

THE PURSUIT OF BALANCE AND RESILIENCE DURING COVID-19: VOICES OF TEACHERS IN SWITZERLAND AND TURKEY

The effect of COVID-19 was first felt in Europe in January 2020. At the time, few of us were aware that the pandemic would lead to a series of worldwide lockdowns and continue for more than a year, leaving individuals feeling isolated and severely impacting teaching and learning. In a short period of time, the majority of the world's teachers radically changed how they taught, affecting them both professionally and personally. Challenges with teaching and learning were significant, and personal balance was greatly disturbed for many teachers. At the same time, the opportunity to grow in personal resilience was great.

This study is a narrative inquiry into the lives of three teachers during the first 15 months of COVID-19, drawing from a focus on “the ongoing temporality of experience” as a teacher and an administrator in their current school settings (Clandinin and Huber, 2010, p. 437). The study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are some of the challenges teachers face and the affordances they have in this period of transition to virtual teaching? How are they dealing with the challenges?
2. How has the teachers' identity been affected by working in a school during COVID-19 while searching for balance and developing resilience?

The teachers share the ways they balanced their teaching and administrative roles with their private lives, as they came to terms with new teaching models. At the beginning of the pandemic, two of the teachers were from a boarding school in the Swiss Alps and one from a day school in Istanbul, Turkey. These three narrative stories during the ensuing 15 months offer us as educators the opportunity to reflect on how teachers met the challenge of sudden change, a new academic-private life balance, and how crisis can lead to developing resilience. The chapter begins by assessing the core literature on how teachers' lives have been affected by COVID-19 and the struggle to balance life and work during the pandemic. We then interpret the teachers' stories through the prism of “balance and resilience” in these challenging times.

Context

On March 13, 2020, the Swiss boarding school announced that all of its nearly 300 students would be going home in the span of three or four days, due to the pandemic. The academic leadership immediately began an intense week of strategizing with subject department heads

and other school leaders. By the end of the week provisional plans were in place and, fortunately, the school's previously scheduled two-week spring break provided additional time for rest and preparation prior to starting instruction online, which ultimately lasted for all students through May and then, during the following school year, for those students who couldn't return, were in quarantine, or who contracted or were exposed to the virus over the course of the year.

Around the same time, teachers and students were sent home from their school in Istanbul. Online teaching commenced in March 2020 and lasted until the end of the school year in June 2020. Teachers in the Turkish school were asked to pivot even more quickly than at the Swiss school, continuing classes with online instruction almost immediately after closing the school.

Narrative Inquiry

Following the pioneers of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000), this study uses the method as a way of understanding and inquiring into the experience of three teachers through "*collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus*" (p. 20). Narrative inquiry is the study of experience as story, which entails a view of the phenomenon as methodology. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as the phenomenon for study (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 375). Lyons (2007) underlines the importance of narrative beyond telling a story and notes that "*narrative stories capture the situated complexities of teachers' work and classroom practices*" (p. 614). The narrative nature of embodied knowledge sits at the heart of both teaching and teacher education (Craig, 2020, p. 97). From this perspective, a teacher-scholar narrative becomes a means for reflection on professional development as a quest for identity transformation. Three common places of narrative inquiry, "*temporality, sociality, and place*", serve as a conceptual framework for this study. As Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) note, "*these lived and told stories and the talk about the stories are one of the ways that we fill our world with meaning and enlist one another's assistance in building lives and communities*" (p. 35). In this study, the struggle with work-life balance and the sheer necessity of being resilient while adapting to new paradigms in teaching and learning are told through personal stories of shock, scrambling, strategizing, and strength as teachers came to terms with school in the times of COVID-19.

Our questions were open-ended to encourage teachers to tell their stories freely. The following questions were asked during the interviews:

- What were your initial experiences in the first weeks of the COVID-19 outbreak? What sorts of constraints and difficulties did you encounter?
- How did you maintain a balance between your professional and private life during the COVID-19 teaching process?
- To what extent has your identity as a teacher and a scholar been affected in the COVID-19 teaching process? Do you think this process enabled you to develop “resilience”?
- What are your recommendations for teachers wanting to develop resilience and sustain “thoughtful teaching and mentoring” in traumatic times?

Participants

Participants in the study were three teachers from two schools, two in Switzerland and one in Turkey during the initial interviews. One Swiss based teacher moved to a new school job in the USA before the follow-up interview, eleven months later, and the Turkish teacher moved to a school in Monaco. The Swiss school is a well known international boarding school catering to students from approximately 40 different cultures and nationalities. The Turkish school is a well known day school in Istanbul. While the pursuit of balance and growing resilience are themes that cut across all their stories, participants experienced both balance and resilience in personal ways, relative to themselves and their contexts. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure confidentiality.

Both of us know all three research participants and have worked with them in different capacities, notably in an educational research program based in one of their schools. The authors made arrangements for keynote speeches in Istanbul and Gaziantep for one of the participants, Joe, with the intention of creating an international community of practice between teachers, practitioners and scholars. However, the pandemic precluded the opportunity to travel and Joe never made it to Turkey. The authors therefore see themselves and their participants as co-composing each aspect of the inquiry (Clandinin & Huber, 2010).

