participants to explore their perceptions of wellbeing, school or district support, and personal navigation of remote teaching challenges. Most participants were female (85%), with many having over 10 years of experience. The quantitative results showed that higher levels of school connectedness and teacher efficacy were associated with lower levels of perceived stress and higher resilience

during the pandemic. Qualitatively, the researchers identified three participant groups: growing teachers, coping teachers, and discouraged teachers. Growing teachers had high levels of social and school-based support and strong individual coping strategies, facilitating professional growth. Coping teachers had positive mindsets and good coping mechanisms but felt less supported by their school and administrators. Discouraged teachers struggled with remote teaching and lacked support from their district and school administrators. Overall, feeling connected to the school community served as a protective factor, though special educators faced unique challenges and were more likely to feel isolated, frustrated, and less resilient than general education teachers (Fox & Walter, 2022).

In a study of resilience among pre-service inclusive education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, Fokkens-Bruinsma et al. (2023) investigated which factors most influenced resilience. They focused on three factors: (a) personal resources such as motivation, efficacy, and emotions; (b) contextual resources such as relationships and support from colleagues; and (c) coping strategies such as problem-solving and maintaining a work-life balance. Using a questionnaire with both open and closed questions, the authors found that pre-service teachers showed lower scores on resilience and personal resources compared to previous studies, comparable scores on contextual resources, and higher scores on coping strategies. The open responses revealed various aspects influenced by the pandemic, including teaching conditions, pupil interaction, study progress, and support from supervisors and the teacher education institute. The findings illustrate that societal and environmental circumstances affect teacher resilience, and joining the childcare workforce during a global pandemic can lower self-efficacy and resilience foundations in the profession (Fokkens-Bruinsma et al., 2023).

Reports of Resilience of Inclusive Education Educators Experiencing Negative Wellness and Social Isolation During COVID-19 and the Response of Educational Institutions

Inclusive education educators are identified as struggling to create and adapt learning environments during the COVID-19 pandemic, necessitating significant support from their respective educational administration and government agencies (Beckmann & Klein, 2022; Lemon & McDonough, 2023; Parveen et al., 2022). Educational administrators and government agencies are responsible for providing educators and educational workplaces with sufficient support, information, and resources to successfully support their students and organize their classrooms, whether online or in-person (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021; Parveen et al., 2022).

In an Australian context, Lemon and McDonough (2023) conducted an online qualitative study to examine questionnaire data from 137 Australian inclusive education teachers, utilizing the four dimensions of teacher resilience presented by Mansfield et al. (2012): professional, emotional, motivational, and social. The researchers investigated the resilience processes and outcomes of inclusive education teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the multidimensional approach educators employed to navigate the challenges of teaching remotely. The authors found that during the pandemic, educators demonstrated effective personal coping strategies and resilience, which significantly contributed to their wellbeing. Educators' ability to articulate their needs and utilize resources was noteworthy, stressing that personal resilience is inherently linked to the settings in which educators implement strategies to foster resilient outcomes. Focusing on social and pedagogical support helped blend the other dimensions of their practice. The COVID-19 pandemic allowed for social support, specifically familial support, to be emphasized in ways it had never been before for some educators, highlighting the positive contributions to self-care, well-being, and resilience (Lemon & McDonough, 2023).

The initial transition to distance learning and remote educational support was prompt and left little time for educators, administrators, and governing bodies to plan and implement new ways of education (Madalińska-Michalak, 2021). Madalińska-Michalak (2021) sought to explore the role of successful school principals in the face of COVID-19. This study, part of the larger International Successful Principalship Project, collected both quantitative and qualitative data from school principals and inclusive education educators. The researcher sought to understand how successful school leadership supports the development of ways in which schools and teachers harness personal and contextual resources to sustain teacher well-being, commitment, resilience, and job satisfaction. The author found that school principals' leadership had a powerful influence on school improvement, including the quality of schools, teachers, teaching, and student learning. Successful school leadership was marked by rapid response to the COVID-19 outbreak, but forward looking planning caused educators to feel lost, reporting stress, anxiety, and low levels of resilience. The miscommunication between governing bodies and school leadership negatively affected the communication between school leadership and educators. Therefore, negatively impacting their thoughts, feelings, stress levels, overall well-being, and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic (Madalińska-Michalak, 2021).

Wharton-Beck et al. (2024) investigated the preparedness of school administrators of inclusive education schools in the United States as they responded to the COVID-19 pandemic, examining their perceived opportunities and challenges. The authors reported challenges faced by school leaders, including the digital divide, staffing shortages, online instruction practices, communication with families, educators, and governments, and staff professional development. Understanding school leaders' perceptions helps researchers identify factors leading to the successes and failures of school management during COVID-19. Reaching out to vulnerable

students, providing culturally relevant digital content, and ensuring full access to hardware and software for all students were significant challenges for school leaders. These challenges impacted leadership roles, wellness, job satisfaction, and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic (Beckmann & Klein, 2022; Lemon & McDonough, 2023; Wharton-Beck et al., 2024).

As schools were one of the most important societal institutions affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, educators relied on governing bodies and educational administrators for rapid and adequate responses to the pandemic (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021; Parveen et al., 2022). The search for answers among the unknown led to declines in educators' wellbeing, stress levels, job satisfaction, and resilience (Beckmann & Klein, 2022; Lemon & McDonough, 2023; McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). McLeod & Dulsky (2021) sought to understand the effects of school administrators' responses on inclusive education educators' wellness and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. From 43 interviews with school organizations worldwide, the primary themes found were vision and values, communication and family community engagement, staff care, equitable instructional leadership and practices, organizational capacity-building, and recognition of potential future opportunities. Educators reported ambiguous government support, with school boards and administrators struggling to maintain expectations while managing crisis situations. Lack of organization, leadership resilience, and effective communication were leading factors in educators' overall wellbeing and resilience levels during the pandemic (McLeod & Dulsky, 2021). Educators were left to their own devices while administrators scrambled to find organizational vision and institutional values during uncertain circumstances. McLeod & Dulsky (2021) called on educational institutions and governing bodies to attend to inclusive education educators' needs and to learn from their experiences to be more responsive and understanding in pandemic planning efforts. It is expected that the number of educators dealing with the lingering

effects of the pandemic and struggling to gain resilience in subsequent years will increase due to the ongoing impact of COVID-19 (Papazis et al., 2023). Educational administrators and governing bodies need to make informed planning decisions to adequately support inclusive education educators.

Gaps in the Research and Guiding Framework

Need for Studies Focusing on Resilience, Wellness, and Social Isolation of Inclusive Education Educators

As evident from the review of current research focused on resilience, wellness, and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, several gaps in the literature exist. A significant portion of the existing studies on wellness and social isolation and their effects on educator resilience focuses on the experiences of general education educators and does not adequately address the pre-existing additional pressures inherent in the high-demand role of inclusive education educators (Ansley et al., 2016; Kauffman et al., 2022). Furthermore, research on the overall well-being and social isolation of inclusive education educators typically centers on periods during the pandemic or pre-pandemic, without considering the long-term effects since the onset of global lockdowns (Lo, 2014; Zhang et al., 2020).

Kauffman et al. (2022) note that shortly after the pandemic began, many researchers provided recommendations for teachers and outlined problems with potential solutions to maintain wellness and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these recommendations often failed to account for the unique circumstances of inclusive education educators and the significant impact the global pandemic had on them, highlighting societal tendencies to undervalue inclusive education educators despite their roles as essential workers (Fothergill, 2013; Kauffman et al., 2022; O'Brien et al., 2022). The experiences of inclusive

education educators need greater amplification, and understanding the resilience of these educators, especially those who have encountered trauma, is crucial.

Need for Studies Focusing on Inclusive Educator Resilience in the Face of Trauma

A notable gap in the current COVID-19 literature concerns the experiences of well-being, social isolation, and resilience of inclusive education educators in the face of trauma. Most of the literature on educator resilience addresses trauma occurring within the school setting, often neglecting the broader community or societal context (Ortiz et al., 2021). Ortiz et al. (2021) also note that this research typically focuses on student trauma, viewing educators negatively if their trauma, resilience, and well-being training are deemed insufficient to support students. Olive (2023) and colleagues emphasize that research on trauma in education has primarily concentrated on students, leaving the prevalence and scope of educator trauma largely unexplored. Their research indicates that most educators have experienced primary, or first-hand trauma, and only some have experienced secondary trauma due to their students' traumatic experiences. However, it fails to call upon educational administrators and governing agencies to consider the effects on educators, and only investigates the effects on students.

Moreover, there is a significant gap in the field of educator resilience, as studies often focus on short-term research to understand resilience, overlooking the lasting effects trauma may have on resilience levels (Brunzell et al., 2021). Broader perspectives are needed to gain a holistic understanding of these experiences and to better inform changes and best practices regarding the lasting effects on the resilience of inclusive education educators. Additionally, perspectives on the continuation of resilience and the involvement of inclusive education educators in the COVID-19 response are essential.

Informing Education Institutions Policy and Planning and Maintaining Resilience

Researchers have hypothesized that the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on educators and the education system will have lasting effects on how educators develop resilience and how education systems respond to crises (Bremer, 2022; Brunzell et al., 2021; Parveen et al., 2022). Therefore, it is crucial for administrators and governing bodies in education to adequately plan for the needs of inclusive education educators. Parveen et al. (2022) highlights a deficiency in education administrators' response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis. The researchers emphasize the need for stronger support from school governance and leadership during times when educators require the most assistance.

In their analysis of leadership and governance in schools during the pandemic, Leask and Younie (2021) highlight that education in Canada has historically been divided by provinces and territories, and during the COVID-19 pandemic, provincial and territorial governments relied heavily on school boards, districts, and administrators to navigate unclear guidelines without adequate resources. This resulted in administrators implementing confusing policies without sufficient consideration for educators. There is a critical need to include educators' voices in planning, policymaking, research, and public awareness to challenge harmful attitudes and assumptions about the capabilities and societal value of inclusive educators during the pandemic.

It is imperative to amplify the voices of educators who assess the response to the COVID-19 pandemic by education administrators and governing bodies to inform institutional planning, policymaking, and responses. First-person qualitative accounts detailing experiences of well-being, social isolation, and resilience levels provide invaluable insights for education administrators and governing bodies to better understand and address the current and enduring impacts of the pandemic on inclusive education educators.

Ann Masten's Resilience Model

There are few models as comprehensive as Masten et al. (1990) that can effectively explore the intricate principles of resilience. Masten (2019) offers a resilience model from a developmental systems perspective, which encompasses a multidisciplinary, multileveled, and developmental approach to resilience research. While originally not specific to educator resilience, Masten's model aptly represents the complexities of the education profession. This model will be instrumental in understanding the lived experiences of resilience among inclusive education educators, particularly in terms of wellness and social isolation amidst various levels of trauma.

Masten's (2019) developmental systems perspective aligns with current research, highlighting profound implications for defining resilience and translating evidence into practice. This perspective integrates dynamic systems theory into developmental science, viewing human development as a complex interplay of genetic, neurobiological, cultural, and social interactions. Resilience, in this framework, emerges from adaptive systems that develop within individuals embedded in larger social contexts. During major disasters or family-level crises, the resilience of interconnected systems becomes crucial, illustrating their interdependence when overwhelmed simultaneously.

Central to Masten's (2019) model is the recognition that human resilience is fundamentally rooted in relationships and social support. Resilience is not merely an individual's capacity but also depends on the supportive environments and networks around them. The model identifies various protective factors contributing to positive adaptation across different adverse experiences, including effective caregiving, supportive relationships, problem-solving skills,

self-regulation, self-efficacy, optimism, and beliefs in life's meaningfulness. Context-specific factors like cultural rituals or spiritual practices also play significant roles in resilience outcomes.

Educators, especially those in inclusive education, continually face the challenge of balancing personal and professional demands amidst ongoing adversities. O'Brien et al. (2024) suggest that resilience among educators correlates with overall well-being and the impact of social isolation, influencing levels of burnout and job satisfaction. As research in educator resilience, wellness, and social isolation continues to evolve, frameworks like Masten (2019) offer critical insights into understanding and supporting educators facing multiple layers of trauma in their professional lives.

Summary

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the variables of wellness and social isolation emerged as critical factors influencing resilience levels, particularly for individuals in vulnerable, high-risk, and high-stress professions that underwent significant transformations (Cameron-Blake et al., 2023; Lades et al., 2020; Masten, 2019; Rumas et al., 2021). Among these, inclusive education educators have been identified as a particularly at-risk subgroup (Baker et al., 2021; Cormier et al., 2021; Kim & Ashbury, 2020; Papazis et al., 2023). Facing rapid and often inadequate shifts to remote learning, these educators were left to navigate new teaching methods while grappling with the persistent expectations of pre-pandemic standards (Bremer, 2022; Brunzell et al., 2021; Madalińska-Michalak, 2021; Parveen et al., 2022).

The literature highlights a significant gap in understanding the experiences of inclusive education educators during the pandemic, particularly regarding their own wellness, social isolation, and resilience. Most existing research has focused on educators' roles in addressing and supporting students' trauma and resilience, neglecting the underlying causes of burnout among

educators themselves (Brunzell et al., 2021; Olive, 2023). This gap highlights the need for qualitative studies that elevate the voices of inclusive education educators, providing nuanced insights into their lived experiences and the contextual factors influencing their resilience.

The current study aims to address these gaps by employing a qualitative approach focused on inclusive education educators. By exploring their experiences with wellness, social isolation, and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic, this research seeks to uncover the multifaceted challenges they faced and the strategies they employed to navigate unprecedented circumstances. This approach not only fills a critical void in the literature but also aims to inform policy and practice by advocating for more inclusive and supportive environments for educators in times of crisis.

Present Study and Research Questions

This research project was undertaken as part of the larger project titled, “Living with COVID-19: Mental Health Experiences.” The study aimed to address three primary purposes: 1) to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of inclusive education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic; 2) to explore how personal resilience may or may not be affected by wellness and social isolation following trauma; and 3) to provide recommendations on how to better support inclusive education educators during times of trauma, global health crises, and social isolation. Conducted through a qualitative phenomenological approach, this study sought to fill gaps in the existing research by amplifying the voices of inclusive education educators, capturing their vital perspectives (Emery & Anderman, 2020).

Describing phenomena from a lived experience perspective allows for a profound understanding of how individuals perceive and navigate their world (Cerbone, 2006). Employing a transcendental phenomenological lens, this study recognized and validated the first-person

accounts of individuals who experienced similar phenomena under comparable circumstances (Cerbone, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through this approach, the unique experiences of inclusive education educators during the pandemic could be meaningfully shared and understood.

The present study aimed to address the following research questions:

- (a) What are the lived experiences of inclusive education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (b) What measures can education administrators implement to support inclusive education educators in managing the effects of global health crises and social isolation?

Collecting qualitative data concerning significant changes in individuals' social environments enabled the researchers to comprehend the potential impacts of these changes on participants' wellness, social isolation, and resilience. Understanding how inclusive education educators perceived the responses of education administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic is crucial for informing educational institutions on how best to support educators' wellness and resilience after profound changes in their social environments.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This section of the study provides a foundation for the research approach used to explore the research questions. The research design, entering assumptions of the author, participants, participant recruitment, data collection and data analysis procedures are investigated. Issues surrounding rigor and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Research Approach

A qualitative research method approach was taken to explore the research questions proposed in this study. Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that focuses on understanding human experiences, behaviours, and social phenomena by gathering in-depth insights into individuals' thoughts, feeling, and motivations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research methods are used to study things in their natural settings, attempting to interpret a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As qualitative research refers to a large family of methods, to answer the research questions of the current study, a descriptive phenomenological approach was taken (Creswell & Poth, 2018 Jackson et al., 2007).

Research Design

The goal of selecting research methods is to meticulously align them with the research questions at hand to ensure that the data collected is both relevant and comprehensive (Groenewald, 2004). This research project aligned with Groenewald (2004), of that the researcher takes a position in which important data can be gathered from the perspectives of the target population. Further, the aim of the research is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon experienced, which in this case were inclusive education educators and their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the ideologies of the methodology based on

the research questions at hand, the author collected the necessary data by engaging with inclusive education educators. The specific qualitative approach that best fits the aims of this study and beliefs of the researcher is a phenomenological approach. Phenomenology is a philosophical research method that focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they have experienced a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Research based in phenomenological ideologies focuses on describing phenomena as they are experienced by individuals, without preconceived theories or explanations rather than on developing theories or extensive literature (Emery & Anderman, 2020). A phenomenological approach allows for the experiences of a given population to be acknowledged and revealed (Groenewald, 2004), which aligned with the first research question of the study: (a) What are the lived experiences of inclusive education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic? Phenomenology also allows the researcher to interpret the benchmark in each area of a study (Creswell & Poth, 2018), aligning with the second research question: (b) What measures can education administrators implement to support inclusive education educators in managing the effects of global health crises and social isolation?

Phenomenology is categorized into two schools of thought: interpretive and descriptive (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Patton, 2020). The primary differences between the two approaches are in how the findings are generated and used to strengthen professional knowledge (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Interpretive phenomenology founded by Heidegger (1962), is introduced through hermeneutics, or the methodology of interpretation (Patton, 2020). This school of phenomenology sees the value in foreknowledge to interpret research data, suggesting that the understanding of what is real, in terms of the phenomenon, in part comes through interpretation through the lens of foreknowledge. This is seen as necessary and inevitable. Descriptive phenomenology is associated with Husserl (1970), which emphasizes that it is essential for the

researcher to shed all prior personal knowledge to understand the crucial lived experiences of those being studied (Groenewald, 2004; Lopez & Willis, 2004). The goal of descriptive phenomenology is for the researcher to achieve transcendental subjectivity, or the neutralization of researcher biases and preconceptions through constant assessment to remove any influence on the object of study (Lopez & Willis, 2004). This stream of phenomenological philosophy also assumes that aspects of the lived experiences of a subpopulation will be common to all persons who have that given experience, known as universal essences. When the research question pertains to purely describing the shared experiences of a phenomenon at hand, a descriptive phenomenological approach is best (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Patton, 2020). As both the research questions of the current study relate to describing the lived experiences of elementary inclusive education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, a descriptive phenomenological approach was taken. As such, the researcher needed to suspend any preconceptions of the phenomenon, their biases and initial assumptions of the research questions, as well as throughout the duration of the study to try to gather the sincerest reports of the phenomena.

