

## A descriptive phenomenological study: COVID-19 and the misnomers about technology in K-12 education

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**Abstract.** This descriptive phenomenological study focuses on understanding the lived experiences of educators, students, and parents through unprecedented human lockdowns and abrupt switches in learning platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The panel discussion will first introduce why we chose phenomenology as our study and briefly overview the topic's impact. Then, a presentation of the study design and examples from the participants' lived experiences. Next, we will discuss the early stages of our data analysis identifying the sense of the whole of the data, the psychological shifts in the data, some of the meaning units, and the essence of the participants' experience. Finally, the panel will open the floor for discussion, advice, and questions.

The pandemic shutting down the entire U.S. public school system and remote student learning is unprecedented. Though students experienced online learning, the COVID-19 pandemic jump-started a new level of online knowledge in public education. What was seemingly a sidelined tool in education became the only form of teacher/student instruction and interaction. As educators, students, and parents attempted to adapt to unprecedented times; school systems were left to their own devices to salvage students' education at home online without training, technology, or lesson plans.

As the phenomena continue and the world remains in flux, so do the United States school directives about COVID-19. This study focuses on the inception of COVID-19 through the present day. The researchers of this study identified four distinct periods. To understand the essence of the phenomena, participants relate their lived experiences through the design of this study: individual pre-interview questions and structured interviews, focus groups, reflections, and discussion questions. Some key discussion points were the need for adequate technology for online learning, the flip-flop between in-person and online learning, and the digital divide between affluent and low-income students. The lack of proper technology and learning disruptions stunted many students' academic progress. According to the Pew Research Foundation, 43% of households in the earning bracket of \$30,000 or less do not have broadband internet (Vogels, 2021). Moreover, in a study about virtual learning and beyond, Pitts, Pillow, Dusseault, and Lake (2022) learned that in the 2021-2022 school year, students who remained remote tended to lose more academic ground. However, despite the learning loss, the United States school districts increased their remote learning from 41 to 94.

As education at all levels faces new challenges, the voices of those individuals working day to day with students must tell their stories to enact change to improve academic content, social-emotional learning, and equity. This phenomenological approach seeks to understand the essence of the participants' lived experience during the COVID-19 pandemic and the phenomenon of online education on teacher preparedness and students' academic and emotional success across races and socio-economic levels.



While teachers, administrators, and parents muddled through another school year, research reflects that students fell an average of five months behind in mathematics and four months back in reading compared to previous years (Dorn, 2022).

This presentation will provide discussants with firsthand accounts of the presenters' experience (a principal of a K-8, and an assistant college professor and former literacy coach of grades 3-5) and their participants of teachers, parents, and students on the academic, social, and emotional impact of the sudden change in learning platform from in-person to online K-8 schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown in the last quarter of 2020 school year through the 2022 school year, and then the return to "normality" in the 2022-2023 school year.

**Keywords:** phenomenological, pandemic, education, technology, equity

**Necessary resources:** Stationary computer or laptop with USB port (if available), projector, and whiteboard with markers.

#### Organization of the Panel Discussion

##### 1- Brief context:

The context of the study looks at technology and education through the lens of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced students to stay home and switch to online learning. This study identified the essence of teachers', students', and parents' lived experiences in an urban public school on the central west coast of Florida. The student body is 40% White, 40% Black and 20% Hispanic, Asian, and of two or more ethnicities. Approximately 40% of the student body qualifies for free and reduced lunch.

##### 2- Objectives:

This phenomenological study aims to understand the meaning and essence of the lived experience of educators, parents, and students from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, and reflection. The researchers will read and reread the data for general themes and then triangulate the data between the participants to identify commonalities among the participants' experiences. Phenomenology allows the researcher to get to the essence of the research by understanding the participants' psychological or meaning shifts identified in the study. This research design is a powerful tool for acquiring firsthand raw accounts of how COVID-19 and transitioning to online learning impacted interested parties in profound ways: socially, emotionally, professionally, and academically.

##### 3- Dynamics / Strategy:

- a. Presentation. The presentation will be a group activity. Both presenters will partner in discussions and work off one another as they present the following panel discussion.
- b. Theoretical Exposition of the theme.

Moderator: Christiana C. Succar

Content and Time of Intervention:

##### **Introduction (10 minutes):**

- a synopsis of the study
- introduction of panelists, research interests, and affiliation to the study

##### **Purpose of the study (10 minutes):**



- COVID-19 and U.S. Schools, and Florida Schools
- technology in education
- relevance of research
- contribution to the overall research

**Methodology (10 minutes):**

- descriptive phenomenology
- participants
- human impact

**Design of the Study (10 minutes):**

- data collection
- questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and reflection

**Analysis (15 minutes):**

- steps
- surprises
- making meaning of the text

**Findings (15 minutes):**

- what we learned
- what we still want to know

**Open Panel for discussion (15 minutes):**

- comments
- pointed discussions on the analysis and findings
- questions/suggestions

**Wrap up (5 minutes)**

c. Application to other contexts. The phenomenon of a pandemic and its impact on society as individuals know it spans human experiences and interactions. This study focuses on technology in education, but the pandemic phenomenon pushed technology to the forefront of many contexts outside of education. As a result, the audience will find many connections to other contexts based on the participants' experiences in this study.

d. Discussion. Our discussion will consist of audience comments, fruitful feedback on analysis and findings, and questions and suggestions of where this theme may continue to develop in our research and other contexts within the qualitative research community.

4- Application of the proposal in reality / practical examples:

The application of the proposal, in reality, involved various learning curves. The initial questionnaire provided a base of information to move forward with the study, but drawing the essence of the phenomena from the participants proved difficult. The researchers needed to have the right setting and methods to avoid bias. For example, situating the in-person meetings outside of school and posing questions objectively. Also, randomly assigning differentiated focused groups and creating equal participation among all participants.

5- Expected results:

The expected results of this study are to gain the essence of COVID-19 and online learning academically, socially, and emotionally. The researchers hope to understand individuals' experiences during the pandemic better and use this information to inform others about equity and justice in public education.



Also, the results will inform the research in online learning and provide the options for new questions about the participants' experiences on the front line of K-12 public education.

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### Biographical note:

Carrie A. Cormier is the Head of School at a public K-8 International Baccalaureate School in St. Petersburg, Florida. Mrs. Cormier started her career in education in 2002 and has served in public education administration for 17 years. Her administrative career focuses on turning around underperforming urban schools with high minority enrollment. Her research interests are equitable pedagogical and urban minority student achievement.

Christiana C. Succar, Ph.D., is Visiting Assistant Professor of Education and Independent Scholar. Before obtaining her doctorate, she was a K-12 public educator and adjunct professor of higher education for 22 years. Christiana's research interests are teacher beliefs and practices about education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and equity education. She has presented at numerous international conferences and has published a book chapter and articles on teachers' beliefs and practices about education and culturally relevant pedagogy.