Paul and Özge’s experience shows how the use of narrative inquiry is a reflective learning process. The stories of the teachers were collected through online, face-to-face interviews, recording via Google Meet. Transcripts were made of the recordings. Meeting notes and debriefing the interviews were helpful in the analysis process. In the end, the excerpts of the narrative transcriptions below tell the teachers’ stories, using an analytic frame proposed by Chase (2005), which follows “*an identity approach with a focus on how people construct*

themselves within institutional, cultural, and discursive contexts” (p. 562). Teachers’ narrative stories highlight their new and until now unknown journey of teaching. Teachers’ roles are redefined and the search for balance becomes a new phenomenon. This new teaching experience leads them to question their identity as teachers and family members.

In the narrative excerpts below, the authors share views, emotions, and experiences during the first 14 months of the pandemic in two diverse and distant places in Europe. In order to maintain the illusion of “spontaneous speech”, all accounts are told in the first person (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009).

The following outlines the positions of the participants at the time of the study:

- “Zeynep” worked as an art teacher at an international high school in Istanbul until June 2020. In August 2020 she became an IB leader at an international school in Monaco, where she lives with her boyfriend, also a teacher.
- “Joe” was an International Baccalaureate (IB) teacher who had worked in the Swiss school for 14 years, up until June 2020. In Summer 2020 he became Deputy Head of School of an international school in New York. He is married with no children.
- “Shawn” is the department head of English as a Second Language (ESL) and an ESL teacher at the Swiss school, where he has worked for 17 years. He directs much of the school’s professional development program. He is still employed at the school, where he lives with his wife, also a teacher, and two children.

Data Collection

The authors began the interview process by sending teachers a letter soliciting their voluntary participation, informing them of participation requirements and safeguards, and asking that they certify their informed consent. All three participants were originally interviewed online in late May or early June, 2020. During the interviews, the researchers used reflective listening to encourage participants to speak and were careful not to lead the participants. After each interview, the contact summary form was used to highlight the main themes that emerged during the conversations. Participants were sent the initial transcripts before the second interviews, which occurred in late April and early May, 2021. All interviews were recorded.

Data Analysis

Narrative inquiry follows a recursive, reflexive process of moving from field (with starting points in telling or living of stories) to field texts (data), and to interim and final research texts (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). In the section with the three narratives, by pulling from the transcripts the most specific comments from each teacher about balance and resilience, we share their stories in their words, and through the addition of their comments about the pivot from pre-pandemic to during-pandemic teaching, we hopefully give their narratives the context necessary for readers to live these experiences vicariously, even as many readers will be reflecting on their own experience, exploring “story lines that interweave and interconnect” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 131) between the research participants and you, the reader.

In the discussion section, we emphasize parallels in the three teachers’ experiences, as expressed by their stories of balance and resilience, in order to capture what may be a more generally shared experience of teaching and learning during these difficult times.

Pursuit of Balance and Resilience in Social Isolation: Voices of Teachers

The teachers’ stories revealed that they were all acutely aware of the need for balance and that they felt a shift in their resilience, particularly after dealing with the pandemic for more than a year. The teachers’ stories follow.

Zeynep’s Story

Zeynep is an arts teacher at an international school in France. She was working at an international school in Istanbul when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out. Her partner is also a teacher who was working at a different school. Her experiences when she first encountered online teaching at schools in Istanbul and Monaco reflect the challenge of balancing elements in two different parts of Europe. Her story shows us ways in which her survival as a good teacher and leader in the COVID-19 process in Istanbul enabled her to become a teacher in a new setting while coping with the demands that the new position placed on her professional and private life.

Balancing Professional Life and Private Life

Zeynep said teachers weren’t prepared when they were asked to start online instruction on March 16, 2020. At first, they didn’t appreciate the enormity of the situation, but quickly became aware of it as they began making preparations, first for two to three weeks, then for four weeks, and then for “months, months, and months”:

“We only took our laptops but the rest of the stuff was in the school. And the kids, again, they thought they were going to go back in two week’s time ... they left their sketchbooks because in school we’re providing materials ... so the kids didn’t have enough material at home to carry on our subject. It was rather stressful and we didn’t know whether we’d be able to run online sessions or whether we were just going to prepare lesson flows for the students...”

Zeynep found talking to students online quite hard as it was a new experience for her to communicate through a “screen”. This was the initial stressful and difficult part of teaching during the pandemic for her. She also had difficulty in working with six other teachers as they all had different approaches to the online process and the new teaching experience. From her perspective, communication became strained and stressful since online teaching was also different and hard for her students.

When asked about the ways she maintained a balance between her professional and private life during the pandemic, Zeynep said: *“I lost the balance [at first]”*. It was hard because her partner was also teaching online and often their computers would crash. Zeynep notes that being in the physical school environment is easier when problems occur since one can contact supervisors and colleagues as well as the principal more easily. Below, Zeynep expresses her feelings:

“You’re on your own in your home. Just waiting [for]everybody else to be available for you. ... I spent so much time on the computer. Obviously my physical health started deteriorating. My eyes, my head ached because it’s so many hours of being in a computer environment, and checking up with the other teachers, you know, how they are doing? It’s not just that I am teaching and also the other teachers are teaching. Checking out whether they are having any difficulties by parents or by students, or by submitting any work, or the students’ attendance, or the students behavior ... because in the lesson, you just talk to students. If they misbehave, you just deal with it there [in the classroom]. But when they are on the screen, and you think that they are there, but they’re actually not there! [smiling] They usually turn their cameras off ... you know, something I’ve learned is that taking attendance towards the end of the lesson rather than at the beginning of the lesson, or calling out their names, ‘hey, are you there? Can I have an answer? Can you please turn your camera on?’ Nobody answers. They’re not there basically...”