Entering Assumptions of the Author

To adhere to a descriptive phenomenological approach, the researcher must recognize their initial biases and personal knowledge about the phenomenon to concentrate on the genuine lived experiences of the participants (Reiners, 2012). This process ensures that all evaluations of what is genuine and what is occurring originate from the population being studied, which is vital for grasping another's phenomena (Chan et al., 2015; Reiners, 2012). In conformity with this ideology, association of the researcher's own initial assumptions before commencing the research study were as follows:

- Participants will be honest with their answers.

- Participants will truthfully carry out instructions provided by the researcher.
- Educators' wellbeing suffered throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Educators are often overworked and took on additional responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Educators encountered and displayed significant levels of resilience through the hardships of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Educators lack the knowledge on how to educate and support children during a global health crisis and social isolation.
- Based on the current literature, educators of an inclusive education classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic have experienced unusual circumstances which has caused an array of experiences that must be examined to optimize the experience of future educators and students.

Alongside initial assumptions, it is essential for researchers to articulate their positionality before commencing the research study. As the only researcher on this study, I am a white, able bodied cis female with an educational background in educational psychology and special education. I have engaged in academic study, research, and practical experience related to education; however, little of the practical experience was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. I firmly believe in inclusive education and value empathy and compassion. In conformity with the ideologies set by Chan et al. (2015), the personal assumptions based on the positionality of the researcher were as follows:

- Participants will view the researcher as trustworthy and credible.
- Participants will understand the positionality of the researcher as someone who is interested and passionate about the subject matter.

- Participants will find comfort in the researchers experience in the subject matter and in inclusive education.

According to Cerbone (2006), no individual can be entirely unbiased; however, in accordance with descriptive phenomenology, a reflexive journal was kept for the purposes of acknowledging the researcher's biases exhaustively (Chan et al., 2015; Ortlipp, 2008). According to Primeau (2003), reflexivity enhances the quality of research through its ability to encompass our understanding of how our positions and curiosities as researchers affect all stages of the research process. Thus, reflexivity is the process by which the researcher reflects on their own experiences, values, and motivations in an honest manner relevant to the phenomena being studied. This, therefore, enables the researcher to recognize any potential biases, including distinguishing thoughts and feelings from those of the participants (Primeau, 2003). A reflexive journal was kept for the duration of this study for this purpose.

Participants

Within the current phenomenological study, purposeful sampling was used to develop a thorough understanding of the lived experiences of elementary inclusive education educators regarding resilience due to wellness, social isolation, and loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic. Purposeful sampling is consistent with the philosophical school of thought selected for this research project, as it is widely used in qualitative research to identify and select information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Patton, 2020). Purposeful sampling is best used when research questions require the identification and selection of individuals, or groups of individuals, that are knowledgeable about or have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Creswell et al., 2011; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). As this research was focused on the specific experiences of inclusive education educators,

purposeful sampling was appropriate for the current study. Participants were included based on the following two criteria:

- Participants are current educators at the Willowcrest Academy in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, who taught during the 2019/2020, 2020/2021, and/or 2021/2022 school year(s).
- Participants who have taught in an inclusive education classroom during the 2019/2020, 2020/2021, and/or 2021/2022 school year(s).

The school of employment of the participants of the current study is a school where a great tragedy took place. The name of the school used in this study has been changed for confidentiality purposes. A randomly generated pseudonym has been used. This study defines an inclusive classroom as one in which there are one or more students with an IEP, designation, or equivalent. For the purposes of this study, an educator is defined as a person in a position of childcare within a classroom. This includes teachers, educational assistants, and early childhood educators. The participants of the current study are teachers and early childhood educators.

As the research is seeking to investigate subgroup populations with defining characteristics, a homogeneous sampling measure will be taken (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Homogeneous sampling aims to use smaller sample sizes, with identified shared characteristics among the population to allow for a thorough, in-depth investigation and description of a particular subgroup, in which in this study allowed for the identification and sampling of inclusive education educators (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Qualitative research methods often rely on pre-set standards for determining the number of participants based on the type of analysis suggested (Creswell, 2003). According to Boyd (2001), between two to 10 participants is sufficient for saturation of the research at hand. Sampling an appropriate number of

participants is essential for phenomenological research, ensuring that the collection of data from participants occurs until no new information from the perspectives of the participants can be gained (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lopez & Willis, 2004). The current study initially proposed comprising six to eight participants, resulting in six participants being interviewed and included in the study.

Participant Recruitment

Participant recruitment for the current study occurred via study advertising through email by the Head of School at Willowcrest Academy from April 2023 to June 2023. A description of the study's purpose and the criteria for participation (see Appendix B) as well as the consent form (see Appendix E) were included in the advertisement. Interviews took place from May 2023 to June 2023, and intake for participants of the current study ended by May 31, 2023. If the number of eligible participants, meeting the criteria, exceeded eight by the deadline, a random selection process would have been used, involving assigning numbers to participants and selecting them with a random number generator (Brooks & Normore, 2015). However, this did not occur, as six participants had expressed interest in the study by May 31, 2023. The researcher received emails from each potential participant with a signed consent form and interest in the study. The researcher then contacted all potential participants via email to introduce themselves along with the research purpose and an introduction to the informed consent process. Then, the researcher organized a convenient in-person interview time that was held at various locations of Willowcrest Academy for each participant.

Data Collection

Consistent with a phenomenological approach, the chosen method of data collection for the current study is one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Interviews are used to

understand experiences and interpretations of social life, including the examination of bodily and personal experiences (Dowling et al, 2016). According to Wilson (2014), language and the meaning that can be gathered from its collection as a primary data source can be used to discover the perspectives of participants, in which interviews are commonly relied on in qualitative research as the concluding discourse. This research project aligned with McIntosh and Morse (2015), by conducting semi-structured interviews, which are designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons concerning a particular phenomenon they have experienced. The current study used this method to document the experiences of inclusive education educators' wellness and resilience surrounding loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of semi-structured interviews is to ensure flexibility in how and in what order questions are asked; including how particular areas might be followed up and established with different participants (Brooks & Normore, 2015). Semi-structured interviews make use of both open-ended and close-ended pre-planned questions that allow for structure while simultaneously supporting participants' elaboration of their experiences, beliefs, and feelings for each question surrounding a particular phenomenon (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Groenewald, 2004; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The use of semi-structured interviews is to allow participants to explore their experiences in greater detail than a structured interview, as the researcher can make use of follow-up questions and probes based on the context of each participant's response (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Groenewald, 2004; McIntosh & Morse, 2015). While conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher is expected to probe beyond participants' initial responses, demonstrating the flexible nature of the unstructured interview process, resulting in rich data collection (Brooks & Normore, 2015). The current study aligned with McIntosh and Morse (2015) semi-structured interview and probes ideologies and made use of probes such as "Can

you give me an example...?”, “Can you expand on...?”, “In what way...?”, and “How did this...?”. According to McIntosh and Morse (2015), semi-structured interviews allow for participants to explore their experiences through a pre-determined interview schedule, contributing to the study’s replicability and is best used when specific aspects of a participants’ experience are the aim of further investigation for the study.

According to Emery and Anderman (2020), semi-structured interview protocol allows for flexibility in conversation with individuals, which allows for researchers to establish rapport, learn from participants expertise, and make room for the degree to which a participant may want to share about a given phenomenon. In accordance with Emery and Anderman (2020), this study allowed each participant as much time as desired to freely describe their experiences. Interview questions allowed for a complete open discussion to encase the unique situation of this study and allowed for each semi-structured interviews to be as participant driven as possible. The objectives of the current study best aligned with the interview epistemology of a descriptive semi-structured interview (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). This subtype of semi-structured interview emphasizes the importance of the participant being viewed as the knower, with the topic of interest being discovered through their unique experiences in the world (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). McIntosh and Morse (2015) stress the purpose to expand the limited knowledge of the phenomenon through extensive exploration of different participants’ perspectives, resulting in new themes and theories being discovered. This description of the intension and implementation of semi-structured interviews aligns well with the phenomena explored in the current study. The pre-determined interview schedule was used to focus participants on their experiences as they related to resilience, wellness and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as their experiences with remote learning and support provided by their educational intuitions and

government. Before starting the interview schedule, background and criteria questions were posed to participants to confirm eligibility for participating in the study, as well as to gather important demographic information for each participant (see Appendix B). The interview schedule included nine questions in total (See Appendix C).

Informed Consent

Obtaining informed consent was mandatory for including each participant's data in this study. Informed consent is a crucial component of adhering to research ethics standards (Groenewald, 2004). To participate in the interviews and have their data included, participants underwent an informed consent process, which involved signing a written consent form (see Appendix E), providing verbal consent during the interview (see Appendix F), and receiving follow-up care after each interview (see Appendix G). It was explicitly stated that participants could withdraw their consent at any time during the research, in which case all their data would be erased and destroyed. The informed consent procedures used in this study were based on the protocol developed by Groenewald (2004), and participants were informed of the following guidelines for their participation:

- That they (the participants) are participating in research.
- The purpose of the research
- The procedures of the research.
- The potential risks and advantages of the research.
- The optional nature of participating in the research.
- The methods employed to ensure confidentiality.

In accordance with Groenewald (2004), participants were required to independently read the informed consent agreement and sign it, indicating their understanding and agreement to the

conditions of the research interview and process. This was done either through electronic copies with e-signatures or physical signatures on scanned consent forms, which were sent to each participant via email (see Appendix E). The informed consent agreement was then summarized and reviewed at the beginning of each individual interview to obtain verbal consent, giving participants the opportunity to ask questions or raise concerns (see Appendix F). Only those who agreed to the contents of the consent agreement by signing the consent form and providing verbal consent during the interview had their data included in the study, which encompassed all six participants. The consent form covered issues related to participant confidentiality, anonymity, and the option to withdraw from the study. During the consent discussion, interviews began with a statement of the study's purpose: to explore the experiences of inclusive education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Data Analysis Procedures

The purpose of analyzing phenomenological interviews is to produce detailed and accurate summaries that reflect the participants' perspectives (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The current study adopted a thematic analysis of the word-for-word transcriptions of each face-to-face recorded interview (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). Written transcriptions were obtained by both the researcher and a third-party professional transcription service from the audio recordings of each interview. The researcher transcribed the first and second interviews, while the third-party service conducted written transcriptions of the remaining interviews. To comply with the informed consent process and confidentiality agreement, any identifying information about the participants was removed from the transcriptions. (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The current study's analytical approach aligns with Colaizzi (1978) phenomenological method. Once the

transcripts were obtained, data analysis followed the 10-step procedure below, condensed into a diagram format in Appendix I:

- a) The researcher read through each transcript once while listening to the corresponding audio recording to ensure transcription accuracy.
- b) Each transcription was read a second time to fully understand the meaning of each interview. This approach, used by Hasse and Myers (1988) for thematic analysis of phenomenological interviews, helps the researcher become familiar with the data. This step aligns with Colaizzi's (1978) concept of Familiarization.
- c) The transcripts were read a third time to identify and extract significant statements, following Colaizzi's (1978) method of Extracting Significant Statements. This preliminary analysis involved highlighting all key expressions related to the phenomena under investigation (Haase & Myers, 1988; Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- d) Relevant expressions from each interview were labeled in the transcript margins with short descriptors or codes summarizing the lived experiences described (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This step follows Colaizzi's (1978) method of Formulating Meaning. Bracketing, or separating the researcher's own experiences and biases, is essential in this process (Creswell, 2003; Colaizzi, 1978). Reflexive journaling during thematic labeling helped reflect on potential biases to stay true to the participants' descriptions.
- e) Significant statements directly related to the targeted phenomena were extracted from each transcript, with unrelated statements removed (Hasse & Myers, 1988; Sandler et al., 2019). Each participant's text was assigned a random color for identification, printed, and then manually cut and sorted into thematic piles for each interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

- f) These statements and their margin descriptors formed thematic clusters for each participant (Colaizzi, 1978). This process, known as Clusters of Themes (Colaizzi, 1978), created core meanings by grouping related expressions and meanings through phenomenological reduction (Creswell, 2003; Sundler et al., 2019). Statements within each cluster were compared to identify consistent similarities and relationships, forming clear data patterns within each interview (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
- g) Patterns of meaning were identified by examining thematic clusters across participant interviews, accumulating the data (Sanders, 2003; Colaizzi, 1978). Similar meanings across interviews were grouped to form these patterns (Colaizzi, 1978). Repeating patterns were organized into themes and given descriptive names reflecting the shared experiences of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sanders, 2003). An exhaustive description of each theme relevant to each participant was created at this analysis stage (Colaizzi, 1978).
- h) A document of thematically analyzed transcriptions for each participant was created, including a description of each theme and important quotes from the interviews to support each theme. These documents were shared with participants during an initial member-check via Zoom Video Communications (Version 5.16.10) to validate the analysis (Bradbury-Jones et al., 2010). This step follows Colaizzi's (1978) method of Validate.
- i) Themes were then clustered and organized into meta-themes, classifying them to convey a consistent story about the data (Sanders, 2003).
- j) The Fundamental Structure (Colaizzi, 1978) was produced by condensing the descriptions of each theme into a single, concise statement essential to the participants'

Rigor

To encompass qualitative research thoroughly, one must address rigor to ensure an impactful study that is free of misrepresentations and biases (Embry & Anderman, 2020). Rigor is a measurement of validity in phenomenological research and is addressed through methodological processes (Creswell & Miller, 2000). To ensure validity in a study, means to return to the philosophical underpinnings and purpose of the research, and can be defined as how accurate the research represents the participants' subjective experiences and the principle of the phenomena being explored (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Embry & Anderman, 2020). According to Cypress (2017), rigor is the strength of the research design and the appropriateness of the method allowing for research to meaningfully contribute to the literature and create knowledge about a specific phenomenon. If a study ensures that well established methodology is followed, current literature states the research also has legitimacy, which is a judgment of how legitimate the knowledge developed from the study is deemed to be, and therefore, related to both validity and rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize that long standing methods of ensuring a study is rigorous includes maintaining a reflexive research journal and member checking. Both methods were employed in the present study. Maintaining a journal provides the researcher with a means of bracketing their own values, attitudes, opinions, and biases, leading them back to the origins of the phenomenon, located within the perceptions of the participants (Chan et al., 2015; Ortlipp, 2008). According to Creswell and Miller (2000), it is essential for a researcher to describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow for the audience to understand their positions, to then bracket those researcher biases as the study proceeds. Therefore, the validity procedure is one that is taken from the lens of the researcher and significantly benefits the reader. A research reflexive journal establishes the credibility of the

study through self-disclosure of the researcher's predisposed assumptions and attitudes of the external phenomenon, which in turn shape their interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This allows for the audience of the study to identify any author biases (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checking allows the validity procedure to shift from the researcher to participants of the study, which is an essential aspect of participant feedback that is crucial to ensuring rigor in a phenomenological study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Participant feedback was gathered to validate themes, the use of quotations, descriptions, and conclusions to ensure that appropriate evidence was provided for each theme (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Embry & Anderman, 2020). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checking is the most essential technique for establishing credibility in a study (as cited in Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member checks include taking the data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). According to Anney (2014), conducting member checks establishes rigor in a study through: (a) eliminating researcher bias when analyzing and interpreting the results; (b) allowing participants to evaluate the interpretation made and to suggest changes; (c) allowing participants to reject an interpretation made by the researcher; and (d) testing the analysis and interpretation against the documents used during data collection before producing the final document. Five of the member checks for the current study were conducted over Zoom Video Communications (Version 5.16.10), while one was conducted over telephone as the preferred method of the participant. Creswell and Miller (2000) note that another point of credibility in a study is by the researcher providing the participants with the raw transcriptions with the themes attached to ensure the participants agree with themes and categories and to ensure they are developed with sufficient evidence, are realistic and accurate. In turn, the researcher incorporates the participants'

comments into the final narrative, adding participant credibility to the qualitative study by having a chance to react to both the data and the final narrative (Creswell & Miller, 2000). This lens of credibility was adopted into the current research project.

Research Reflexive Journaling

It is essential to note that the author maintained a research reflexive journal throughout the current study. In alignment with Chan et al. (2015), to bracket the researcher's own attitudes, assumptions and values that may bias the data and influence the results at any stage of the research process, the researcher must maintain a reflexive journal over the entirety of the study. This journaling is significant during the data collection and analysis stages of the current study as sensitive conversations that occurred, and the themes uncovered should be free from researcher bias and be exemplars of the participants' insights and experiences (Chan et al., 2015; Colaizzi, 1987). Entries were spontaneously written when the researcher had any critical reflections concerning their assumptions, opinions, decision making, and experiences (Ortlipp, 2008). By openly acknowledging biases and pre-existing knowledge related to the phenomenon, the researcher can better focus on capturing the authentic lived experiences of the participants (Chan et al., 2015; Reiners, 2012). This is particularly useful when conducting semi-structured interviews with multiple participants who experienced the same phenomenon, however, have individual and unique experiences (Brooks & Normore, 2015; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Samples from the reflexive journal from this study are included in this thesis (see Appendix H) to ensure transparency of the research outcomes to the audience (Ortlipp, 2008).

Ethical Considerations

This research project was undertaken as part of the larger project titled, "Living with COVID-19: Mental Health Experiences", a comprehensive study consisting of various research

projects examining the impacts of COVID-19 on diverse populations. The current study was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Victoria. All participants were informed of their rights as participants during the informed consent process, including their right to withdraw from participation at any point during the study, and for all data collected to be erased and destroyed. This informed consent process included the participant's signature on a written consent document, and verbal confirmation and review of the consent agreement before commencing each interview to ensure further clarity (Groenewald, 2004). Participants were assured that their participation in this study would be kept confidential, and that their identities and/or any identifying information will not be included in the study. Confidentiality and identification were protected and maintained by using pseudonyms of randomly assigned numbers as identifiers for all storage of data such as recordings, transcriptions of interviews, and journal entries. The researcher informed participants that their data was not stored on a personal computing device or telephone device and was stored using the researcher's cloud-based platform to ensure security and confidentiality. This information was included on both the written consent document as well as explained verbally before commencing each individual interview to ensure clarity. Due to the subject matter of the interview schedule, answering the interview questions may have been emotionally or mentally distressing for participants. Mental Health hotline numbers along with contact information for counselling services offered by Dr. Jillian Roberts as a psychologist, not as a part of this study, were provided on the consent forms as well as reviewed verbally at the beginning and end of each interview as part of a debriefing procedure to minimize the harm of participating in the study (see Appendix E and Appendix F).