Zeynep thought that it was hard for her to be in front of the computer at the same time as her partner. She also underlined the changes to her cat's life, saying that she couldn't let her cat walk around during meetings. *"She's got to be out, out, out. Yeah it was hard. Now we got used to itn..."* She and her partner also shared household duties between them.

Struggle with Online Teaching

Zeynep noted that as a part of school policy they were to communicate with the parents if any of the students were not regularly attending. Even though this was a private school and parents were paying a lot of money for their child's education, they were sometimes unable to convince their children to attend.

"Then we just thought, 'Hey listen, your child is not coming. And then some of them [the parents] are like yeah, you know what, they aren't coming ... ' They then started to stay up very late and they didn't go to bed early. And even though it's not allowed, they started socializing with their friends - some of them physically, staying in someone else's house, and some of them online. Once I turn off my lesson, you know, the meeting link, they join there again and they just communicate ..."

In the meantime, the Turkish Ministry of Education started an online educational program in which asynchronous online teaching was provided for public schools. Private schools also immediately initiated online education. Zeynep's school had an advantage as it had previously prepared and invested in online education. Teachers were also more prepared compared to public school teachers as they had been involved in IB-oriented training sessions. The Turkish Minister of Education announced that students would not be graded for the 2020 Spring semester. Parents were assured that attendance would not be compulsory since some students had internet connection problems. In such a setting, students motivation was quite different, as revealed by Zeynep below:

" ... Many of my students said, yeah Miss, you aren't going to grade us... So of course they didn't do much work, of course they didn't join [the class], because even though we pretend that we got the attendance, the government said it wasn't going to be registered on their report [cards]. Why would I wake up Friday 9 am to join an art lesson?..."

Resilience, Courage and Identity Transformation

When the pandemic reached Turkey, Zeynep began online communication with colleagues and team members as a leader. However, she had difficulty because some of her colleagues

became impatient and irritable. Her adaptable character helped her to overcome the initial constraints.

“As a HOD [head of department) it’s my job to put everything together and wrap things up and leave being in a good relationship. I can confess that. So it did affect me as a whole because I am an emotional person, I am very much a social person and I like communicating face-to-face and I love teaching people and I love being around people, laughing. It’s hard. This is the professional side that has been affected ...”

“As a department we have Turkish speaking teachers and English speaking teachers. One of the big things, one of the causes of our misunderstanding and impatience started from there. I’m bilingual and I’m trying to organize and make sure everything is going well but...half of them speak English, but half of them can’t speak English, so for me everything was double.. For example, when COVID started, everybody started communicating with each other, including me, including my HOD friends, including our principals; everyone wants to communicate as soon as possible. Because at work, we are all face-to-face, I’m just going to see you and grab you and sort things quickly...”

Since everything had to be done on screen, she found communication busy but lacking: *“let’s call him let’s call him let’s text him”*, and *“texting Turkish, texting English, texting Turkish, texting English”*, left her exhausted.

The hardest time for Zeynep was in March. As an IB examiner, she was part of the IV standardization committee, marking portfolios, writing reports to IB, and having meetings with senior examiners around the world. At the same time, she had her school duties and found she had no time to spend with her partner or friends. Zeynep says that she learned her lesson the hard way. She has learnt to be more engaged in life, to be more flexible, and that she needs to leave her comfort zone. She underlines the importance of flexibility during the COVID-19 pandemic and other difficult times.

“There is not one way to do our job. As a teacher we have millions of ways, because we have millions of kinds of children types, and learning types, and needing types ... My resilience is more like: You need to be more patient now, you need to be more flexible now, and open to more alternative tools and platforms, you know, to communicate with kids either academically or emotionally... One of my lessons was

the lesson on my birthday and it was fantastic! My kids - on that day we didn't do our lesson - for 40 minutes they stayed and they celebrated my birthday..."

"And also I listen to them. They complain about this or that lesson, they complain about the workload, and you just calm them down ... 'OK guys, I know how you feel, but we're going to get through this together, don't worry... Do what you can'. I think this was kind of my resilience, how I equip myself and how I try to equip myself... I thought I was a good teacher. But clearly, COVID was a big slap in my face..."

Zeynep recommended teachers not to be too harsh on themselves and allow themselves to make mistakes. She said she learnt this painfully. Some of the conversations she had were harsh and she became aware of the need to be patient and to adapt herself to doing things in other ways. She also noted the value of giving yourself time, saying that teachers should turn off their computers,

"... I was like 'why didn't they reply back to me!'... My partner said enough of this now. I am in the same position as you! He has his own problems. I mean I'm not criticizing, but he was a teacher and I was the head of the department... I was dealing with principals, teachers and he was just doing his lessons with his colleagues and with his students. Not that I am [superior] to him, but I wasn't listening to him because I was always too busy...always manic!... [Teachers should be careful,] especially if they have teacher partners... It has to be like 'Calm down ... this is it. Take a break!'"

Zeynep noted that visiting online classes was part of the school requirements. She also noted that it was not like going into the classes and checking teachers.

"... you know everyone was using the internet. Because of the pressure [on bandwidth], some of the teachers [lost the connection] and ... we kind of stepped into the process, when students were in the online classes. So we were the ones taking over ... but it was purely supporting teachers, especially with the younger groups; they were the ones misbehaving, acting silly or typing things on the chat column.

"[The teachers] thought that we were observing their lessons. That had nothing to do with it. It was purely supporting teachers... But they took it the wrong way... It was one of the things that I faced as well. One of my teachers took this as an offense and he was like 'why the hell are you coming to my lesson?'"

"I mean, I'm vulnerable there, I am in front of the computer, I'm in front of the screen just like the students and just like any other teacher, but if any of the admin members

comes along, they felt and I felt like.... I didn't feel like that because the admins made it clear and said that any of the admin members can come and join your lesson purely to support you... We never knew how students are going to behave on an online platform. And that was all! But that was another story..."

Zeynep illustrated her stories in accordance with the term resilience with the belief that she cultivated her skills to communicate in order to become a better teacher. She seemed to feel more confident with time. *"Luckily, I'm making things up for everybody... We missed so much good stuff as well, unfortunately. We are trying to compensate for it on a different platform which we learn again, in a new way. 'Do and celebrate things!'"*

Zeynep was hopeful for the future and tried to hand over her duty in Istanbul as responsibly as possible before leaving her position there. She was also excited to be working in a new culture. Life has taught her that no matter how hard it gets, there are doors that are waiting for you to open. When COVID-19 broke out, teachers were sitting at home and dealing with online teaching when a two-week lockdown began. All of a sudden Zeynep's career moved onto a new path. A headhunter called and offered her a job. Zeynep said she had begun her teaching career in England and then returned to Turkey to teach at a school, but she had always wanted to move into an international environment to expand her skills, so she moved to Monaco. Looking back to April 2021, Zeynep felt courageous and able to adapt herself to any kind of unexpected situation since she had developed her capacity to be resilient over the previous year. Her reflections on her year-long struggle are shared in the discussion section in comparison with Joe and Shawn experiences.

Joe's story

"It was absolutely overwhelming," reflected Joe.

Joe is a 20-year-plus veteran teacher with almost an equal number of years experience as a leader in residential life. When COVID broke out in Europe, he was working at a Swiss boarding school as a teacher in the IB program. His spouse was also an employee of the school at that time, in charge of residential life, and the two of them lived on campus in an apartment in one of the residential halls for boys. From the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak through Joe's second interview in May 2021, he was also working on an online MED program.

At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, Joe and his wife relocated to the United States where Joe is currently the dean of residential life at a large high school. His wife followed him there after his first several months of starting his new job.

“There was so much uncertainty and so much being thrown at us. It was like flak you know ... Should it be synchronous? Should it be asynchronous? What platform should we use? And then every teacher was doing his or her best to support everyone else and was throwing out their favorite tech gadget ...”

In May 2020, Joe’s mother, who had been struggling with illness for some time, passed away.

“I also had the emotional uncertainty of my mother's impending death, so I was in that fairly emotional fraught state ... Anyone who lost anyone during this time, you know, we missed greatly the ability to come together and to mourn together.”

Balancing Professional Life and Private Life

Obviously, balancing professional and private life was going to be difficult for Joe.

“There’s no balance ... I don’t know if I’m starting to find balance again but I think the first six to eight weeks there was no balance ... You know, in our apartment, in those first few weeks, we were really isolated because we had a kid who was in our dorm who was positive. So we ... spent 14 days where we didn’t leave our apartment. That was the first 14 days, and then, after that we could go out a little bit more, and take walks, and those things, and that was okay, but there was no balance.”

Joe goes on to describe what might be interpreted as risking burnout, highlighting how his usual patterns changed due to his racing thoughts.

“I try to read, I watched about an hour of television a week before and I read every day. I can’t read. My mind is too busy with everything. I can’t get my mind to turn off long enough to focus on reading ... so instead I find myself watching mindless television ...”

Interestingly, when Joe moved from Switzerland to the United States after finishing the first three months of online teaching, he reentered a similar period of feeling that he had no balance. While he recognizes that any new job can take extra attention and effort at the

beginning, COVID-19 certainly was a factor, as well as moving to his new job without his wife.

“I came into a new job with a huge task on hand and it took me months to find balance here ... I came and they said “Hi, by the way, we don’t have a COVID plan for residential life, you need to write it. And I started writing it from Day 1, while at the same time doing all these other things I had to do. It took months to find balance and I think I’m just finding it now.”

“The first four months my wife wasn’t here, so I was alone and she hadn’t come. So you know, what else are you going to do? I went home at night and I worked because there was really nothing else to do ... So when she came there was someone that I wanted to spend time with but also someone I needed to spend time with to keep a healthy relationship. So I stopped working [so much] and we spent time together. So those things helped. I don’t know if it was me finding [balance] or my wife demanding it. It is what it is.”

Reflecting on the past year, Joe is still keenly aware of what a difficult time it has been, balancing the changes that came with COVID-19, his relationship with his wife, his graduate studies - which he hardly mentioned during our interviews - the passing of his mother, and the sudden switch to online teaching.

Struggle with Online Teaching

“Those first several weeks of teaching online were some of the most challenging teaching times I’ve had since I was a first year teacher, because essentially I was a first year teacher.”

Perhaps this sentiment is easier to express at the end of the 2019-2020 school year, when Joe knew that both he and the school had successfully pivoted to online instruction. Twenty year veterans don’t often admit feeling like a first year teacher. But Joe’s description of the early weeks of online teaching will resonate with most teachers’ first year experience.

“I was spending three or four hours and you know I was scripting what I thought was every moment of that online asynchronous lesson to see if it would work. And then I went through and did the lesson to see how long it would take the kids, knowing that I would have to add fifty percent more time at least ... because you know I’m quicker

than they are, with the material. But I would go through, I would read the text, I would watch the video, I would write out any assignment ... to see how long it would take. I don't know if every teacher who was doing the process was doing that but I, that was, that's my nature and I did that. Did I get the mix right? I don't know, I did as well as I could do."