Chapter 4 Results

Six individual in-person one-on-one interviews were conducted with each interview lasting an average of 1 hour, 2 minutes, and 54 seconds. Each of the study participants were educators at Willowcrest Academy during the COVID-19 pandemic during the 2019/2020, 2020/2021, and/or 2021/2022 school year(s). To maintain participant confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to each of the six participants using a random name generator. These pseudonyms allow for the current research analysis to be communicated and discussed while safeguarding the privacy of the participants. The demographic information for each of the six participants is summarized below.

Participant Background Information

Josephine has been an educator for 15 years, working with infants, toddlers, and young children aged 0 to 5. After working with infants and toddlers for many years, she states her favourite age to work with is 2 to 3 years old. Josephine worked for most of the school years during the COVID-19 pandemic, working in an inclusive education classroom full-time while her position includes working with children in the classroom, and administrative work. She defines an inclusive education classroom as one that is willing to work with children and families to meet the needs and goals of the child no matter a diagnosis.

Sophie's teaching career of 10 years has led for her to work in childcare with many age groups, ranging from toddler, young children, and teenagers from 3 to 14 years old. She has worked as a substitute teacher, in specific subjects, and across multiple schools throughout her career in childcare. Sophie's favourite age to teach are six year olds, or first grade students. She worked in childcare full-time during the COVID-19 pandemic in inclusive education classrooms.

Sophie defines an inclusive education classroom as one with students with a variety of abilities, ranging from having an IEP or students who need extra support in a range of areas.

Max has been an educator for 16 years, working with infants, toddlers, young children, and teenagers, including children with brain injuries, in early intervention work, and with troubled teens. His favourite age to work with is the toddler age- ages 3 to 5, because in his view they are curious, open, and to them everything is new and amazing. Max worked in childcare throughout the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic, working in an inclusive classroom full-time. He defines an inclusive classroom as openness, an anti-discrimination lens to education, focusing on including all children in one classroom.

Isabelle has been an educator for 11 years, working with toddlers and young children aged 2 to 5. She expressed she loves working with all ages of children for different reasons, as older children grasp different concepts that are being taught, while she likes teaching younger children new tasks and watching them succeed. Isabelle worked in childcare full-time during the COVID-19 pandemic in an inclusive education classroom. She defines an inclusive education classroom as one with all children, no matter their background, in one classroom together.

Lily's teaching career of the past 7 years has led her to work in childcare with toddlers and young children both inside and outside of Canada. She noted that she cannot pick a favourite age to work with, because in her view she loves all children as they are all so different. Lily worked full-time in an inclusive classroom throughout the entirety of the COVID-19 pandemic. She defines an inclusive classroom as one in which all children attend.

Eva has been an educator for 23 years but has worked in childcare since she was a young child herself. She has worked as a specialist teacher with toddlers, young children, and teenagers in general education classrooms, inclusive education classrooms, and special education

classrooms throughout her career. Eva expressed she has a hard time picking one age she favours working with, as she has liked working with so many different grades. Eva worked in childcare full-time during the COVID-19 pandemic, working as a specialist educator in inclusive classrooms. Eva describes inclusive education classrooms as ones that are justice orientated, that focus on what real humanity is like.

Meta Themes and Themes

From these six interviews, nine themes emerged through the data analysis procedure categorized into four different meta themes (see Table 1). One of the meta themes include three themes and three of the meta themes consist of two themes. Under redefining the role of educator, the themes analyzed were shifts in the expectations and duty of educators and educators as essential workers. Under a new standard to educator wellness, the themes of the impacts of COVID-19 on educators' well-being, feelings of being blindsided, and changes in classroom dynamics emerged. Under shifts in external support, the themes uncovered were employer support and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic and the response of the community. The final meta theme of seeking resources and balancing new educational norms during the COVID-19 pandemic included the themes of following COVID-19 guidelines and available resources.

Essential Structure of the Experience

Teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic altered the role of inclusive educators immensely. Rather than solely guiding learning, educators were compelled to master new educational methods while adhering to constantly evolving community, provincial or territorial, and national medical protocols. They also faced the personal stress and toll of living through a global health crisis and social isolation. With expectations from employers and community

members at an all-time high, educators redefined their roles and confronted the indefinite unknown head-on.

This expansion of an inclusive educator's role has numerous implications. Educators needed to quickly learn and implement online tools and social distancing measures to keep their classrooms functional. They had to stay updated with the expectations of running an inclusive classroom under unprecedented circumstances, support students and families through online and socially distanced learning and manage the daily demands of their job. Inclusive educators' responsibilities extended beyond students' academics, social involvement, and safety to include monitoring the health status of their students, their loved ones, and themselves during a global pandemic and times of heightened social isolation.

The evolving role significantly impacts inclusive educator wellness and resilience. While actively participating in a child's life can be fulfilling, the additional stress from the pandemic, social isolation, and past trauma can be overwhelming. Many educators feel unprepared for these expanded responsibilities, citing a lack of information, support, time, and resources. The pandemic exacerbated the challenge of maintaining personal wellbeing and resilience. Participants in the study described the pandemic as a period of significant disruption and change, with social distancing restrictions, public safety measures, and new role demands affecting their daily lives and their ability to support students effectively.

Moreover, the emotional labor required to adapt to these changes has been substantial. Educators not only had to be flexible and innovative in their teaching approaches but also empathetic and supportive towards students and families facing their own challenges. This dual burden of professional and emotional responsibilities has led to increased burnout and stress

among inclusive educators. The need for professional development, mental health support, and adequate resources has never been more critical.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally reshaped the role of inclusive educators, demanding a multifaceted approach to teaching that balances academic, social, and health-related responsibilities. The resilience and wellness of these educators are crucial for sustaining their ability to support and nurture students in an era marked by uncertainty and change.

Table 1. Findings presented by meta themes and themes

Meta Themes			
Redefining the role of educator	A new standard to educator wellness	Shifts in external supports	Seeking resources and balancing new educational norms during the COVID-19 pandemic
Themes			
Shifts in the expectations and duty of educators	The impacts of COVID-19 on educators' well-being	Employer support and communication during the COVID-19 pandemic	Following COVID-19 guidelines
Educators as essential workers	Feelings of being blindsided Changes in classroom dynamics	Response of the community	Available resources

Redefining the Role of Educator

Throughout the interviews, many participants vividly described their lived experiences of teaching inclusive classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the profound impact on their roles as educators. Numerous participants discussed the significant and multifaceted

demands placed on educators during this period. They expressed heightened frustration due to the stress of assuming additional roles while also personally navigating the challenges of the pandemic.

Many educators found themselves overwhelmed by the dual burden of professional responsibilities and personal health concerns. The pressure to adapt to new teaching methods, such as online and hybrid learning, was compounded by the need to stay informed about constantly changing health protocols and safety measures. Educators had to juggle these professional demands while also managing their own and their families' health and well-being, creating an intense and often exhausting workload.

While some educators successfully integrated these new expectations into their daily routines, many struggled with the pressures of these expanded roles. The constant flux of guidelines and directives from employers, governments, and communities often led to confusion and stress. Participants reported mixed responses to these directives, with some finding ways to adapt and others feeling overwhelmed by the lack of consistent and clear communication.

In addition to the technical challenges of implementing new educational tools and methods, educators faced significant emotional and psychological burdens. The need to provide emotional support to students, who were also dealing with the anxieties and uncertainties of the pandemic, added another layer of complexity to their roles. This emotional labor was especially taxing for educators who were themselves coping with similar fears and stresses.

Participants also highlighted the lack of adequate support and resources to meet these new demands. Many felt unprepared and under-supported, citing an insufficiency of professional development opportunities, mental health resources, and practical tools to effectively manage

their expanded roles. The inadequacy of these supports exacerbated feelings of frustration and burnout.

A New Standard to Educator Wellness

Educator wellness experienced a significant transformation during the pandemic. Some participants highlighted the silver linings found in lockdown and maintaining in-person classrooms, such as a greater appreciation for flexibility in teaching and the opportunities to innovate with technology. These educators found ways to adapt and thrive, embracing the challenge as a chance to develop new skills and strengthen connections with their students in creative ways.

However, many other participants reported experiencing intense anxiety and pressures due to the unfamiliar circumstances brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The abrupt shift to remote learning, coupled with the constant threat of illness and the need to adapt to ever-changing guidelines, created a highly stressful environment. Educators faced increased workloads, frequent technological issues, and the challenge of engaging students through virtual platforms, all while managing their own health and safety concerns.

Participants also described significant shifts within the classroom environment. Students, educators, and the overall dynamics of classroom interactions were all affected. Many educators noted changes in student behavior, engagement levels, and learning outcomes, with some students thriving in the new format while others struggled with the lack of structure and personal interaction. The need to support students' mental and emotional well-being became a central focus, adding another layer of responsibility for educators.

Furthermore, the pandemic has emphasized the importance of supporting educator wellness. Participants emphasized the need for more robust mental health resources, professional

development opportunities, and a supportive community to help educators navigate the complexities of their roles. The experiences of the pandemic have highlighted the necessity of creating a sustainable work-life balance and ensuring that educators have the tools and support they need to maintain their well-being. The lessons learned during this period are likely to influence the future of education, with a focus on integrating new technologies, supporting mental health, and creating flexible, resilient learning environments.

Shifts in External Supports

The participants experienced significant changes in the assistance, expectations, and communication with external supports during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many felt that this shift placed undue emphasis on supporting families and community members, often at the expense of their own wellbeing. These educators expressed feelings of being ignored or having their needs placed on the backburner during this challenging time.

While all participants acknowledged the importance of supporting families and community members, many reported feeling underappreciated by external supports. The increased expectations placed on educators to provide not only academic instruction but also emotional and logistical support to students and their families were often met with insufficient assistance. This imbalance led to feelings of frustration and burnout, as educators struggled to meet these heightened demands with lower levels of support.

The pandemic brought about a new dynamic in the relationship between educators and external supports. Communication channels became more strained, and the flow of information was often inconsistent or unclear. Educators found themselves navigating a labyrinth of changing guidelines and protocols, often without the necessary guidance or resources. This lack of clear, consistent communication exacerbated the stress and uncertainty they faced daily.

Participants also noted the increased pressure to be the primary point of contact and support for families navigating the challenges of remote learning and the broader impacts of the pandemic. While they were committed to helping their students and their families, many educators felt overwhelmed by the additional responsibilities. They described a sense of being "lost" as they tried to balance these new expectations with the diminished support from external agencies, administrations, and community resources.

Moreover, the shift in focus towards family and community support sometimes led to educators feeling that their professional contributions were undervalued. The lack of recognition for their efforts, combined with the overwhelming demands of their expanded roles, contributed to a sense of underappreciation. This, in turn, affected their morale and job satisfaction, further highlighting the need for better support systems and recognition of educators' critical role during the pandemic.

Seeking Resources and Balancing New Educational Norms During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many participants actively sought resources and guidelines to adapt to the rapidly changing educational landscape. They spent months trying to balance the new demands of education, navigating the complexities of remote and hybrid learning environments. While some participants felt well-supported during this period, others struggled with unrealistic expectations and insufficient resources.

Several participants noted that the expectations for in-person classrooms were often unattainable given the circumstances. They explained that the inherent limitations of the pandemic environment made it impossible to deliver education effectively in the traditional sense, yet they were still expected to succeed. This disconnect between expectations and reality led to significant frustration and stress among educators.

A common theme among participants was the continuous shift in guidelines set by governments and employers. These frequently changing directives added to the complexity of their roles, as educators were not only required to implement new protocols but also to enforce them. Many participants expressed frustration at being positioned as the enforcers of these guidelines, feeling like mere messengers without sufficient authority or support. This additional responsibility often came without the necessary resources to carry out these tasks effectively, further exacerbating the challenges they faced.

While some educators found the resources available to be scarce, others managed to find silver linings in the new ways society adapted to the pandemic. For instance, some educators appreciated the increased flexibility and the opportunity to incorporate innovative teaching methods and technology into their classrooms. These participants viewed the pandemic as a catalyst for positive change, driving the adoption of new practices that could benefit education in the long run.

To ensure the credibility of the research findings, direct quotes from participant interviews were included in the analysis of each meta-theme and theme (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Incorporating these direct quotes allows the voices of the participants to become an integral part of the narrative, enriching the description of the phenomena presented and providing a deeper understanding of their experiences (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Emery & Anderman, 2020).

These direct quotes serve to humanize the data, offering vivid illustrations of the challenges and triumphs educators faced during the pandemic. By grounding the analysis in the participants' own words, the research captures the nuanced realities of their experiences,

highlighting both the struggles and the resilience displayed by educators in this unprecedented time.

In conclusion, the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges for educators as they sought resources and adapted to new educational norms. While some found adequate support and saw potential benefits in the changes, many struggled with unrealistic expectations, shifting guidelines, and insufficient resources. The inclusion of direct participant quotes in the research highlights the importance of their voices in understanding the full impact of the pandemic on education, providing valuable insights into the lived experiences of educators during this transformative period.

Redefining the Role of Educator

Shifts in the Expectations and Duty of Educators

During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants highlighted the significant hardships associated with the abrupt shift to remote learning and the implementation of social distancing measures in physical classrooms. These changes presented numerous challenges that affected both their professional and personal lives.

Participants worked in diverse educational settings during the pandemic. Some educators transitioned entirely to online teaching, grappling with the challenges of engaging students through virtual platforms. Others found themselves in hybrid environments, balancing the demands of both in-person and remote learners. Still, others continued to teach full-time in physical classrooms, managing the health and safety protocols alongside their regular teaching duties. This range of teaching formats added layers of complexity to their roles and contributed to a pervasive sense of confusion and uncertainty.

It was really hard to balance. Like my students would be like “oh so and so on the board wants your attention” because I’d forget that I had another person there and they wanted the same level of interaction as my in classrooms did. But I would meet with the parents for 2 hours after school. So, it started I believe at 3:30 and went for 2 hours. Which is past my paid time, and where [the student] would show me all of the work that she did throughout the week that I couldn’t really engage with. I feel like it was the hardest time of my teaching here so far, which is insane. – Sophie

This fragmented approach to education during the pandemic made it difficult for educators to find their footing. They felt caught in a liminal space, essential to the functioning of society but often without the necessary tools, recognition, or support to perform their roles effectively. The lack of clear guidance and consistent policies from educational institutions and government bodies only compounded these challenges, leaving many educators feeling adrift.

But we had a choice. And if that was the choice you made, that you're going to teach and you're going to stay because you're needed, then that's what you do, right? So, that's what you do regardless. You just have to sort of take the... take as many precautions as you can. But realize that, hey, it's... it is what it is. If this is what you do, then this is what you do. It was stressful. - Max

Moreover, the emotional toll of this period was significant. Educators were not only managing their own fears and uncertainties but also providing crucial emotional support to their students. The pressure to meet academic goals, enforce health protocols, and support students' mental health without adequate support systems led to heightened stress and burnout.

If I can be super, super nice about it, of course, I get much more stressed than before COVID. Because as I said, it feels like you gotta do much more than before. Because

these kids are not there when they're supposed to be. I believe my feelings affect the children and then their feelings affect me. If they are happy, it makes me happy. If I'm happy, they can see my happy face, and then they laugh as well. So, facial expression was super important but hard. - Lily

Despite the considerable impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, some participants found a silver lining in the transformation of their roles. Even after all restrictions were lifted, the adaptations they made in their teaching methods continued to yield positive effects for both educators and students.

That was out of sheer necessity for us because to this day, we still actually do drop off at the door. Strictly, actually because we found it was significantly easier to help in most cases with separating the parent from the child. If we say drop off is at the door, hugs, kisses, you're in, shut the door, parent leaves. It's better for everyone. – Josephine

Amidst their own demanding lives, educators dedicated additional effort to support their students during the pandemic. This commitment not only provided hope to participants but also encouraged creative approaches to student engagement, illuminating both their students' lives and their own.

But I bought like a roll of 50 stamps, and I literally mailed activities to students. And so, I'd like Amazon order, like it was like I had 21 students that year, like puzzle things that they had to build. And so, then I would like get the whole pack and like take them apart and write little notes with jokes on them and like mail them individually to all my students. And that was super fun. It's something to like, I don't know, make your day exciting, because they, a lot of them, almost all of them, were in these like ruts. – Sophie

The participants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic highlight the significant challenges posed by the shift to remote and hybrid learning and the implementation of social distancing in classrooms. The dual demands of managing both remote and in-person learners, coupled with the emotional and psychological toll, created a highly stressful environment for educators. These challenges were further compounded by inequities in access to resources, highlighting the need for comprehensive support systems and more equitable solutions in education.

Educators as Essential Workers

Participants experienced a complex and often contradictory reality of being perceived essential workers by governing bodies during the COVID-19 pandemic, as this status was officially recognized but inadequately supported. This period was marked by a sense of being caught between two worlds: the essential nature of their work was clear, but the treatment and support they received often did not reflect this critical role.

Many participants articulated that this time felt like a paradox. On one hand, they were hailed as essential for ensuring the continuity of education and supporting the development and well-being of their students. On the other hand, the lack of consistent recognition and support made them feel undervalued and overlooked. This dichotomy was especially pronounced in the varying modes of instruction they were required to navigate.