Joe and Shawn, whose story follows below, were colleagues at the same school. The school sent all students home one week before a scheduled two-week spring break. During that extra week, Joe and Shawn and other leaders met twice daily to create and debate strategy for online teaching.

"From the beginning we recognized that we were not going to be able to offer classes - live classes - that we could make the students show up to because of the difference in time zones. So it had to be asynchronous."

But Joe places high importance on the ability of the students to socialize, and for himself to feed off the energy of working directly with the students, face to face. In the early planning meetings, he was already advocating for synchronous meetings with students, despite the difficulty with multiple time zones.

"But I thought that, in this time of isolation more than ever, students and teachers both would be craving the contact that they had abruptly lost ... I was like an early adopter, I would say. From the very first week of the online teaching process, I pushed the kids to come to my online sessions and I would do two of them a day for the classes."

As soon as it became apparent that the students would not be returning to school for the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the school adopted Joe's strategy schoolwide. Joe's other strategy was also shared by a number of teachers, who realized that at some point it wasn't helpful to talk about more online tools, but rather to focus on just a few.

"I decided to limit it to two other platforms that I'd been hearing about that I thought would be worth pursuing. And I thought that if I could learn those platforms, and just limit myself to those, I think that that's going to be a benefit for the kids because I thought that if we all start throwing all this stuff at them it's just going - just like I'm overwhelmed sitting in my apartment and planning for the learning process - they are going to be very quickly overwhelmed if we start throwing eight or ten different tools at

them to master ... I chose the ones that I chose and I felt that they worked ... I used Edpuzzle and I used Parlay, which is an online platform, it's actually a learning management system that allows you to do discussions ... and I used Kahoot. Those are my three go-tos."

In addition to limiting the number of tools he used, Joe tried to learn how to make the online environment welcome and social. One strategy in particular was connecting with the students through humor, something Joe does easily in face to face situations, but had to relearn for the online environment.

"Over the course of those eight weeks or whatever I think I bought seven joke books. ...Sometimes they don't laugh at all and that's okay. I would laugh and I think that they enjoyed that I would laugh. So that's how I would start the sessions."

He also wanted students to enjoy the camaraderie of being together, something he struggled to create online. In the end, he discovered if he left his online session running, but physically removed himself from the camera, students would talk to each other.

"I really wanted them to just talk with each other freely. And I did everything I could do to kinda make that happen. I would say, do you guys have anything? Just talk with each other. And it didn't work very well. Except for one day.

"...They talked, finally ... 54 minutes later [after Joe left the class] the last kids left the discussion. They just were talking and I, I have to tell you, this made my old teacher heart a little lighter and a little more joyful."

Joe summarized his and others' learning in our follow up interview in May 2021. He feels there have been teachers who have been very successful, teachers who have not - and who have in extreme cases left the profession, as per some examples Joe provided from his new school, and teachers who are anywhere in between.

"So, I think there is a full gamut. Most are like me - they learned their strengths within that context and developed those strengths, they build their lessons around those, and they succeed more or less as the year has gone on. And then there are others who have excelled in this format, but there are others who just didn't make it."

As far as the student experience goes, Joe feels that the past year has confirmed what he and his colleagues anticipated when it first became clear there would be face to face and online students at the same time, for the same class and teacher.

“And I think as the year went on we also recognized that our students most at risk, and that was based on what we had seen already, were going to be those students who were at a distance, who were asynchronous, online learners. Those were going to be the most at risk students.”

“From statistics of surveys that we did, and from looking at grades, our students who were in pure online mode performed the poorest in comparison to their peer group who were here on campus learning.”

In his second interview with us, Joe summed up the pivot to online learning by reflecting on how significant a change going online was, and how with time he and his colleagues came to terms with this new mode of teaching.

“The real takeaway is how strange that felt - how unsettling the experience of being forced into this online experience and this disruption of what we had come to know. And we were just casting around looking for solutions - and nothing had been tested, so it was just throw it against the wall and see what sticks. That was the takeaway - this is super disruptive.

“But at some point we settled into this ... this new normal, where we accepted that life had different sets of risks and that our teaching was going to be different and that our educational experiences were going to be different. And with that we could progress.”

Resilience, Courage, and Identity Transformation

Joe sees himself as an individual who is able to take care of himself, someone who knows how to get things done and is effective at getting them done. As a senior teacher and resident life leader, he has that feeling of having seen it all ... until of course he hasn't, which was the case of COVID-19.

It's not surprising, therefore, that Joe already had the perception that he was resilient, in a general sort of way, before COVID-19 came along. His comments, though, show that there is always room for growth, even in those things we consider ourselves quite adept at.

“I think that I'm pretty resilient. I would say that I wonder how much resilience developed as opposed to how much I already have. But I can't imagine making my way through the process if I wasn't rather resilient. And, I think, by nature, I am sometimes unhealthfully competitive and so for me, I would say some of my resilience is based in that.”

It is interesting that Joe considered his competitive nature a source of his resilience, in perhaps the way of someone who is determined not to give up, or to succeed in the face of adversity where others might not.

“I decided that I was going to be the best at [online teaching]. Like I said earlier, I wasn't going to be the best in everything, but I was going to be the best at those few little platforms that I could do, and I would try to do those as well as possible. And so for example I was doing lessons on an online learning site called Parlay and it was interesting because my lessons were good enough - obviously - because parlay contacted me and asked if they could feature some of my lessons on their site.”