Like if you saw other people, like nurses, “oh essential workers, nurse’s dah, dah, dah” but with us, the difference with us was the like compared to other educators. With other educators, kids went home and did schooling online. And that just. . . I don’t think there was that recognition of what you did and what that meant and the things that. . . realizing that we have families too. Being called essential, you were like the essential worker. But

essential means “we need you”, but not being treated like you’re needed. The average person didn’t have to really deal with that. That wasn’t a reality. . . that was my reality every freaking day for like 3 years. – Max

This fragmented approach to education during the pandemic made it difficult for educators to find their footing. They felt caught in a liminal space, essential to the functioning of society but often without the necessary tools, recognition, or support to perform their roles effectively. The lack of clear guidance and consistent policies from educational institutions and government bodies only compounded these challenges, leaving many educators feeling adrift.

It's the outside of the box part that I feel like we're all trying to explore because we're seeing so many different things being affected through the last few years. And it definitely rolls on to teachers, for sure, especially those that even have children. Like we've got parents asking flat out for us to potty train their kids because they don't have time at home. And it's like, again, not our responsibility. We will assist you, but that's your responsibility. I feel like we should just be an added bonus. . . I mean, I understand at that age you are somewhat raising them. Like, I'm not delusional to that. But at some point, it would be nice if some of the onus was taken off us and always expecting us to fix the problem and find a solution. – Isabelle

Moreover, the emotional toll of this period was significant. Educators were not only managing their own fears and uncertainties but also providing crucial emotional support to their students. The pressure to meet academic goals, enforce health protocols, and support students' mental health without adequate support systems led to heightened stress and burnout.

Like, you’re telling us that we are the workforce behind the workforce because this is also when other areas of work were getting shut down, or you’re working from home, or it’s

not essential. So, if you're not an essential worker, you're to be at home. Like, a lot of that was still in play. But it was like no, childcare centers have to stay open. But then also schools shut down or went online at that point. So, we had some kids who were here, some kids who weren't, we had some staff that ended up having to go off work to be with their kids. It was stressful. – Josephine

The participants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate the complexities of being deemed essential workers in education. The lack of consistent recognition and support, combined with the varying modes of instruction and unclear roles, created significant challenges and confusion. Educators navigated these difficulties with resilience, but their experiences highlight the urgent need for systemic changes to better support them in their essential roles. Ensuring clear guidelines, adequate resources, and consistent recognition of their critical contributions is vital for the future of education, especially in times of crisis.

A New Standard to Educator Wellness

The Impacts of COVID-19 on Educators' Well-being

As the pandemic persisted with no clear end in sight, many participants conveyed the profound impact COVID-19 had on their overall wellbeing. Despite being labeled as essential workers and continuing to work during the pandemic, the stress of balancing professional responsibilities, family obligations, and the broader strain of living through a global health crisis took a significant toll.

We had kids at home. We had stuff going on in our lives that we couldn't put on hold. We still had to be out and doing things, regardless of our own welfare and like the stress that came along with every sniffle you got or every time you saw somebody sneeze or cough. And then you work with kids that. . . they don't wear mask. Kids can't wear masks. And

they've touched their faces and they cough without covering their mouths. And they are around you and in your bubble. And as much as you disinfect and you're spraying all the time and getting kids to wash their hands and everything, they're kids. . . Like, you love them, but they're disgusting. They're little germ beasts and you had to just cross your fingers. – Max

The emotional toll of the pandemic was also significant. Educators faced the challenge of supporting their students' mental and emotional health while dealing with their own fears and uncertainties. Many students experienced heightened anxiety, isolation, and disengagement, requiring educators to provide additional emotional support and guidance. This role as both educator and emotional caregiver was draining, particularly without adequate mental health resources and support for the educators themselves.

You can definitely lose sleep over days, for sure, because you can go home exhausted. Like there's days I've gone home and literally done nothing for hours on end just because I'm like, "Oh, the quiet," right? It's like over stimuli, for sure. . . and then I smile when I tell stories about them. So. It's kind of like they drive me nuts, but I love them. . . And you give them your all, but then you have nothing left for yourself either because they needed so much. – Isabelle

While being labeled as essential workers highlighted the critical importance of their roles, many participants felt this designation was paradoxical. They were essential to the continuity of education and the stability of students' lives, yet they often felt undervalued and unsupported. The recognition of their essential status did not always translate into tangible support, such as increased resources, better working conditions, or enhanced mental health services. This

disconnect between their essential status and their lived experience contributed to feelings of frustration and neglect.

And then so I really... I felt like I started the year with a lot of resentment, and I started the year not liking what I do, which made me sit and like question everything. It's like that slippery slope of, like, "Oh, well, now's a good time to switch jobs because everything's going online" . . . But it felt like the pandemic was the hardest because it was like there's no end. It was this we as like a whole society don't know. – Sophie

Numerous participants discussed the positive aspects that aided them during the pandemic. Additionally, some acknowledged their privilege, recognizing that despite the stress associated with their positions and the uncertainty of COVID-19, they found comfort in their professional roles and relationships with colleagues.

I did find that the teams relied on me, but honestly, we relied on each other because. . . especially in the beginning when it was no one was allowed to go anywhere or do anything. Like, at least we in a sense because we had to stay open, well we were allowed to see each other. Whereas lots of people were stuck working from home and didn't get to see adults. So, at least for us we were allowed to see adults, which was really helpful. – Josephine

Certain participants attributed their positive experiences during this period to their privilege. Despite facing an exceptionally distressing and unsettling time, many acknowledged the safety of their positions and communities. Additionally, several participants expressed gratitude for their specific roles in education, which provided support throughout the pandemic.

Yeah, I think a lot of my experience is, and I've probably said it a hundred times already, contextual. You know, the fact that I was in a place where I didn't need to worry about

housing, I didn't need to worry about food. What I had to do was to slow down. I think that was actually good timing for me personally. . . So, because I was able to take on that role, it really helped me and helped me to process that and to look for positive outcomes.

– Eva

Feeling Blindsided

The rapid spread of COVID-19 led to significantly negative consequences, particularly in the early stages. During a substantial portion of the pandemic, schools operated independently, and educators were left to their own devices, leaving many participants coping with the profound impact of uncertainty.

And in that first beginning that there really was a lot of uncertainty, because we didn't have guidelines or recommendations or anything from the government. It's like we don't know what to do and we don't know how to answer questions from parents and the school but everyone is looking towards us. – Josephine

Several participants described their experience during the pandemic as feeling blindsided. The sudden onset of COVID-19 and the subsequent effects left them grappling with a multitude of uncertainties. These unknowns significantly amplified stress levels and contributed to feelings of insecurity. The lack of clear information and the rapidly changing landscape created a sense of vulnerability, impacting both mental well-being and overall resilience.

Admin said "well you can stay away. You have to be symptom free" but how long can you actually? You only get paid to a certain point. . . then what happens? So, we had that stress too. I don't mean to be bitter. It's not bitter thing. Our school is actually really good. But at the same time, I think everybody was sort of blindsided by it, and nobody really knew what it meant to be in this situation, right? Not knowing. The not knowing

was the scary part. . . not knowing what the outcome of all this crap was going to be. –

Max

During the pandemic, participants who worked in childcare roles, characterized by their profound empathy for others, frequently experienced feelings of exhaustion. The emotional demands of caring for children, coupled with the heightened stress and uncertainty brought about by the pandemic, negatively exacerbating their overall well-being. The draining effects of their work emphasized the immense challenges faced by childcare professionals during this unprecedented time.

It was literally a fear of social contacts, which was legitimate because of the virus. And so, I think there was like an underlying fear that people had of being with actual people. And I also think there was a lack of ability to sit physically. . . this transition time when some kids were in the classroom and some kids weren't was like dealing with a trauma. –

Eva

Changes in Classroom Dynamics

Hybrid learning fundamentally altered classroom dynamics, making it difficult for educators to maintain the cohesive, interactive environment that is essential for effective teaching and learning. Participants noted that the simultaneous management of in-person and remote students created a fragmented experience. Educators struggled to engage both groups equally, often finding that one group received more attention at the expense of the other. This imbalance affected the overall learning experience and made it challenging to foster a unified classroom community.

And it worked out that in the morning, every single day, I would turn on the Zoom camera, have the student that's at home learning on the smart board while my kids are

doing their morning work so they can see her. And she was doing morning work, but they're not necessarily having conversations back and forth, or me engaging with her, right? But it was that she was part of the group. Which, in theory, worked really well. In practice, it was painful. Because then I had that whole family sitting down at the dining room table, sitting on Zoom with their kid in the middle and parents on either side. I think the effort and the intentions were good, but the expectation to have online students do as much as what the kids in the class were doing was really unrealistic. – Sophie

Amid the ongoing pandemic, participants settled into a familiar routine, yet encountered mounting challenges in managing classroom dynamics. The ever-changing landscape of child behavior, influenced by the impact of COVID-19, posed significant difficulties. The need to adapt teaching strategies and address behavioral shifts became a central concern for educators during this period.

I feel like we spend the first couple of hours just reacquainting them with the safety of the center and how we play with toys and how we play with books, and “we don't hit our friends with those toys” and “those don't belong up on the ceiling,” type stuff. Where it's just like, “how is this okay?” – Isabelle

Particularly among those with extensive experience in education, some participants conveyed a sense of being adrift as they sought answers and solutions. Their quest to comprehend the profound shifts—both within the educational landscape and their own well-being—left them grappling with uncertainty and a desire for clarity. The complexities of adapting to new paradigms during the pandemic highlighted the challenges faced by seasoned educators.

It's hard to say 100% yes or no if this is a specific kind of ramification of something that's happened from COVID. But in my experience and in the 15 years that I've been working

in childcare, specifically with children birth to five years, it's what I've seen in the last three years that has been the most challenging. And these extreme kinds of behaviors are happening more frequently since the beginning. – Josephine

Within the context of inclusive education, participants experienced a pronounced transformation in the concept of inclusivity itself. This shift significantly impacted their roles within the classroom. As the definition of inclusivity evolved, educators grappled with redefining their practices, adapting pedagogical approaches, and navigating the complexities of fostering an inclusive learning environment. The profound implications of this shift reverberated throughout their professional responsibilities and interactions with students.

That was hard because inclusivity sort of came to a new level. I mean, the first part of that experience was all about the tech. And I laugh now because my job relies on tech. And so, I was the first one. I really wanted to make sure that I just kept that routine because I felt like, well, routine is so important. And so consequently, I fell flat on my face in front of everybody. For the pandemic, because we were trying to figure out the new technologies. . . so in terms of inclusivity at that time, it was about whether or not people had access to technology, and how they were able to use technology and what the supports were like at home. – Eva

Significant changes resulting from the pandemic also influenced participants' perceptions of their professional roles in relation to their overall well-being. As the educational landscape evolved, educators grappled with the impact of these shifts on their job satisfaction, emotional resilience, and sense of purpose. The intersection between their roles within the educational system and their personal well-being became a focal point of reflection and adaptation during this transformative period.

Again, it was all about... because I also understand like when the coworkers or like other staff are taking day off, they didn't even care if it's unpaid or paid, they just do not want to get sick. So, I totally understand because they have family. They have little children at their place. – Lily

As the pandemic persisted, participants experienced a notable transformation in their values and perceptions of their roles. The ongoing shifts within the educational landscape prompted re-evaluation of their professional identities, priorities, and the intrinsic meaning they attached to their work. The evolving context challenged educators to adapt their perspectives, leading to a nuanced understanding of their roles and responsibilities during this prolonged crisis.

So many different values outside of the norm on what you do and how you do things, and the rules that go beyond like your usual purview of like anything that you would do, right? So, it was stressful and tiring. – Max

The shift to hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic presented significant challenges for educators. The disruption of classroom dynamics, increased stress levels, and a sense of loss of control over their teaching environments were common themes among participants. These challenges were compounded by communication difficulties and the emotional and psychological impact of managing dual formats. Despite these obstacles, educators demonstrated resilience and adaptability, developing strategies to cope with the demands of hybrid learning.

Shifts in External Supports

Employer Support and Communication During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Many participants noted a noticeable shift in the support they received from their employers regarding the classroom environment, the transition to online learning, and the overall effects on educators during the pandemic. This shift in support and communication was a

prominent theme in several interviews, highlighting its impact on educators' experiences and perceptions.

I feel like as much as my administration was saying, “take care of yourself. Here's resources if you need to talk to someone. Just do your best. We're all going through this. It's all really hard and challenging. Like, take it slow,” like, they were saying all those things, but then our school, the expectation was much higher than I felt my friends in the public sector. Our school at that time also had this weird clause in our contracts, that if we lost enrollment, you as the teacher could get negative fall back. So, you could lose part of your salary if we lost students. And I feel like it was interesting because admin was telling us like, “Enjoy the pandemic. You get all this time off.” And it didn't feel that way. – Sophie

Participants discussed varying levels of support from their employers regarding the classroom environment during the pandemic. Some educators received clear guidance and resources to help them adapt to new health and safety protocols in physical classrooms. This support was crucial in ensuring educators could implement necessary measures to protect themselves and their students while maintaining effective teaching practices.

I look at it as companies will say, or administration will say “oh yeah, we're here for you, blah, blah, blah” . . . but really? What are they going to do? The bottom line is they want to keep the school functioning and open. And they do as much as they have to do or that they choose to do that would make it. And then after that it's like, “well we've done this and this and this. If you guys aren't doing well, then there's not much more we can do.” You know what I mean? So, it's. . . it is what it is. – Max

Inconsistent or insufficient communication left many educators feeling isolated and uncertain about their roles and responsibilities. Mixed messages from employers about health guidelines, instructional expectations, and support resources added to the confusion and stress experienced by educators. Participants emphasized the need for transparent and frequent communication to foster trust, mitigate uncertainty, and promote a sense of collective effort in addressing challenges posed by the pandemic.

Like if I talk to the school, they just have to come and see what our environment is like, how the kids are doing here. And it shouldn't be only a day or short period of time. . . because they gotta see what they're losing or what they have is super limited. I don't even know how to display because I don't know how much they know about here. And I'm not only talking about this place, but like each childcare place. – Lily

The quality of employer support and communication significantly impacted the emotional wellbeing of educators. Participants who felt supported and informed by their employers reported higher levels of job satisfaction and resilience in navigating the pandemic. Conversely, those who perceived a lack of support or ineffective communication experienced heightened stress, burnout, and dissatisfaction with their professional environment.

And especially when what we're taught doesn't always work with particular children. So, goes back to that, "well, maybe it's me. Maybe I'm the failure. Maybe..." where it's not the case, but it certainly feels like it especially when you're so invested in the children and trying to make things good for them. No, just definitely that I just. . . I see the struggles and I see the challenges in all areas. I think it'd just be nice if eyes were open and there was just support seen on both sides. – Isabelle

Several participants commented on the communication they received from their employers regarding the potential negative effects of COVID-19 and how to navigate the new educational landscape. Clear and transparent communication from leadership about health risks, policy changes, and expectations helped educators make informed decisions and adapt their teaching practices accordingly.

I'm really happy with this administration. I think they have a hard job. I really think they did an amazing job. – Eva

The experiences of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasize the critical role of employer support and communication in shaping their experiences and wellbeing. Clear guidance, adequate resources, and proactive measures from employers were essential in helping educators navigate the challenges of classroom environments and transitions to online learning. Effective communication about COVID-19 effects and educational changes fostered a sense of security and empowerment among educators, enabling them to fulfill their roles effectively amidst unprecedented challenges.

Response of the Community

Many participants emphasized the significant role of community support during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting how they relied on their communities for cooperation, respect for guidelines, and emotional sustenance during uncertain times. This reliance on community support was a central theme in their reflections on navigating the challenges brought about by the pandemic.

No, I think the... you felt appreciated by mostly parents. I think some parents take it for... just take it for granted. They're just like, "This is your job", right? But others showed appreciation. – Max

Participants also noted that community support was not always consistent or universally observed. Instances of resistance to guidelines or misinformation within the community occasionally posed challenges and added to the complexity of managing pandemic-related protocols in educational contexts. Despite these challenges, educators acknowledged and appreciated the majority of community members who supported their efforts to maintain safe learning environments.

There was a lot more like. . . a lot more rigidness in the parents. Like a lot more like they were mad at us because of things we were implementing from Ms. Bonnie Henry and everybody, right? So, it was like, listen, we are not the enemy here. And I feel like we're seeing a lot more parents asking us to fix things, as opposed to stuff being done at home. It's like, "Oh, well, we were seeing this at home, what do you suggest?" And in our heads, it's like, "You know what you've got to do some of your own research here. You're the parent. We're here to assist you. But we're not here to raise your child." – Isabelle

Numerous participants voiced their resistance to adhering to COVID-19 guidelines and the challenges they faced in balancing their professional responsibilities with stringent protocols. The tension between community expectations and the practical realities of implementing rigid guidelines significantly impacted their ability to effectively perform their jobs. Navigating this delicate balance required educators to grapple with competing demands, adapt their practices, and find innovative solutions to ensure both safety and educational efficacy.

And parents, it's also some parents understand, but not all of them. And then that was pretty hard part as I understand them, but there's nothing I can do about it. Because your child has runny nose. Yeah. So, it was very frustrating between parents and I and the other staff too. – Lily

While community support was a source of strength for many participants, they also acknowledged the challenges and complexities involved. Educators faced varying levels of community engagement and encountered instances where community support was overshadowed by conflicting opinions or misinformation. Navigating these dynamics required resilience and adaptability, as educators worked to maintain trust, communication, and collaboration with their communities while upholding educational standards and safety protocols.

Because parents would basically demand these types of answers from me where I'm like, I am not the public health authority. Like, I don't get to make these rules. I'm just the person that has to then enforce them. Thankfully that was like a very select few families that I feel like there's always going to be those select few wherever you go or what you're doing. But even with those families, we got through that. – Josephine

The experiences of educators during the COVID-19 pandemic stress the vital role of community support in fostering resilience and navigating unprecedented challenges. While not without its complexities, community cooperation, respect for guidelines, and emotional solidarity provided educators with crucial support systems. Acknowledging and nurturing the reciprocal relationships between educators and their communities will continue to be pivotal in maintaining safe and supportive learning environments for all.

Seeking Resources and Balancing New Educational Norms During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Following COVID-19 Guidelines

Participants frequently voiced frustration over the challenges they faced in accessing and interpreting guidelines from government authorities and their employers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The evolving nature of these guidelines and the inconsistencies in communication

created uncertainty and confusion among educators, impacting their ability to effectively plan and execute their roles.

Schools had guidelines put away right away from the government and you know all these different kinds of branches of areas of guidelines and everything and childcare didn't have anything until like quite later on. And it took childcare providers across BC to basically scream at the government. Like, you're telling us that we are the workforce behind the workforce. . . so, if you're not an essential worker, you're to be like at home. . . but it was like no, childcare centers have to stay open. There was no rule book on how to do this from the government. . . And so that was really hard because it took forever to get guidelines for childcare. And then when we got them, so many of those guidelines just seemed so contradictory to literally everything that is taught about how important the first six years of life is for children. – Josephine

Many participants described a sense of frustration and confusion due to the continuous shifts in access to supportive guidelines. Initially, educators received varying levels of clarity and detail regarding health protocols and safety measures from government agencies. Some participants noted that guidelines were frequently updated or revised without clear explanations, making it difficult to keep up with the latest recommendations.

I feel like among staff, things shifted because everybody's different perspective of cleanliness and what people's... what they thought their roles were type thing. . . so, trying to figure out how we in the field are trying to also follow the guidelines, trying to encourage the families to follow said guidelines. . . but everybody with their own beliefs and whatnot, right? And I don't think there was so much for the teachers in the field, aside from what things should look like and how we should play with kids now type thing.

Like, there was things like that like, “Oh, we shouldn't play with sand. We shouldn't play with rice. We shouldn't play with Play Doh. We shouldn't play with this.” It was that kind of stuff, and be like “okay, well what can we do?” there was some of that. But I feel like as far as the educators go, we had to look out for ourselves. I don't feel like there was a lot put in place. – Isabelle

Participants also expressed frustration over encountering contradictory information from multiple outlets during the pandemic. Conflicting messages from government agencies, educational authorities, and media sources contributed to confusion and uncertainty about the appropriate course of action. Educators found themselves navigating conflicting advice on topics such as mask mandates, social distancing protocols, and the implementation of online, hybrid, and socially distant learning models.

And then the regulation was kept changing, the... what do you say, the list of symptoms, or...? So, it was very confusing period. Nothing... there's only rumors going around. So, and people just don't want to get sick from each other. So, it's tightened and tightened. And but it turned out that nothing was really official. So, that part was partly really. . . confusing. There was another thing during pandemic, you have to wear mask all the time inside. There's a period, right? It was pretty... it wasn't... like it was good for us. But as an educator to children, it just causes a lot of confusion. Because they also need to recognize people's feelings. They need to learn that like your face expressions express your feeling. – Lily

The challenges in accessing and interpreting guidelines had practical implications for educators' planning and execution of their roles. Uncertainty about health protocols and safety measures made it challenging to implement consistent practices in classrooms and educational settings.

Educators struggled to adapt teaching strategies, manage student interactions, and address health concerns effectively without clear and reliable guidance.

Furthermore, the frustration stemming from inconsistent guidelines affected educators' morale and job satisfaction. Participants expressed feelings of anxiety, stress, and overwhelm as they grappled with the uncertainty surrounding their professional responsibilities amidst changing guidelines. The lack of stability in regulatory frameworks exacerbated existing challenges and heightened educators' concerns about their ability to maintain safe and supportive learning environments.

And I think it depends on your... because of COVID with so many different things. I'm in that older person category then they're like, "yeah, well, if you're over 45 this and you have complications..." and I'm like, "Oh my God. Like really? Am I being stupid? Like, should I really be doing this or...?" . . . and should I be risking myself, right? Like I said though, it's the thinking that you had that. . . just like there was a point. I don't know if that was like that for everybody but there was a point for me where I was like, what do I do. . . like do I continue or do I take a break or do I do something else. And then you have to think of all the things, right. You think about, this is my passion. This is what I do, this is my job. I'll miss the kids, the kids need me, you know? There's enough weird things going on as is. But I'm fine. I made it out okay. – Max

In response to these challenges, participants advocated for greater transparency, clarity, and support in accessing and interpreting guidelines from government and employer sources. They emphasized the need for proactive communication, regular updates, and accessible resources to facilitate informed decision-making and enhance confidence in the measures implemented.

I don't really check the government statement or what they're offering. So, to be fair, I have no idea. Like, even though I might get benefit from it, but like personally, I didn't feel I got help from them. Like, they just clear... they just clear the symptoms that we cannot have here, that helped. That helped that I can show this to the parents so there will be no more argument over it. But other than that, . . . yeah. – Lily

The frustration expressed by participants regarding the access to and interpretation of guidelines during the COVID-19 pandemic emphasizes the importance of clear, consistent communication from government and employer authorities. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts to streamline information dissemination, provide timely updates, and prioritize the well-being and safety of educators and students alike.

Available Resources

Throughout the course of the pandemic, many participants turned to mental health services and other resources provided by their employers and government agencies. Their experiences highlighted the importance of accessible and supportive mental health resources during times of heightened stress and uncertainty. However, participants also expressed frustration and disappointment with the perceived inadequacies and limitations of available support systems.

So, the government, definitely, I don't feel has done their part. Like, I mean, yes, they've supported businesses and sense of providing funding for all of that, but as far as the mental health of the educators in the field, I don't feel like there's been enough there for us, right? Like there's been all this show for the frontline workers in this, that and the other. And that's wonderful because they are hands on. But they forget that, not just us, I mean, everybody that teaches in the school systems, like the things that teachers had to

do from home. Yeah, it definitely threw a new light on things, for sure. And even my thought process in so many ways, because you are seeing things in such a different level.

– Isabelle

During the COVID-19 pandemic, participants universally acknowledged the importance of guidelines and mental health resources. However, a significant number of them also voiced frustration regarding the absence of effective conflict resolution mechanisms related to mental health services. Despite recognizing the value of available resources, they encountered challenges in accessing timely and responsive support. The lack of clear pathways for addressing conflicts or discrepancies in mental health services exacerbated their frustration and hindered effective resolution.

So, I think there was good intentions to provide us with all the supports that we needed, but I almost feel like it didn't work the way they expected it to, because the expectations they were putting on us were so high. But there was nothing concrete that I would say was helpful. I mean, when I was getting that much communication from parents, staff and like everything was bombarding me, the last thing I want to do is call up someone and talk to them on the phone, right? Or have another Zoom meeting. – Sophie

During the implementation of social distancing measures, participants exhibited gratitude toward both their employers and the government. They appreciated the resources provided, which facilitated the transition to remote services. Additionally, another group of participants expressed gratitude toward the broader society. This collective spirit fostered resilience and contributed to a more cohesive response to the pandemic.

But in the same way, conflict resolution skills would have been, I think, really helpful. But then there was like, it was naturally embedded in the experience because strangely that

whole, like banging on pots, which is so funny to think of now. . . banging on pots was kind of like an interesting creative conflict management. . . so there were these weird things that, like we came up with. And I love that, these weird rituals. And again, that was like looking at bereavement, you know, and this idea of grieving, and we were grieving something. Whatever it was we were grieving, we found this like, really interesting little ritual to kind of help us grieve. – Eva

As educators contemplate the post-COVID-19 landscape and anticipate the ongoing impact on the education system, a significant number of participants have voiced their frustration regarding the dearth of resources available to navigate the uncertainties ahead.

I mean, there's definitely been the workshops, but as far as altering them to current day, I feel like that's not necessarily been the case. There may be attempts, but I don't feel like even what we're learning necessarily reflects COVID and the times. Because the behavior is different than it was 3 years ago, 4 years ago. Yeah, there's more scattered, I think it's just a little bit more chaos in the environment more than anything. So, I think for us. . . it's not always the assorting of what we need or it just seems like it focuses on different things that aren't necessarily as important right now. – Isabelle

The experiences shared by participants highlight the critical importance of accessible and supportive resources during times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. While many benefited from employer-provided services and government initiatives, systemic challenges and perceived inadequacies in mental health support highlighted areas for improvement. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts to enhance accessibility, reduce barriers, and prioritize mental health as a fundamental aspect of supporting the wellbeing and resilience of educators and frontline workers.

Chapter 5 Discussion

This study investigated the experiences of a diverse group of inclusive education educators with respect to social isolation, loneliness, and personal resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. It also examined the implications of these experiences for educational administrators and school districts. The study aimed to address two key research questions:

- (a) What are the lived experiences of inclusive education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- (b) What measures could education administrators implement to support inclusive education educators in managing the effects of global health crises and social isolation?

The findings of the study highlight a broad spectrum of experiences among inclusive education educators, driven by the significant disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Adopting a descriptive phenomenological approach, the study categorized participants' experiences into several meta themes and themes. Four primary meta themes emerged from the analysis:

1. Redefining the role of educator: This theme explores how the pandemic has transformed educators' roles, including shifts in their professional responsibilities and interactions with students.
2. A new standard for educator wellness: This meta theme examines how the pandemic has raised awareness about educator wellness and introduced new benchmarks for maintaining mental and emotional health.
3. Shifts in external supports: This theme looks at changes in the support systems available to educators, including alterations in institutional and community resources.

4. Seeking resources and balancing new educational norms during the COVID-19 pandemic: This meta theme focuses on the challenges and strategies related to accessing support systems and resources during the pandemic.

The initial discussion will explore these meta themes and related themes to address the first research question, providing a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of inclusive education educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this, the study will offer recommendations for educational administrators and accessible support systems, based on the findings and existing literature, to address the second research question. These recommendations aim to enhance support mechanisms for educators and improve their resilience and well-being in the face of future global health crises and social isolation.

Discussion of Meta Themes and Themes

Alignment with the Current Research

Participants' experiences with loneliness and social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic can be contextualized within the developmental trajectory of childcare positions, as well as the mental health and well-being factors outlined in Bohlmeijer and Westerhof's (2020) model for sustainable mental health. This model emphasizes the importance of a supportive environment and personal coping mechanisms in maintaining mental health. Additionally, participants' experiences in building resilience can be analyzed through the professional trajectory of childcare roles and the resilience models proposed by Mansfield et al. (2012), which highlight various dimensions of educator resilience.

Inclusive educators are known to be a particularly vulnerable and high-risk group, often facing low job satisfaction, heightened stress, reduced self-efficacy, and increased burnout (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010). This vulnerability contributes to a heightened risk of experiencing

loneliness, social isolation, and diminished resilience (Karakose et al., 2022). The COVID-19 pandemic's social distancing measures and the shift to socially distant, hybrid, and remote learning environments had a profound impact on childcare workers. Their classroom dynamics, social interactions, and educational experiences were drastically altered (Pokhrel & Chetri, 2021).

Prior to the pandemic, inclusive educators were already identified as a vulnerable group struggling with adaptation to life course changes, experiencing higher levels of loneliness, social isolation, and lower resilience (Kush et al., 2022). The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic intensified these issues. The social distancing restrictions and the shift to remote learning environments introduced additional challenges for inclusive educators, affecting their social lives, mental health, community support, and access to external resources (Sokal et al., 2020).

The present study reveals that participants' social isolation and loneliness were significantly influenced by how they adapted to the pandemic's impacts on their social interactions, psychological well-being, support systems, and access to resources. The findings highlight that the COVID-19 pandemic substantially affected participants' resilience, highlighting the need for targeted support and interventions to address the compounded challenges faced by inclusive educators. This research provides valuable insights into the specific ways the pandemic has altered the landscape of support and resilience for this vulnerable group, suggesting a need for continued focus on enhancing support structures and resilience building strategies in the education sector.

Impacts to the Educator Role

In the model for educator resilience, significant disruptions to the educator role are associated with changes in motivational and professional factors. These disruptions often lead to

decreased self-efficacy, increased burnout, and challenges in seeking help. Previous research highlights that inclusive education educators are particularly vulnerable to low job satisfaction, heightened stress, and social isolation, and the added burden of social distancing measures during the pandemic exacerbates these issues (Kim et al., 2022).

Resilience in educators is often built through preparedness and maintaining a sense of normalcy, attributes that are crucial during times of trauma and crises, such as pandemics (Pressley, 2021). This study found that many participants experienced a significant decline in self-efficacy due to the heightened pressures and expectations imposed by the pandemic. Participants reported that instability in communication and fluctuating demands were among the most detrimental changes to their roles, further contributing to their stress and burnout.

Inclusive educators operate in a field where changes to daily routines are closely linked to feelings of exhaustion, diminished accomplishment, and cynicism, all of which contribute to high levels of burnout and reduced resilience (Sokal et al., 2020). Workload manageability remains a significant challenge throughout all stages of an educator's career. As noted by Hester et al. (2020), inadequate preparation, insufficient information, and increased expectations can decrease educator retention and resilience while elevating stress and burnout. The pandemic intensified these challenges, leading to a pronounced impact on the participants' well-being.

Participants in this study reported that miscommunication and feeling undermined severely affected their resilience throughout the pandemic. Additionally, the extra duties and unpaid hours spent on their classrooms and students—without adequate recognition—further contributed to their sense of frustration and reduced resilience. While some participants were able to adapt and find ways to manage the new demands of their roles, others struggled to adjust to the changes.

Overall, the findings emphasize the importance of addressing the specific needs of inclusive educators, particularly in times of crisis, to enhance their resilience and well-being. This involves improving communication, managing expectations, and ensuring that educators receive appropriate recognition and support for their efforts.

Impacts to Overall Well-Being

Participants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted significant impacts across all dimensions of well-being—psychological, physical, emotional, and social. The shift to socially distant, hybrid, and remote learning environments, coupled with the broader disruptions of the pandemic, led to notable changes in participants' overall psyche. Inclusive educators, in particular, have been identified as experiencing heightened emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. These issues contribute to burnout, reduced occupational retention, and lower resilience throughout their careers, especially when navigating trauma and uncertainty (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010; Brunzell et al., 2021).

The study revealed that adapting to the new reality of the pandemic was a substantial challenge, impacting various aspects of participants' well-being. Many educators struggled to balance their work, family responsibilities, and the demands of a global health crisis, which created significant stress and insecurity. Participants reported difficulty in anticipating future developments, managing their classrooms, and maintaining a sense of stability, which exacerbated feelings of stress, isolation, and diminished self-efficacy.

Despite these challenges, some participants found positive aspects amid the pandemic's difficulties. They expressed gratitude for the sense of community and the meaningful interactions they experienced, which helped counteract feelings of isolation. These educators appreciated the

opportunity to connect with others and felt that their roles provided them with a sense of purpose and belonging during an otherwise challenging time.

Research on inclusive educators during the pandemic has consistently shown high levels of psychological distress, leading to reports of deteriorating mental health, reduced resilience, and increased disassociation from their roles (Orbach et al., 2023; Weissenfels et al., 2021). The ongoing effects of the pandemic have left lasting marks on classroom dynamics and educator interactions, contributing to ongoing strain and challenges to overall well-being.

Participants in this study echoed these concerns, noting the enduring impacts of the pandemic on their professional and personal lives. The pervasive sense of being underprepared and the continuous dread of uncertainty align with broader findings about the long-term effects on inclusive educators' well-being (Karakose et al., 2022). These insights underline the critical need for targeted support systems and interventions to address the specific challenges faced by educators during and beyond such global crises.

Importance of Administrative & Community Supports

The study highlights the pivotal role of administrative and community support in the well-being of participants, especially in the educational setting. Researchers have identified that strong supportive relationships with parents, colleagues, and school administration can significantly boost the self-efficacy and resilience of childcare workers (Mansfield et al., 2016). Similarly, in inclusive education literature, educators are more inclined to seek additional support from community members and administrators, leading to reduced levels of stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout (Zee & Koomen, 2016).

Notably, during the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the feelings of support varied among participants, with some experiencing feelings of isolation, self-doubt, frustration, and a

sense of unattainable expectations, while others found comfort in the encouragement received from administrators and community members.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, regular communication with school administrators and community members emerged as a critical factor in supporting educators' mental health, stress management, and resilience (Baker et al., 2021; Schneider et al., 2021). Expressing gratitude for the continuous support provided by the community and administrators, some participants emphasized its significant contribution to their overall well-being and sense of belonging within their professional roles.

Nevertheless, the study also sheds light on the complexity of administrative and community support experiences, as some participants reported negative shifts in communication and backing from their support networks. The anxiety stemming from interactions with parents and administrators was identified as a key factor contributing to inclusive educator burnout post-pandemic (Pressley, 2021). Participants highlighted the immense challenges of navigating a global crisis while shouldering the responsibility of communicating restrictions and guidelines, often feeling overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon them.

Educator's Experience and the Emphasis on Available Resources

Feeling well-informed and supported by available resources was a critical aspect for many participants during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, as highlighted in this study. Research suggests that the best outcomes in school work, culture, and achievements are accomplished when educators articulate educational needs and shared values through personalized strategies that consider the current context and timing (Day et al., 2016).

Inclusive educators' motivation and personal accomplishments have been significantly impacted by various external barriers such as districts, administrators, lack of resource access,

and interactions with colleagues during the pandemic (Mullin et al., 2024). Participants in the study expressed stress and uncertainty when facing these barriers that hindered their successful access to necessary resources.

The abrupt shift from traditional in-person teaching to remote learning posed significant challenges for educators. Some participants had to quickly adapt to the use of technology to deliver everyday classroom activities in a remote setting. Others found themselves in a different scenario where childcare centers remained open throughout the pandemic, without the shift to remote teaching. Additionally, a hybrid approach was adopted by some, with students learning remotely and others attending socially distanced classes in compliance with regulations set by governing bodies and administrators.

Access to resources and information emerged as a crucial factor for the success and well-being of inclusive educators during the pandemic (Beltman et al., 2020; Blaydes et al., 2024; Hester et al., 2020). While some participants appreciated the support and guidance received from governments, districts, and administrators, others struggled with the new teaching format and heightened expectations, leading to feelings of frustration and resentment towards the governing bodies and community resources.

Continuous education and access to valuable resources are vital for the development and success of childcare workers in the inclusive education field (Biglan et al., 2013). Participants emphasized the ongoing need for support and resources as they navigate the lasting effects of the pandemic, especially concerning the well-being of children and the challenges that may arise in the upcoming academic years.