Not only did the company feature his lessons on their site, they also interviewed Joe and a few of his students about their experience using the application. For someone with Joe's competitive streak, this was no doubt a source of pride and a sign that he had worked hard enough to be successful, overcoming those early weeks of no balance and wobbly confidence about his online teaching.

In fact, the theme of increased confidence was very evident in Joe's comments, particularly after having accommodated schooling due to COVID-19 for over a year.

“We all got better and more resilient and we continued to get better as the year went on ... I don't feel that same level of stress. I know it's still there. I know it still impacts our life every day, but I don't wake up in the morning and say ‘Oh my god, how am I going to get through the day?’ We've figured out how to do that... And now having been through it, I think that all of us feel like, yeah, we can take this on - or whatever the next new one is - yeah, we could take it on.”

Shawn's story

“Well it was of course a big shock at first when I got a call from one of my bosses as I was walking to school ... could I help out with some internal assessment for the IB program because they were going to close the school...”

Shawn's story is a variation of a story lived across the world. From receiving the news of the unprecedented - the school was actually closing and sending students home - to reflecting almost a year later that there seems to be hints of light at the end of the tunnel, he went from shock, to intense planning and teaching, to a new rhythm, and even growth.

Along the way Shawn balanced his own teaching, his ESL and English department administrative duties, and his family. He found both a return to balance and a reinforced sense of resilience along the way.

Balancing Professional Life and Private Life

Shawn is the only one of our three participant teachers who remained at his school during both school years (so far) interrupted by COVID-19. Shawn is a longtime department head of the school's English as a Second Language program, who added responsibility for the English department as the new academic year during the pandemic got underway. Balance for Shawn, therefore, included supporting a number of faculty members, who in his words “all had different strengths,” meaning some individuals needed significant support navigating online learning. Between administration, his own classes, and his family, his story shares a sense of many changes and finding a new normal - a new balance - brought on by changes that emerged from the school's closure and the ongoing disruption of the pandemic.

For seventeen years, Shawn has been in the same Swiss boarding school, balancing work and children for the last eleven years. His experience and general equanimity are evident in his narrative, in that he expresses himself more often as finding a new balance instead of being out of balance, using modest phrases like “It was tricky:”

“It was tricky to balance the expectations of our office hours and working hours where we have our Google Meet open all the time and organize meetings with other teachers or with other staff members, as well as synchronized learning sessions with our students ...”

He also naturally tended to highlight the positives, for example:

“We were encouraged to stay home. That was kind of nice because for the last two and a half months we’ve been eating all our meals together and spending a lot of time together.”

In many ways, Shawn felt that the Swiss federal rules, and his school’s policies, simplified things. For example, his words reveal the advantages of the physical context in maintaining balance:

“We had it pretty good ... because even despite the closures of businesses and restaurants and other things that are nice to enjoy, having access to nature has been an edifying experience. Just being able to hop on my bike and go for a ride or ... the great winter with the mountain ski resort staying open To just enjoy the time with my kids being outside has really been a positive experience and it's made me enjoy where we live more because there hasn't been a ton of other options.”

There was also less self-imposed pressure to get away for the weekend, allowing Shawn to “step back a little bit” and he did not feel guilty about that. He also asserts that stepping back and not saying “yes” to everything helped him to feel good in this new scenario. For example, he mentions opting out of a school event.

“Last night was the improv show and I would normally go to support them [but I thought] well, you know, it's the time of COVID and my daughter has a test tomorrow and you know, I'm just going to miss it this time and that was okay.”

Shawn’s experience reveals ways in which things got easier over time as he expressed in the follow up interview that his family expected to have some freedom to move around in the summer and to catch up with family since it's been a long time since he last saw them. He feels lucky and grateful for that right balance he kept during this challenging school year. But he also realizes, in hindsight, that the “new balance” he found during the early months of the pandemic was tipped to lots of screen time and he may have well been burned out.

He describes the challenge of planning for the pivot from face to face boarding school to online instruction across 12 different time zones:

“We had to figure out how we could reach kids in different time zones, how to engage them, how to encourage engagement, how to meet with them synchronously and to accommodate all the different time zones and how to structure you our lesson posts in

a way that wasn't overwhelming ... and so those were the bigger challenges. Like creating a structure, promoting meaningful content delivery, promoting engagement either asynchronously or synchronously, and assessing students. And then at the same time supporting teachers who were learning as they go ..."

Yet he manages to find the positive for time with his family and with the faculty in his department amid the shifting schedules and responsibilities.

"The online screen time interfacing that we've been doing has been more intense but ... when you close your laptop you can kind of shut off. You don't have to run to the next thing - to coaching or to the dorm at 7 pm for students in study hall. So those kinds of things have given us more time to be more focused so that's been a good sense of balance for me. It's been spending time with the family getting a bit more exercise than I often normally have time to do and, because we don't have a traditional class schedule, we've had a lot more time to meet as a faculty."

Being outside as a dad with his family has been a really positive experience. He found that they had time to enjoy their surroundings and perhaps slow down the pace a little. "We've saved money, time, and mental effort because we just go outside and do things here..."

For Shawn, the response to the pandemic was less a loss of balance, though he admits to stretches that were difficult, and more a change in the routine with different ways of working, new challenges, and also new affordances in both personal and work life.

Struggle with Online Teaching

Shawn thinks that his identity as a teacher is as an apprentice of learning where one is constantly growing and changing and learning from others. On the other hand, the pandemic seems to have also helped him release what a veteran teacher he actually is - an educator with good instincts and a strong mental framework of what good learning looks like.