Recommendations

This comprehensive study was initiated to investigate deeply into the multifaceted experiences of educators in the field of inclusive education. More specifically, the research explored the nuanced variables of wellness, social isolation, loneliness, and resilience amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The primary objective was to provide valuable insights to education administrators, enabling them to enhance the overall well-being and resilience of these dedicated educators.

The findings of the study not only shed light on the complex interplay of these key variables but also pinpoint specific areas of focus for administrators and school districts seeking to provide optimal support to inclusive educators. By identifying the challenges faced by educators and understanding their needs during times of crisis, education leaders can tailor strategies and initiatives to better address the well-being and resilience of their staff.

Moreover, the recommendations outlined in Table 2 present a robust framework of practical steps and potential safeguards that hold significant promise for this vital population of educators as they navigate the uncertainties of the future. These actionable recommendations serve as guiding principles for education stakeholders, offering concrete ways to bolster support systems, foster a culture of resilience, and prioritize the mental health and overall well-being of inclusive educators moving forward.

By using the insights and recommendations developed from this study, education administrators and policymakers can proactively implement targeted interventions and support mechanisms that not only alleviate the immediate challenges faced by educators but also lay the foundation for sustained well-being, enhanced resilience, and a thriving inclusive education environment.

Table 2. Recommendations to improve the response of education administrators

Feeling Supported	Recommendations Being Valued	Access to Resources & Supports
Themes		
Receiving high quality, meaningful communication from administrators was a significant factor to feeling supported.	Educators expressed wanting to be included in communications, decision making, and planning concerning the transition and implementation of socially distant, hybrid, and remote learning.	As a vulnerable population, the access of resources and supports for inclusive education educators' mental health and wellbeing is emphasized (Zhang et al., 2020).
Receiving patience and high quality communication from community members about the best practices during the COVID-19 pandemic was emphasized.	Inclusive education educators' voices are essential to provide feedback on changes to education in times of a pandemic as they are at the forefront of communications with community members.	Education administrators and governing bodies should provide more accessible, appropriately catered and available resources allows inclusive educators to build the tools necessary to educate in educational environments post COVID-19.
Engaging in high quality communication and informing about expectations set for implementing and carrying out socially distant, hybrid, and remote learning including communications surrounding COVID-19 guidelines.	Inclusive education educators' opinions and decision makings are especially important to provide insight and feedback on the changes made to educational settings and curriculum during pandemic situations as they hold the most knowledge of best educational practices.	

The insights collected from the participants in this study stressed the utmost importance of feeling supported by both administrators and the community among inclusive education educators. The establishment of consistent, supportive, and informative guidance from

administrators regarding best practices for transitioning to online, hybrid, and socially distant learning environments in a professional and educational manner greatly contributed to educators feeling a sense of security and support. Similarly, educators highly valued open communication, patience, and empathy from community members, further emphasizing the critical role of interconnected support systems during challenging times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study reaffirms the crucial need for enhanced and sustained communication and support networks between educators, administrators, and community members to strengthen educator resilience, a concept highlighted by Beltman et al. (2020). Encouraging open dialogues with inclusive educators about their experiences with various service delivery models, including socially distant, hybrid, and remote learning, emerged as a highly impactful strategy valued by study participants. This echoes the growing consensus among researchers, educators, and advocates advocating for the inclusion of educators in decision-making processes and planning, both during and beyond crisis situations (Brunzell et al., 2021; Hester et al., 2020).

Moreover, the participants emphasized the significance of feeling heard, valued, and actively involved in decision-making processes and planning, particularly when navigating transitions to new learning environments. Ensuring that educators' voices are recognized, and their expertise is leveraged in shaping educational practices during crises is essential, given their crucial roles as front-line communicators (Madalińska-Michalak (2021). Inclusive educators possess invaluable insights into classroom dynamics and effective educational approaches, making their inclusion in decision-making processes vital, (Emery & Vandenberg, 2010).

Many participants highlighted challenges in accessing essential mental health resources and professional support, underscoring the urgent need for more accessible mental health services tailored to the specific needs of inclusive education educators, who are considered a

vulnerable demographic (Cameron-Blake et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2020). Equally critical is the provision of tailored resources, such as workshops, communication channels, and personnel services, to assist educators grappling with the evolving demands of post-pandemic education. There is an indispensable requirement for educators to be equipped with the necessary resources to effectively facilitate their students' success in the classroom (Biglan et al., 2013).

Conclusion

This study explores the nuanced experiences of inclusive education educators, focusing particularly on social isolation, loneliness, well-being, and resilience, and seeks to understand how education administrators can effectively support this specific group of educators. By providing a platform for inclusive educators, a demographic often overlooked and deemed vulnerable, to share their encounters with social isolation, loneliness, well-being, and resilience amidst the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, this research aims to fill a critical gap in the existing literature (Kim et al., 2022).

Both individual and institutional resilience were noted as essential for the overall wellbeing of inclusive education educators (Beckmann & Klein, 2022; Fox & Walter, 2022; Parveen et al., 2022). The current study presents a vital contribution to the literature, noting that both individual and institutional resilience were built during times of trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, during these times of social isolation and negative wellness, with a lack of institutional resilience, participants found difficulty in maintaining job satisfaction and overall positive wellbeing (Cormier et al., 2021; Fokkens-Bruinsma et al., 2023).

The participants of the study emphasized the significantly negative shifts in self-efficacy and resilience in their professions linked to the lack of adequate support and resources provided by administrators, governing bodies and community members (Fokkens-Bruinsma et al., 2023).

The current study presents vital contributions to the current literature, as the participants noted the significance of building both individual and institutional resilience as the foundation of wellness and positive relationships with administrators (Papazis et al., 2023). Participants of the current study noted negative communication and expectations as the reason they found it difficult to build individual resilience (Madalińska-Michalak, 2021). Therefore, negatively affecting their overall wellbeing, and relationship with their administrators, students and community.

The multifaceted nature of resilience, social isolation, loneliness, and well-being experienced by inclusive educators was profoundly impacted by the myriad changes magnified by the challenges presented during the COVID-19 era (Karakose et al., 2022). This study presents a vital contribution to the scarce research centering on the lived experiences and resilience of inclusive education educators during the pandemic, building on the existing qualitative literature (Olive, 2023; Ortiz et al., 2021). Creating a platform for marginalized populations like inclusive education educators to share their narratives authentically is paramount during unprecedented periods of turmoil, such as a global pandemic, as it amplifies voices that may otherwise remain unheard (Kauffman et al., 2022; Rayner, 2007).

Possible Limitations

The limitations of this study, notably the small participant size of only six individuals, restrict the generalizability of the findings to a broader population of inclusive education educators. The study was conducted at a specific institution, a small religious independent school in Victoria, British Columbia, characterized by unique resource allocations and community dynamics that may not align with those of the larger provincial or national educational framework. This contextual specificity raises concerns about the extent to which the experiences and insights of participants can be extrapolated to settings with varying demographics and

resources. Furthermore, larger schools present a different character, in which communication among a larger staff may present challenges that differ from a small staff.

Additionally, the gender imbalance within the participant cohort, with only one out of the six identifying as male, does not accurately reflect the gender distribution of educators within the broader British Columbia education system. The skewed representation could potentially impact the comprehensiveness and diversity of perspectives shared within the study, limiting the kinds of insights that could have been derived from a more gender-balanced sample.

Moreover, the retrospective and reflective nature of the participants' accounts may introduce elements of bias, affecting the reliability and validity of the reported experiences. Relying on memory recall and ongoing post-pandemic experiences to narrate their encounters during the COVID-19 crisis could introduce nuances of interpretation and recollection, potentially influencing the accuracy and consistency of the shared experiences.

Considering these limitations, future research endeavors would benefit from expanding the participant pool to encompass a more diverse and representative sample of inclusive education educators, including special educators, spanning across various institutional settings and demographic profiles. By broadening the participant inclusivity and considering a range of educational contexts, researchers can attain a more comprehensive and robust understanding of the challenges and resilience factors experienced by educators in diverse settings, enhancing the applicability and relevance of the study findings on a broader scale.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are many directions for further research that emerged from this investigation. By exploring the essences of inclusive educators' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study revealed three key areas of concern: feeling supported, being valued, and access to

resources and various supports. Additional research investigating these concerns using a broader sample size would enable educators to apply results reliably. It would be beneficial for further research to include mixed method measures. These three areas can be explored more specifically in the following ways:

1. Expanding participant pool for diversity
2. Consideration of different participant occupational profiles
3. Inclusivity of various institutional size settings
4. Increasing methodological rigor and validity checks

This study offers several recommendations for advancing research in the field. By expanding the participant pool to encompass diverse demographics, considering different participant occupational profiles, considering institutional contexts, and rigorously validating methodologies, future studies can build upon the current findings. These directions collectively contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation and pave the way for impactful scholarly contributions.

Competing Interests

The author declares no competing interests.

References

American Psychological Association. (n.d.). *Apa Dictionary of Psychology*.

<https://dictionary.apa.org/trauma>

Anderson, D. S. (2016). *Wellness issues for higher education: A guide for student affairs and higher education professionals*. Routledge. **<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315778129>**

Anney, V. N. (n.d.). Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. *Journal of Emerging trends in Education Research and Policy Studies*, 5(2), 272-281.

Ansley, B. M., Houchins, D., & Varjas, K. (2016). Optimizing special educator wellness and job performance through stress management. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 48(4), 176-185.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059915626128>

Aurini, J., & Davies, S. (2021). COVID-19 school closures and educational achievement gaps in Canada: Lessons from Ontario summer learning research. *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue Canadienne de Sociologie*, 58(2), 165–185.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12334>

Awosoga, O., Hazzan, A. A., McIntosh, S., Dabravolskaj, J., Sajobi, T. T., & Doan, J. (2019). Factors associated with the health status of childcare workers in southern Alberta, Canada. *BMC Research Notes*, 12(1), 4. **<https://doi.org/10.1186/s13104-018-4039-5>**

Baker, C. N., Peele, H., Daniels, M., Saybe, M., Whalen, K., Overstreet, S., & The New Orleans, T.-I. S. L. C. (2021). The experience of COVID-19 and its impact on teachers' mental health, coping, and teaching. *School Psychology Review*, 50(4), 491–504.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1855473>

- Beckmann, L., & Klein, E. D. (2023). Resilience in the context of multiple adverse circumstances? Leadership capacity and teachers' practice during COVID-19 at schools serving disadvantaged communities. *School Leadership & Management*, 43(2), 145–166. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2022.2137727>
- Beltman, S., Mansfield, C., & Price, A. (2011). Thriving not just surviving: A review of research on teacher resilience. *Educational Research Review*, 6(3), 185–207. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2011.09.001>
- Beltman, S., Dobson, M. R., Mansfield, C. F., & Jay, J. (2020). “The thing that keeps me going”: Educator resilience in early learning settings. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 28(4), 303–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2019.1605885>
- Berbeco, M. R., & McCaffrey, M. (2016). Fostering educator resilience: Engaging the educational community to address the natural hazards of climate change. In J. L. Drake, Y. Y. Kontar, J. C. Eichelberger, T. S. Rupp, & K. M. Taylor (Eds.), *Communicating Climate-Change and Natural Hazard Risk and Cultivating Resilience* (Vol. 45, pp. 255–265). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-20161-0_16
- Berson, I. R., & Baggerly, J. (2009). Building resilience to trauma: Creating a safe and supportive early childhood classroom. *Childhood Education*, 85(6), 375–379. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00094056.2009.10521404>
- Biglan, A., Layton, G. L., Backen Jones, L., Hankins, M., & Rusby, J. C. (2013). The value of workshops on psychological flexibility for early childhood special education staff. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 32(4), 196–210. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1177/0271121411425191>

- Blaydes, M., Gearhart, C. A., McCarthy, C. J., & Weppner, C. H. (2024). A longitudinal qualitative exploration of teachers' experiences of stress and well-being during COVID-19. *Psychology in the Schools*, *61*(6), 2291–2314. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.23169>
- Bohlmeijer, E., & Westerhof, G. (2021). The model for sustainable mental health: Future directions for integrating positive psychology into mental health care. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 747999. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.747999>
- Boyd C.O. 2001. Phenomenology the method. In Munhall P.L. (Ed.), *Nursing research: A qualitative perspective* (3rd. ed., pp. 93–122). Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett.
- Bradbury-Jones, C., Irvine, F., & Sambrook, S., F. I. (2010). Phenomenology and participant feedback: Convention or contention? *Nurse Researcher*.
<https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2010.01.17.2.25.c7459>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77-101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Brooks, J. S., & Normore, A. H. (2015). Qualitative research and educational leadership: Essential dynamics to consider when designing and conducting studies. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *29*(7), 798–806. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-06-2015-0083>
- Brunzell, T., Waters, L., & Stokes, H., (2021). Trauma-informed teacher wellbeing: Teacher reflections within trauma-informed positive education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, *46*(5), 91–107. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2021v46n5.6>
- Bu, F., Steptoe, A., & Fancourt, D. (2020). Who is lonely in lockdown? Cross-cohort analyses of predictors of loneliness before and during the COVID-19 pandemic? *Public Health London*, *186*, 31-34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.puhe.2020.06.036>.

- Cameron-Blake, E., Annan, H., Marro, L., Michaud, D., Sawatzky, J., & Tatlow, H. (2023). Variation in the stringency of COVID-19 public health measures on self-reported health, stress, and overall wellbeing in Canada. *Scientific Reports*, *13*(1), 13094.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-39004-w>
- Cerbone, D. R. (2014). *Understanding phenomenology*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315712086>
- Chan, Z., Fung, Y., & Chien, W. (2015). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only undertaken in the data collection and analysis process. *The Qualitative Report*, *18*(30), 1.
<https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2013.1486>
- Cheng, C., & Chen, S. (2024). Unmasking resilience in the ‘New Normal’: Coping with unprecedented stressors amid COVID-19. *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, *55*, 101346-. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2023.101346>
- Colaizzi, P. (1978). Psychological research as a phenomenologist views it. In: Valle, R.S. & King, M. (1978). *Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 48-71). Oxford University Press.
- Cormier, C. J., McGrew, J., Ruble, L., & Fischer, M. (2022). Socially distanced teaching: The mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on special education teachers. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *50*(3), 1768–1772. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22736>
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D.L. (2000) Determining validity in qualitative inquiry, *Theory Into*

- Practice*, 39(3), 124–130, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed method research* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (Fourth edition.). SAGE.
- Crompton, H., Chigona, A., & Burke, D. (2023). Teacher resilience during COVID-19: Comparing teachers' shift to online learning in South Africa and the United States. *TechTrends*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11528-022-00826-6>
- Cypress, B. S. (2017). Rigor or reliability and validity in qualitative research: Perspectives, strategies, reconceptualization, and recommendations. *Dimensions of Critical Care Nursing*, 36(4), 253-263. <https://oce.ovid.com/article/00003465-201707000-00006/PDF>
- Day, C., Gu, Q., & Sammons, P. (2016). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 52(2), 221–258. <https://doi.org/doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.1177/0013161X15616863>
- Debata, B., Patnaik, P., & Mishra, A. (2020). COVID-19 pandemic! It's impact on people, economy, and environment. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 20(4), e2372. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2372>
- Decker, J. T., Bailey, T. L., & Westergaard, N. (2002). Burnout among childcare workers. *Residential Treatment For Children & Youth*, 19(4), 61–77. https://doi.org/10.1300/J007v19n04_04
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed.). Sage.

- Desson, Z., Weller, E., McMeekin, P., & Ammi, M. (2020). An analysis of the policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic in France, Belgium, and Canada. *Health Policy and Technology*, 9(4), 430–446. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hlpt.2020.09.002>
- Diebel, S., & Boissonneault, E. (2021). A Pan-Canadian narrative review on the protocols for COVID-19 and Canadian emergency departments. *International Journal of Medical Students*, 9(2), 150–154. <https://doi.org/10.5195/ijms.2021.958>
- Dowling, R., Lloyd, K., & Suchet-Pearson, S. (2016). Qualitative methods 1: Enriching the interview. *Progress in Human Geography*, 40(5), 679–686. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515596880>
- Elmer, T., Mephram, K., & Stadtfeld, C. (2020). Students under lockdown: Comparisons of students' social networks and mental health before and during the COVID-19 crisis in Switzerland. *PloS One*, 15(7), e0236337–e0236337. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0236337>
- Emery, A., & Anderman, L. H. (2020). Using interpretive phenomenological analysis to advance theory and research in educational psychology. *Educational Psychologist*, 55(4), 220–231. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2020.1787170>
- Emery, D. W., & Vandenberg, B. (2010). Special education teacher burnout and ACT. *International Journal of Special Education*, 25(3).
- Ferreira, R. J., Buttell, F., & Cannon, C. (2020). COVID-19: Immediate predictors of individual resilience. *Sustainability (Basel, Switzerland)*, 12(16), 6495-. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12166495>
- Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., Tigelaar, E.H., van Rijswijk, M.M., Jansen, E.P.W.A. (2023). Preservice teachers' resilience during times of COVID-19. *Teachers and Teaching, Theory and*

Practice.

[https://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/epdf/10.1080/13540602.2023.](https://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/epdf/10.1080/13540602.2023.2172391?needAccess=true)

[2172391?needAccess=true](https://www.tandfonline.com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/doi/epdf/10.1080/13540602.2023.2172391?needAccess=true)

Fothergill, A. (2013). Managing childcare: The experiences of mothers and childcare workers.

Sociological Inquiry, 83(3), 421–447. **<https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12011>**

Fox, H. B., & Walter, H. L. (2022). More than strength from within: Cultivating teacher resilience during COVID-19. *Current Issues in Education (Tempe, Ariz.)*, 23(1).