"For the first time I've kind of felt like I'm actually a bit of a veteran now ... that I have good instincts and I know I have a strong mental framework of what good learning looks like."

He was happy to offer mentorship not only to the faculty in his department, but also to other department heads who asked him for advice and guidance. For example, during the one week

of intense strategizing and training to switch from face to face to online learning, Shawn created a model classroom to guide his faculty members, meaning they organized their learning about online teaching in the form of a model online classroom that they could then use with their own students.

“We decided to use some of ... the Google suite of educational apps that we were already using. We actually used that forum [Google apps] to deliver remote professional development to our teachers and to collaborate with our teachers in the same way we were hoping to deliver learning remotely to our students after the spring break. We spent a whole week, you know, working collaboratively but remotely ...”

Shawn’s major concern was leveraging the power of social relationships between and among his students and faculty members, expressing that he is perhaps a bit of a Vygotsky-ist in that he believes there is great value in interacting socially. Learning comes through interaction and learning itself is a social process.

“[There is a lot of] value in learning as a social experience to develop your social skills, but also that negotiating meaning often comes from interacting with others to developing understanding.”

A few particular strategies from the first week of strategizing that resonated with Shawn was the general notion of keeping things simple and modifying expectations. This was, after all, an entirely novel set up for teaching and learning.

“KISS - keep it simple, stupid, yeah, I guess our rule of thumb we might call it - that keeping it simple and consistent for the students would help them feel like they could navigate their own self-paced learning, especially since a lot of the learning was happening asynchronously because we are in so many different time zones. For me that was helpful. ... And, ah, I wouldn’t say lowering our expectations, but maybe changing expectations about what we could accomplish in terms of covering content, adjusting that and then being flexible with deadlines”

He returned to the same theme in the follow up interview, mentioning KISS again.

KISS - keeping it simple. I think I definitely tried to take it on last spring and I think I sort of forgot it this year a little bit. I have come back to it recently, partially out of necessity, but also I think it is a useful heuristic.

Resilience, Courage, and Identity Transformation

Shawn went through a funk in the autumn in the October lockdown during which he felt his lessons weren't overly strong and there wasn't much engagement from the students. The times one doesn't feel much resilience are the times one needs resilience the most! "I wasn't going to throw in the towel, but I felt kind of low," Shawn said. As the year progressed and things felt more normal, with a growing sense that the school was going to manage face to face classes right through the IB tests and graduation, Shawn grew back a stronger sense of resilience. Like Joe, Shawn gets his energy from working with students, so when the mood across the school was that the school was going to make it to the end, face to face, his energy and attitude improved, too.

"There is in school a culture and rapport that goes through the year because you know there is an end and a restart. That for me is a source of resilience and optimism - refreshment for doing my job ... we made it, vaccinations are coming, next year might be more normal and more personal things, like political change in the US. Optimism changes into resilience ... [and]being a parent - their year has been pretty normal, school and friends and skiing and all that stuff".

Shawn thinks that one thing that he really took from last spring was that relationships have been so critical to do both "resilience and balance" in and out of the workplace. About his role as department head, he expressed in the first interview:

"I felt as a department head .. just continuing to maintain my relationship and establishing or continuing to build the relationship I have with individual teachers ... because we weren't seeing each other like we typically do."

He mentioned the same concern in the follow up interview:

"Developing relationships does not have to mean that it has to be face-to-face, but just the frequency of contact with staff in order to build collegial relationships. [That] has

been lacking to some extent during COVID. Because [teachers] had to focus their efforts on adapting to the situation, it's been hard to build cohesion as a group”.

And:

“One thing I took from this last spring ... Relationships are so critical to both resilience and balance. You know ... Frustrations and challenges within schools and within our school ... with lockdowns and disruptions with face to face ... I mentioned that last spring and feel more strongly now ... it's critical to develop relationships [and to] build on collegial relationships.”

And finally:

“I guess one thing that I really took from this last spring and I think it has been emphasized even further this year is that relationships are so critical for both resilience and balance in the workplace and outside.”

Shawn did not report that he felt a transformation in his identity. He was most likely already very focused on maintaining and growing strong social relationships in both his private and work life. During his two interviews, however, it was quite apparent that he had been reflecting on the need for strong social cohesion, particularly in a crisis situation. The pandemic allowed him to further reflect on the importance of relationships. For example, the effect of relationships on a team, and in turn, individual balance and resilience.

“I think that can be a challenge in the day to day life of a school, you know, or any organization: how do you develop resilience as a team? And I think that sort of in a strange way having a big challenge like this can help and can build solidarity in a team.”

Shawn underlines the importance of, in his own words, “social capital” that is established as a team, through maintaining strong relationships with individuals. Together we can, he is saying, because we will be more resilient.

Discussion

Joe, Zeynep, and Shawn (and indeed the majority of teachers worldwide) were presented with an unthought of challenge when the reality of the strength of the pandemic grew apparent. In a short amount of time, teachers were asked to radically change how they taught, where they

taught, and under which policy they would teach, whether those rules were determined locally (Joe and Shawn) or federally (Zeynep). Either way, the pressure was on teachers to continue to teach their courses amid the disruption, whether they agreed with policy or not, and whether they had any say in or influence on the school's handling of the crisis.