<https://doi.org/10.14507/cie.vol23iss1.1978>

Gadermann, A. M., Gagné Petteni, M., Molyneux, T. M., Warren, M. T., Thomson, K. C.,

Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Guhn, M., & Oberle, E. (2023). Teacher mental health and

workplace well-being in a global crisis: Learning from the challenges and supports

identified by teachers one year into the COVID-19 pandemic in British Columbia,

Canada. *PLOS ONE*, 18(8), e0290230. **<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0290230>**

Gammel, I., & Wang, J. (Eds.). (2022). *Creative Resilience and COVID-19: Figuring the*

Everyday in a Pandemic. Routledge. **<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003213536>**

Groenewald, Thomas. (2004). A Phenomenological research design Illustrated. *International*

Journal of Qualitative Methods, 3(1), 42-55.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300104>

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Haase, J. E., & Myers, S. T. (1988). Reconciling paradigm assumptions of qualitative and quantitative research. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 10(2), 128-137.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/019394598801000202>

- Harry, E. M., Carlasare, L. E., Sinsky, C. A., Brown, R. L., Goelz, E., Nankivil, N., & Linzer, M. (2022). Childcare stress, burnout, and intent to reduce hours or leave the job during the COVID-19 pandemic among US health care workers. *JAMA Network Open*, 5(7), e2221776–e2221776. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2022.21776>
- Hester, O. R., Bridges, S. A., & Rollins, L. H. (2020). ‘Overworked and underappreciated’: Special education teachers describe stress and attrition. *Teacher Development*, 24(3), 348–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2020.1767189>
- Hortulanus, R., & Machielse, A. (2006). *Social isolation in modern society*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203020142>
- Jackson, R. L., Drummond, D. K., & Camara, S. (2007). What is qualitative research? *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication*, 8(1), 21–28. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17459430701617879>
- Jakubowski, T. D., & Sitko-Dominik, M. M. (2021). Teachers’ mental health during the first two waves of the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland. *PLOS ONE*, 16(9), e0257252. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257252>
- Jalongo, M. R. (2021). The effects of COVID-19 on early childhood education and care: Research and resources for children, families, teachers, and teacher educators. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 49(5), 763–774. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01208-y>
- Johnson, M., & Coleman, V. (2024). Teachers’ research diaries – reflection and reconnection in times of social isolation. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 47(1), 79–92. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1743727X.2023.2231857>

Kamath, S. P., Mithra, P., K. J., Kulkarni, V., Joshi, J., Kamath, P., Unnikrishnan, B., & Pai, K. (2022). Returning to work at school during the COVID -19 pandemic, is it stressful for schoolteachers? Assessment of immediate psychological effects: A cross sectional study. *F1000Research*, *11*, 751. <https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.110720.1>

Karakose, T., Ozdemir, T. Y., Papadakis, S., Yirci, R., Ozkayran, S. E., & Polat, H. (2022). Investigating the relationships between COVID-19 quality of life, loneliness, happiness, and internet addiction among K-12 teachers and school administrators—A structural equation modeling approach. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, *19*(3), 1052. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031052>

Kauffman, J. M., Badar, J., Hallenbeck, B., & Lopes, J. (2022). Teaching inclusive and special education during the COVID-19 pandemic: Needed support for learning and research of effects on teachers and students. *Support for Learning*, *37*(4), 589–606. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9604.12426>

Keyes, C. L. M. (1998). Social well-being. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, *61*(2), 121–140. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2787065>

Kim, L. E., & Asbury, K. (2020). ‘Like a rug had been pulled from under you’: The impact of COVID-19 on teachers in England during the first six weeks of the UK lockdown. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *90*(4), 1062–1083. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12381>

Kim, L. E., Oxley, L., & Asbury, K. (2022). “My brain feels like a browser with 100 tabs open”: A longitudinal study of teachers’ mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *92*(1), e12450. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12450>

- Kush, J. M., Badillo-Goicoechea, E., Musci, R. J., & Stuart, E. A. (2022). Teachers' mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Researcher*, 51(9), 593–597.
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.3102/0013189X221134281>
- Lades, L. K., Laffan, K., Daly, M., & Delaney, L. (2020). Daily emotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 25(4), 902–911.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/bjhp.12450>
- Leask, M., & Younie, S. (2021). *Education for all in times of crisis: Lessons from Covid-19*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003155591>
- Lemon, N., & McDonough, S. (2023). “I feel like nothing else will ever be this hard”: The dimensions of teacher resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Educational Forum*, 87(4), 304–318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2023.2178564>
- Lo, B. L. (2014). Stress, burnout and resilience of teachers of students with emotional behavioural challenges. *SpringerPlus*, 3(S1), O4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/2193-1801-3-S1-O4>
- Lopez, Kay A. & Willis, Danny G. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research*, 14(5), 726-735.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732304263638>
- Madalińska-Michalak, J., J. (2021). Successful school leadership in times of COVID-19 pandemic: Fostering resilience in teachers and schools in Poland. *Labor et Educatio*, 9, 83–101. <https://doi.org/10.4467/25439561LE.21.006.15360>
- Manderscheid, R. W., Ryff, C. D., Freeman, E. J., McKnight-Eily, L. R., Dhingra, S., & Strine, T. W. (2010). Evolving definitions of mental illness and wellness. *Preventing Chronic Disease*, 7(1), A19-.

- Mansfield, C. F., Beltman, S., Price, A., & McConney, A. (2012). “Don’t sweat the small stuff:” Understanding teacher resilience at the chalkface. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 28(3), 357–367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2011.11.001>
- Margolis, J., Hodge, A., & Alexandrou, A. (2014). The teacher educator’s role in promoting institutional versus individual teacher well-being. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 40(4), 391–408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2014.929382>
- Masten, A. S. (2019). Resilience from a developmental systems perspective. *World Psychiatry*, 18(1), 101–102. <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20591>
- Masten, A. S., Best, K. M., & Garmezy, N. (1990). Resilience and development: Contributions from the study of children who overcome adversity. *Development and Psychopathology*, 2(4), 425–444. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954579400005812>
- Mawhinney, L. (2008). Laugh so you don’t cry: Teachers combating isolation in schools through humour and social support. *Ethnography and Education*, 3(2), 195–209. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457820802062466>
- McIntosh, M. J., & Morse, J. M. (2015). Situating and constructing diversity in semi-structured interviews. *Global Qualitative Nursing Research*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2333393615597674>
- McLeod, S., & Dulsky, S. (2021). Resilience, reorientation, and reinvention: School leadership during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, 637075. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2021.637075>
- Miller-Karas, E. (2023). *Building resilience to trauma: The trauma and community resiliency models* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003140887>

- Mullin, A. C., Sharkey, J. D., Aragon, K. M., Appel, O., Portabales, P., Bouchard, I., & Felix, E. D. (2024). "It just felt like another thing to do": Examining teacher barriers and motivators to utilizing trauma-informed resources during COVID-19. *Psychology in the Schools, 61*(4), 1287–1301. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.23111>
- Myers, J. E., Sweeney, T. J., & Witmer, J. M. (2000). The wheel of wellness counseling for wellness: A holistic model for treatment planning. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 78*, 251–266. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2000.tb0190.x>
- Newall, N. E. G., & Menec, V. H. (2020). A comparison of different definitions of social isolation using Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) data. *Ageing and Society, 40*(12), 2671–2694. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X19000801>
- O’ Brien, N., O’ Brien, W., Costa, J., & Adamakis, M. (2022). Physical education student teachers’ wellbeing during Covid-19: Resilience resources and challenges from school placement. *European Physical Education Review, 28*(4), 873-889. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1356336X221088399>
- Olive, J. L., Gilbert, C., Wronowski, M., & Peddle, A. (2023). Pain of the past and present: An identity conscious exploration of the prevalence and scope of educator primary and secondary trauma. *Teachers and Teaching, 1*–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2023.2291069>
- Orbach, L., Fritz, A., Haase, V. G., Dowker, A., & Räsänen, P. (2023). Conditions of distance learning and teaching and their relation to elementary school children’s basic number skills after the suspension of face-to-face teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Education, 8*, 1083074. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1083074>

Ortiz, A., Johnson, M. K., & Barreau, P. P. (2021). A culture of healing: Practical steps to support students and educators in the face of collective and individual trauma. In: Byrd-Poller, L., & Farmer, J. L. (2021). *A culture of healing: Practical steps to support students and educators in the face of collective and individual trauma*. IGI Global.

<https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-7016-6.ch008>

Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 695–705.

Papazis, F., Avramidis, E., & Bacopoulou, F. (2023). Greek teachers' resilience levels during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and its association with attitudes towards emergency remote teaching and perceived stress. *Psychology in the Schools*, 60(5), 1459–1476.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22709>

Parveen, K., Tran, P. Q. B., Alghamdi, A. A., & Aslam, S. (2022). Identifying the leadership challenges of K-12 public schools during COVID-19 disruption: A systematic literature review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 13. **<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.875646>**

Patton, Cheryl M. (n.d.). Phenomenology for the holistic nurse researcher: Underpinnings of descriptive and interpretive traditions. *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, 38(3), 278-286.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0898010119882155>

Perry, M. A., Ingham, T., Jones, B., & Mirfin-Veitch, B. (2023). “At risk” and “vulnerable”! Reflections on inequities and the impact of COVID-19 on disabled people. *New Zealand Journal of Physiotherapy*, 48(3). **<https://doi.org/10.15619/NZJP/48.3.02>**

Petts, R. J., Carlson, D. L., & Pepin, J. R. (2021). A gendered pandemic: Childcare, homeschooling, and parents' employment during COVID-19. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 28(S2), 515–534. **<https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12614>**

- Pokhrel, S., & Chhetri, R. (2021). A literature review on impact of COVID-19 pandemic on teaching and learning. *Higher Education for the Future*, 8(1), 133–141.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631120983481>
- Presnell, D. (2018). Preventing and treating trauma, building resiliency: The movement toward compassionate schools in Watauga County, North Carolina. *North Carolina Medical Journal*, 79(2), 113–114. **<https://doi.org/10.18043/ncm.79.2.113>**
- Pressley, T. (2021a). Factors contributing to teacher burnout during COVID-19. *Educational Researcher*, 50(5), 325–327. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X211004138>
- Pressley, T. (2021b). Returning to teaching during COVID-19: An empirical study on elementary teachers' self-efficacy. *Psychology in the Schools*, 58(8), 1611–1623.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22528>
- Primeau, L.A. (2003). Reflections on self in qualitative research: Stories of family. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 57(1), 9–16. **<https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.57.1.9>**
- Rayner, S. (2007). *Managing special and inclusive education*. SAGE.
- Reiners, M. G. (2012). Understanding the differences between Husserl's (descriptive) and Heidegger's (interpretive) phenomenological research. *Journal of Nursing & Care*, 1(5), 1–3. **<http://dx.doi.org/10.4172/2167-1168.1000119>**
- Rekha Francis, C., & Fraga, F. X. V. (2022). Moulding and sustaining excellence and passion of teachers through resilience in the post-Covid-pandemic Era. *Sedme, Small Enterprises Development, Management and Extension Journal*, 49(3), 271-279.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/09708464221111966>
- Rosli, N., Johar, E. R., Rosli, N., & Hamid, N. F. A. (2022). Psychological impact of COVID-19: Assessing the COVID-19-related anxiety, individual's resilience and conspiracy beliefs

on attitudes to COVID-19 vaccination. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *13*, 906914–906914.

<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.906914>

Rumas, R., Shamblaw, A. L., Jagtap, S., & Best, M. W. (2021). Predictors and consequences of loneliness during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Psychiatry Research*, *300*.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2021.113934>

Ryff, C. D. (1989). Happiness is everything, or is it? Explorations on the meaning of psychological well-being: Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *57*(6), 1069–1081. [https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069)

[3514.57.6.1069](https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.57.6.1069)

Sanders, C. (2003). Application of Colaizzi's method: Interpretation of an auditable decision trail by a novice researcher. *Contemporary Nurse: A Journal for the Australian Nursing Profession*, *14*(3), 292–302. <https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.14.3.292>

Sundler, A. J., Lindberg, E., Nilsson, C., & Palmér, L. (2019). Qualitative thematic analysis based on descriptive phenomenology. *Nursing Open*, *6*(3), 733–739.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.275>

Schneider, R., Sachse, K. A., Schipolowski, S., & Enke, F. (2021). Teaching in times of COVID-19: The evaluation of distance teaching in elementary and secondary schools in Germany. *Frontiers in Education*, *6*, 702406. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.702406>

<https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.702406>

Skaalvik, E. M., & Skaalvik, S. (2017). Teacher stress and teacher self-efficacy: Relations and consequences. In T. M. McIntyre, S. E. McIntyre, & D. J. Francis (Eds.), *Educator Stress* (pp. 101–125). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53053-6_5)

[53053-6_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-53053-6_5)

Sokal, L. J., Trudel, L. G. E., & Babb, J. C. (2020). Supporting teachers in times of change: The job demands- resources model and teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic.

International Journal of Contemporary Education, 3(2), 67.

<https://doi.org/10.11114/ijce.v3i2.4931>

Wagner, S. L., Forer, B., Cepeda, I. L., Goelman, H., Maggi, S., D'Angiulli, A., Wessel, J.,

Hertzman, C., & Grunau, R. E. (2013). Perceived stress and Canadian early childcare

educators. *Child & Youth Care Forum*, 42(1), 53–70. **[https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10566-012-9187-5)**

012-9187-5

Weissenfels, Marie, M., Benick, M., & Perels, F. (2021). Can teacher self-efficacy act as a buffer against burnout in inclusive classrooms? *International Journal of Educational Research*,

109, 101794. **<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2021.101794>**

Wharton-Beck, A., Chou, C. C., Gilbert, C., Johnson, B., & Beck, M. A. (2024). K-12 school leadership perspectives from the COVID-19 pandemic. *Policy Features in Education*,

22(1), 21-42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14782103221135620>

Wilson, A. (2014). A guide to phenomenological research. *Nursing Standard*.

<https://doi.org/10.7748/ns.29.34.38.e8821>

Xu, N., Chen, P., Lang, R., Kong, L.-L., & Qu, H. (2023). The effect of Chinese special education teachers' competence on their occupational well-being: The mediating effect of resilience. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, 70(6), 1206–

1221. **<https://doi.org/10.1080/1034912X.2021.1975263>**

Zee, M., & Koomen, H. M. Y. (2016). Teacher self-efficacy and its effects on classroom processes, student academic adjustment, and teacher well-being: A synthesis of 40 years

of research. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 981–1015. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/10.3102/0034654315626801>

Zhang, M., Bai, Y., & Li, Z. (2020). Effect of resilience on the mental health of special education teachers: Moderating effect of teaching barriers. *Psychology Research and Behavior Management, Volume 13*, 537–544. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S257842>

Appendices

Appendix A. Participant Recruitment Advertisement

The recruitment for this study was conducted by the then Head of School, at Willowcrest Academy at the time in which this research was launched.

Hello,

My name is Katie Stewart, and I am a master's student at the University of Victoria. From Jillian Roberts' previous email, I am working with Jillian on my thesis research looking into the experiences of educators during COVID-19. I am looking for around 6-8 inclusive educators, who have at least one student in their class on an IEP, who are willing to volunteer to be a part of my study. I have attached the consent form to this email for distribution to those who volunteer and ask that signed copies be emailed to me at the address: catrionastewart@uvic.ca.

If you have any questions or concerns, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Appendix B. Criteria Inclusion Questions

1. Are you a current educator at Willowcrest Academy?
2. With the 2019/2020 school year being the first of the COVID-19 pandemic, how many years have you taught during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. How many of those years did you teach an inclusive classroom?
4. How many of those years did you teach an inclusive classroom at Willowcrest Academy?

Appendix C. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Demographic Information

1. How many years have you been an educator?
2. What grades have you taught?
3. What is your favourite grade to teach and why?
4. With the 2019/2020 school year being the first of the COVID-19 pandemic, how many years have you taught during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. How many of those years did you teach an inclusive classroom?
 - a. Prompt: how do you define inclusive classroom?

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your experiences being an educator of an inclusive education classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Tell me about your well-being during the pandemic.
 - a. Prompt: please tell me about your psychological well-being, your emotional well-being, and your mental well-being.
3. In your experience, what services or help, if any, did your school district or administrators offer to decrease the social and mental health strains brought on by remote learning and the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - a. Prompt: if services were provided, did you use them? Were they beneficial to you? If not, what might have been of assistance to you during remote learning and the COVID-19 pandemic?
4. Is there anything else you would like to add to your experience as an educator of an inclusive classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic that you feel we have not discussed, or you would like to go into further detail about?

Appendix D. Certificate of Ethical Approval



**University
of Victoria**

Office of Research Services | Human Research Ethics Board
Michael Williams Building Rm B202 PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria BC V8W 2Y2 Canada
T 250-472-4545 | F 250-721-8960 | uvic.ca/research | ethics@uvic.ca

Certificate of Approval - Annual Renewal

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:	Jillian Roberts	ETHICS PROTOCOL NUMBER:	20-0259
		Expedited review - delegated	
UVIC DEPARTMENT:	Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies EPLS	ORIGINAL APPROVAL DATE:	09-Jun-2020
		APPROVED ON:	02-Jul-2024
		APPROVAL EXPIRY DATE:	08-Jun-2025

PROJECT TITLE: "Living with COVID-19: Mental Health Experiences"

RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS:
 Shailoo Bedi - Co-Investigator, UVIC
 Celeste Duff - Research Assistant, UVIC
 Katie Stewart - Co-Investigator, UVIC
 Bianca Humbert - Research Assistant, UVIC Graduate Student
 Robyn MacMillan - Research Assistant, UVIC Undergraduate Student
 Grace Demerling - Co-Investigator, UVIC
 Arvind Tirkey - Co-Investigator, UVIC

DECLARED PROJECT FUNDING:
 Faculty of Education COVID-19 Emergency Fund, Faculty of Education IRCPG, UVIC

DOCUMENTS INCLUDED IN THIS APPROVAL:
 EDIT 3- Appendix 3 Consent form.pdf - 21-Jun-2020
 Screen Shot 2023-03-07 at 6.27.54 PM.png - 07-Mar-2023
 TCPS2_Core Certificate_Katie Stewart.pdf - 04-May-2023
 Appendix 2-Interview Guide.docx - 04-May-2023
 Appendix 3- Consent Form.docx - 04-May-2023

Conditions of approval

This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above term provided there is no change in the protocol.

Amendments
 To make changes to the approved research procedure in your study, please submit "Amendments" or "Annual renewal with amendments" form. You must receive research ethics approval before proceeding with your amended protocol.

Renewals
 Your ethics approval must be current for the period during which you are recruiting participants or collecting data. To renew your protocol, please submit a "Request for Renewal" form before the expiry date on your certificate. You will be sent an emailed reminder prompting you to renew your protocol about six weeks before your expiry date.

Project Closures
 When you have completed all data collection activities and will have no further contact with participants, please notify the Human Research Ethics Board by submitting a "Notice of Project Completion" form.

Certification

This certifies that the UVic Human Research Ethics Board has examined this research protocol and concluded that, in all respects, the proposed research meets the appropriate standards of ethics as outlined by the University of Victoria's policies for research involving human participants.

Dr. Sandra Gibbons
 Chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Dr. Cindy Holder
 Vice-chair, Human Research Ethics Board

Certificate Issued On: 02-Jul-2024

Appendix E. Participant Signed Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

A study through the Faculty of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

Thank you for indicating an interest in participating in an exploration of the effects of social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it impacts educator's lives and mental health. This study is being conducted by Jillian Roberts Ph.D., and Catriona Stewart, MA, University of Victoria.

Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

PO Box 1700 STN CSC, Victoria, British Columbia

V8W 2Y2 Canada

Tel: 250-721-7799, Fax: 250-721-6190

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigator:

Jillian Roberts PhD

Research Team:

Catriona Stewart, MA, Educational Psychology

Email: catrionastewart@uvic.ca

Purpose and Objectives of the Research

The objective of this research study is the exploration of educator's personal experiences, specifically how social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their lives and mental health. It is of focus to foster an increased understanding of students and education administrators' responses to this unique context for educator. By asking for educator's recommendations, education organizations can learn to better understand how this pandemic has affected educator's mental health and seek advice from educators as they proceed with policy formation and response to COVID-19.

This includes individuals who:

Inclusion:

- An educator at Willowcrest Academy
- Taught an inclusive classroom during the school years of 2019/2020, 2020/2021, and/or 2021/2022

This Research is Important Because

We are living in an unfamiliar world.

The importance of this study is that these narratives in times of a pandemic or novel to research, and educator's voices are currently unheard but valuable in the process to create safeguards for this population in the future. Educator's well-being are an ethical responsibility of education organizations and the community at large.

Asking for educator's recommendations, education organizations can learn to better understand how this pandemic has affected teacher's mental health and seek advice from educators as they proceed with policy formation in response to COVID-19.

Including these voices and experiences will provide direct feedback on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on educators' lives and mental wellness. Educator's recent experiences can then directly assist in finding adequate support for navigating mental health concerns at their education organization and community.

Inclusion for Participation

You are being invited to participate in this study because:

- You responded to the information concerning this study and freely volunteered to share your story for this study.
- You are an educator at Willowcrest Academy in Victoria, BC, Canada.
- You have been affected by the social isolation in effect due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

What is Involved in Participation

- Your participation will consist of one digital audio recorded face-to-face interview of approximately 60-120 minutes in duration. You will be asked to respond to two basic questions: **“Tell me about your experiences teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and how your education administrators supported you through this experience?”**
- The location of the interview will be at Willowcrest Academy in your convenient place of choice.
- You will also be contacted by email a few weeks after your interview to schedule a virtual feedback session to ensure that the data analysis accurately represents your experience. The time commitment for this feedback session will take between 60-120 minutes.

Please initial the appropriate box below to indicate permission for follow-up contact to review the findings:

Yes - I consent to receive follow up emails or text messages to review the findings associated with my data.

No - I do not consent to receive follow up emails or text messages to review the findings associated with my data.

Inconvenience

Involvement in this research will not involve any substantial inconvenience for you other than the time to participate in the interview, and the time to validate findings during a feedback session. The interview will take approximately 60-120 minutes and the review of findings is expected to take, as well as 60-120 minutes.

Benefits

- This study will provide participants with the opportunity to share their experiences, concerns and need for support regarding the effects of social isolation. This opportunity provided educators to make their voices heard and may lead to improvements in education organizations understanding of how this pandemic has affected teachers' mental health as they proceed with policy formation in response to COVID-19. This encounter may prove to be affirming and validating experience.
- Educator's voices can contribute to a better understanding of educator experiences, unique perspectives, concerns, and needs. This could provide and generate new and comprehensive information to better understand the causes and key characteristics of issues that pertain to concerns regarding the effects of social isolation on teachers.
- Your participation in this study will contribute to the body of knowledge on students' experiences regarding social isolation. There is limited available published research that has addressed the specific issue of teacher's experiences with social isolation during a pandemic. This study will generate new knowledge and hopes to fill a gap in the literature.

Risks

- Possible but unlikely, there is a chance that participation in this study may lead to emotional or psychological discomfort. If your experience with social isolation took place in the context of difficult circumstances, sharing your experience may result in bringing up difficult memories or emotions, and possibly including a sense of embarrassment or feeling demeaned. In the interview, I will ask you to respond to the two questions

specified above. It is important to consider what your emotional responses might be to determine your level of comfort while discussing these experiences.

- Before the interview process begins, the previously signed and sent back consent and confidentiality form including the duty to report and potential risk factors will be discussed. The participant will have the opportunity to ask questions before beginning the interview process regarding risk factors and the duty to report.
- Should you experience distress at any time during the interviews, you can take a break, end the interview and resume the interview another time, or withdraw from the study at any point. Any of these choices may be done without any risk of consequence or need for explanation.
- If you feel stressed in any way as a result of the study, Dr. Roberts who is a registered psychologist will follow up with you in person, not as part of the research study, but to ensure your well-being. A referral to counselling services will be made as well.
- If you express any wariness or discomfort regarding discussing your mental health for a research study, you will be encouraged to withdraw participation and a referral to counselling service will be offered as necessary instead.

Voluntary Participation

- Your participation in this research must be completely voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without consequence or explanation. If you feel coerced, manipulated, or influenced to participate in this study I ask that you not volunteer to participate or withdraw from the study.
- You have the right to refuse to discuss any aspect of your experience. If you decide to withdraw from the study during the interview, the audio recording of the interview will be erased and all notes will be shredded, unless you give consent to use the material already obtained, and as long as you notify us of your decision prior to the completion of the transcription and development of themes, at which point your identity cannot be verified anymore.
- Educators will be screened and that only those who are eligible will be contacted.

Researcher's Relationship with Participant

In most cases, the research team will not have any known relationship with individuals participating in this study. Your participation is fully independent of and will have no consequence or bearing on any pre-existing relationship.

Withdrawal of Participation

- All aspects of your participation in this study are strictly voluntary. You may withdraw at any time without any obligation, explanation, or consequence. You may also choose not to answer certain questions in the interview.
- In the event that you choose to withdraw from the study, you will be asked if you want the data you have contributed to be included in the final analysis. If you agree, your data will remain in the study. If not, the audio recording of your interview will be erased, and all data associated will be destroyed.
- Withdrawal from the study can occur at any time prior to the final write-up of the study.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

- The research team will be conducting the face-to-face interviews and therefore your identity and your individual responses will be known to the team; a pseudonym of your choice will be used throughout the interview and on all other records.
- Because of the initial distribution of the recruitment through your education institution, your intent, and interest in potentially participating won't be known by others; therefore, knowledge of your participation in this study should be protected.
- All records (e.g., audio-tapes, transcripts) will be labelled with participants' pseudonyms and kept in secure password-protected computers, and digital audio recorders, which will be kept in a secure locked cabinet. The research team will use their own password-protected computers (which will be on their person) and all identifiable data will be stored on the hardware of the password protected computers, to which only the research team will have access to. Any personally identifying information will also be removed from the transcripts and formal documents.
- When describing events and/or other people in the interview please refrain from using names; additionally, the researcher will make sure that names are not included in the transcriptions; and may alter details of people and events if there is a chance that others reading the research could recognize the participants and possibly the events and people being described.
- Participants can protect their identity and increase the protection of their personal information by not using their actual name in Zoom. This is important for our research that is sensitive and confidential.
- Participants can do the above by: i) using only a nickname or a substitute name; ii) they can turn off their camera
- All information collected will be securely stored when not in use.
- Word file transcripts without identifiers will be kept for 5 years and will be destroyed upon completion of the study.
- Zoom servers are located outside of Canada, and Zoom stores users' names and usage data outside of Canada. No other information is stored outside of Canada, and recordings of Zoom meetings are not stored on Zoom servers.

Exceptions to Confidentiality

- Confidentiality is limited in situations when there is sufficient reason to believe that a child or vulnerable adult is being abused or neglected. Should anyone reveal information to suggest this is the case, it is a legal obligation to file a report. In any such instance, the research team will follow the legislated duty to report guidelines for the province in which the respective participant is located.
- Dr. Roberts, who is a registered psychologist, will follow up in person--not as part of the research study, but to ensure participants well-being. A referral to counselling services will be made as well.

Dissemination of Findings

- The findings and final report will be presented in publications and academic conferences.
- The findings may be presented in a published book chapter.
- The final report will be made available to participants, upon request.

Questions or Concerns

- Contact the research team under: catrionastewart@uvic.ca
- Contact the UVIC Human Research Ethics Office - 250 472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca.

Withdraw from Participation

In the event that you choose to withdraw from the research, please indicate whether you consent to have your data remain in the study. (Indicate with your initials in the appropriate box below.) If you decide to withdraw, please contact the research team under catrionastewart@uvic.ca immediately. It may not be possible to remove your data if the analysis has progressed to a later phase and if the final draft of the thesis is almost completed. Face-to-face interview sessions are planned for April/ May/ June 2023, while the analysis will begin in June 2023.

Yes - I consent to keep my data in the study in the event that I withdraw from the research.

No - I do not consent to keep my data in the study in the event that I withdraw from the research.

Consent

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study and that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researchers, and that you freely agree to participate in this research project.

Signature _____ Name _____ Date _____

Please sign the document and e-mail or scan it back to catrionastewart@uvic.ca

Thank you so much!

Resources

Crisis line at 1-888-494-3888

<http://www.vicrisis.ca/crisis-lines/>

Here to talk: <https://here2talk.ca>

The Crisis Centre at 1-800-784-2433

<https://crisiscentre.bc.ca>

Appendix F. Verbal Informed Consent Process in Participant Interviews

My name is Catriona Stewart, but you may call me Katie, and I am a first year master's student in the Educational Psychology and Leadership program at UVic specializing in Special Education. I have a strong passion for inclusive education, and the wellbeing of educators in the field, which is why I am conducting my research for my master's thesis under the supervision of Dr. Jillian Roberts in this area.

This project is in conjunction with a larger project conducted by Dr. Jillian Roberts titled, "Living with COVID-19: Mental Health Experiences". The project I am conducting will be titled "Educator Wellness Experiences of Inclusive Educators During the COVID-19 Pandemic". This interview along with others will be used to explore the social isolation, loneliness, and overall wellbeing of inclusive educators during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the reports on administrators and governments during this time. Participating in this research will allow for your voice and experience to be heard by sharing your experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This interview will be recorded, by both Zoom and a secured device. Only the audio of both recordings will be used for analysis as there will be no video recording of this interview. The Zoom recording will be saved on the cloud server on Zoom, while the secured device recording will be kept in a locked file on the researcher's personal device in a cloud-based platform. Do I have your permission to start the recording on both devices?

Only the recorded audio of this interview will be used and transcribed into words. Themes from the interviews will be analyzed and identified for the common essence of the experiences among interview participants. Following this analysis, I will follow up with you to get your feedback on the analysis to ensure that it is accurate and fair to your experiences that you discuss with me today. Do I have your consent to contact you via email after this conversation we have today for the purposes of a follow up?

Your identity will always be kept confidential, and your anonymity will be maintained in the written research report as well as in all files, recordings, and documents related to this research. I would also like to state that participation in this interview and research overall is completely voluntary. This means that if you feel uncomfortable and wish to discontinue participating in this interview or at any point during the study following the interview, that is completely your choice, and you have the right to discontinue the interview and/or participation in the research all together at any time. In this event, all recordings and documentation of your participation will be demolished. You also have the right to skip over or not answer any question during the interview that makes you feel uncomfortable or that you do not wish to answer.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the ethics committee and the University of Victoria has taken any symptoms or positive results of COVID-19 seriously. If you have or may have encounter an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 to please let the researcher know as soon as possible. In this event, your contact information will be stored in a separate file from research data if a follow up is needed. This also applies if I, the researcher, have or may have also

encounter an individual who has tested positive for COVID-19 in the coming days and weeks following this interview.

Do you have any questions for me concerning your participation in today's interview?

Appendix G. Verbal Follow-Up Care and Debriefing

I would like to thank you so much again for your participation in this study. I really appreciate the time you gave me to speak about your experiences being an educator in an inclusive classroom during the Covid-19 pandemic. As I spoke about in the interview, your interview number is __ if you ever wish to refer to yourself without personal information to any member of the research team.

As mentioned, you will be receiving a follow-up email to set up a Zoom meeting for a feedback session on the first interview. This will take anywhere between 1-2 hours.

If you have any questions, comments, or concerns regarding this study or your participation please do not hesitate to reach out. Thank you so much again for your time and participation. It was a pleasure meeting with you and hearing about your experiences!

Appendix H. Reflexive Journal Entry Samples

Tuesday January 17, 2023

I have just had my first meeting with my supervisor after switching into the MA of my field in which I will now be doing a thesis instead of a project. I am so excited. She asked me to come up with a few ideas for what I would like to do my research on, and one of the most pressing things that I keep circling back to is research into educators. I don't know what I would choose exactly, but I feel that there are certain gaps in the research of educators, and I would like to be one of the researchers to help fill that gap.

Wednesday April 12, 2023

I haven't received too many participants so far, which is making me anxious. After a discussion with my supervisor, we'll be expanding the pool from teachers to all educators, as I have received many emails from potential participants who are ECE's. Expanding the participant pool like this will help me get a grasp of different roles in education during the pandemic. As the participants are from a small, religious, independent school I also have some potential participants who are specialized in specific subjects, or only teach certain classes on certain days of the week- I'm very intrigued to learn about their experiences during the pandemic and see how much as possibly changed for them. I also hope expanding this criterion will allow more voices to be heard and a different perspective of education to be highlighted.

I have also received an email today from educators who are eager to participate, but they no longer work at the school. As it's one of my criteria I have to thank them for their interest but sadly I can't have them be a part of my study. I've never done research before, and I'm assuming most if not all studies have had to turn potential participants away. It seems so simple when you read about it in someone else's work, but I honestly feel bad, and would love for them to be a part of my study, but sadly they can't. Turning participants away also makes the finish line of getting my minimum of six participants so much further away. It feels like every participant I have to say "thank you, but I'm sorry you can't be a part of this" feels like a step backwards in completing my participant requirements. I know I will get there, I'm just anxious to get going.

Tuesday May 23, 2023

I have now completed four interviews and on top of other commonalities between several interviewees, there is one statement that they all share: they felt like they were left to their own devices, while not receiving any support other than from their coworkers, but they were held to the same expectations as before the pandemic. I have noticed many participants have stated that during socially distant learning, there were numerous rules and regulations that were impossible to do, and they were expected to implement them, but they weren't told how to or received any guidance or support. Many have expressed thoughts of doubting their professions simply due to the lack of guidance and support yet high expectations during this time.

Sunday June 11, 2023

After finishing my sixth interview just the other day, I have been reading through transcripts and reflecting on the experiences so far. I am frustrated to say the least. It breaks my heart to know that not only the educators that I am speaking with, but I can only assume around the world felt immense pressures, distress, expectations, and frustration during this time and

most felt like they were left to their own devices. It's difficult to hear the experiences of the participants and not feel upset, or disheartened by what they have experiences thus far. Using the reflexive journal has been helpful to understand and express my position and biases in terms of the treatment of educators during COVID-19 and education administrators and governing bodies. I can only hope this pandemic was a learning curve to assist educators and provide them with the tools necessary to succeed while amplifying their voices.

Friday September 22, 2023

It has been a few months since my sixth interview, and I have completed several steps of the data analysis. I have listened to each individual tape twice, while reading the transcripts to ensure they match up. I have also re-read over the transcripts again separately to make sure everything is captured. I've begun to identify significant statements in each of the interviews that correlate with a) Educators' wellbeing during the pandemic, b) Educators' perceptions of support and resources during the pandemic, and c) Educators' resilience during this time. I do believe these concepts to be strongly interlaced with one another. When information, guidelines, and communications are limited and educators are unable to appropriately access resources and support as well as mental health and other services offered by either their administrators or governing bodies, I believe their overall wellbeing is jeopardized. Further, I believe that if educators are having trouble with their overall wellbeing it will cause a significant decline in their overall resilience. I also believe that if educators are struggling with their overall wellbeing and their resilience, they are more likely to rely on services offered by administrators and governing bodies. Therefore, I believe that these three factors are reciprocal and correlated with one another which is why they should be investigated alongside one another.

Using Colaizzi's method of descriptive analysis has been both difficult to me for certain interviews, while others are more straight forward. In this method as one must look at each individual interview as a separate entity unrelated to any of the previous research as well as keeping each participants experience separate from one another until the themes can be looked at collectively has been difficult for those interviews that share a lot of commonalities between them. However, there are some interviews in which the results are almost opposite to the others which has been one of the most interesting aspects to this analysis. These opposing voices are significant to the research as they hold a special role not only in their school, in their community, but they also hold shared values with what can only be assumed as many other educators across our world during this pandemic. As I have recorded in this journal many participants had experiences that overlap with one another, and I have found many commonalities between them. It is important to keep all experiences separate for now to not skew the meaning of a participants described experience to fit with a narrative of and others.

Monday February 26, 2024

As I continue with my analysis using Colaizzi's method of descriptive analysis, I have met with all participants again for the review and feedback sessions and I'm reviewing each thematic cluster and each pattern of meaning to find commonalities and to begin the writing process of these findings. This process is one that I feel immense gratitude for. I feel honored to have been let into the participants lives, hear about their experiences, and I'm now contributing to research in the field highlighting the need of listening to educators' voices, especially during times of trauma.

Appendix I. Phenomenological Thematic Analysis Procedure