By and large, school simply continued for all three of these teachers, albeit in a new format. The manner in which these teachers found balance - or lived through stretches without much balance - forced them to draw on existing resilience to find even greater resilience to handle the disruption to their teaching, their working routine, and their personal lives. None of these three teachers handled the situation the same, but all three successfully navigated the end of the interrupted academic year and the entire following academic year. During that time all three of their jobs changed, from a small change for Shawn to new positions in new countries for Joe and Zeynep.

Through the conversations following themes emerged:

- Redefining Balance in the New Context
- Survival in Online Teaching
- Reflection in Action as a Means of Resilience

Redefining balance in the new context

While Joe and Zeynep reported, borrowing Joe's words, that "there was no balance", Shawn's perspective was one in which the balance shifted with the situation. Despite "screen saturation", as he referred to it, the pandemic created a different type of balance, not necessarily an imbalance. For all three of the teachers, of course, the situation in March 2020 was very similar: students were being sent home and teachers were being asked to teach in completely new ways with little time to prepare.

Each of them drew on different strengths to work through the feelings of being out of balance or adjusting to a new balance. Joe reported that his motivation to succeed, fueled by his own competitiveness, gave him the needed resilience, as evidenced in his pride at being contacted and interviewed by Parlay. Zeynep referenced her determination to be a good leader and to interface with other mid- and high-level managers, even when it came to some significant tensions between her and others, and Shawn doubled down on his preferred styles, modeling good online teaching and focusing on relationship-building and supporting others. In both Joe's and Zeynep's stories, determination and belief in their inner power of professionalism

emerged, due to their own resilience. Zeynep mentioned that her previous leadership role in Istanbul was not yet filled, by saying “*everyone is replaceable, yet my role is still vacant...*” *Going out of their professional comfort zones and leaving more than a decade behind was a challenging decision that is not easy to make.* However both Joe and Zeynep showed how they can “*swim against the tide*” (Walton, 1996) pushing back against the waves of COVID in their new work and life settings.

The stories of these three teachers confirms the notion that balance is a relative term. One individual’s sense of the right balance may differ from another’s, and what seems out of balance in one context may be more or less in balance in another. We have already seen that Shawn’s perspective differed from Joe and Zeynep’s, most likely due to his personality, but it is also worth noting that Joe’s move to the US to start a second academic year under COVID-19, this time as a deputy head, put him again at the start of a steep learning curve. This time, however, in part because he lived alone for the first three months, he reported working all the time because there *was nothing else to do*. Out of balance, perhaps, but the extra work fulfilled a need and was perhaps more like the different sense of balance that Shawn seemed to feel, not merely imbalance. Joe’s and Zeynep initial experiences in their new roles at their new schools reveal ways of which “balance is in the eye of the beholder” and there is no single recipe that applies to all individuals at all times. Shawn’s story shows that our individual equations of work life balance do not have to be the same. We can still find balance in a new distribution of responsibilities.

Survival in Online Teaching

These stories revealed ways in which Joe, Shawn and Zeynep managed to survive online teaching during the early months of the pandemic while managing their work-life balance in their own ways. What is evident in their stories is that none of them regret their choices. Instead they seem to be satisfied with the strategies they used to overcome the many challenges. Their words remind us of the term “*stewards of practice*”, first proposed by Shulman (2006). “*Essential elements of stewardship of practice include being reflective about one’s practice and working continuously toward its improvement*” (Olson, Clark, Hacifazlıoğlu and Carlson, 2021, p. 380). Joe, Zeynep and Shawn appear to be courageous and adventurous enough to sail in unknown waters and find their own scientific and action oriented strategies to cope with the new experiences. It should be noted that the strategies they used are also a reflection of simplicity and practicality based on collaboration. Joe and Shawn, working in the same mid-level management group at the same school, both resonated with the

idea of keeping things simple in order to be an effective teacher, as well as a way to limit stress and time preparing for class. Joe described himself as being an early advocate for doing just a few apps well, hoping in part to stem the deluge of emails from well-intentioned colleagues. Shawn set an early example for other department heads, using the Google Suite for Education to both discuss online teaching and to model online teaching and learning. Taken together, their strategy was to flatten the learning curve *and* make the maximum use of time to move along the learning curve as quickly as possible. All three of them recognized the importance of “creating communities of practice” as an instrument to overcome the challenges encountered with online teaching. Dabrowski (2020) and Ashbory and Kim (2020) noted that the COVID-19 pandemic will likely lead to further anxiety and weariness within the profession of teaching, aligned with the pressures from students, families, and a constantly changing system. Most of the research on teaching during the pandemic highlights the need to “*support educators to learn, reflect, and improve their practice as a result of school closures and remote schooling*” (Dabrowski, 2020, p. 37).

Reflection in Action as a Means of Resilience

It doesn't seem from the transcripts that the three teachers had thought much about the pandemic in terms of building personal resilience, but upon reflection - and sometimes mentioned indirectly, they expressed both that they entered the pandemic with a great amount of resilience and weathering the various issues COVID-19 presented made them more resilient. The strongest statement, from Joe, was echoed in all three of their voices: “*We made it through this, we can do anything!*” based on his story of moving to a new job in the middle of an unknown crisis, figuring out and applying what he learned from March to May 2020 in his new American setting. Both Joe and Zeynep gave hints of resilience in their stories of adjusting to their new schools in addition to COVID. Shawn also expressed his feelings that things are easier now.

Stories of Zeynep and Joe showed that initial challenges and constraints are inevitable when you enter a new professional setting. Both Zeynep and Joe were willing to move during the pandemic to a new situation and seem to be happy in their new context in spite of the challenges. Shawn was willing to add the administration of the English department to his existing job. In their cases it is obvious that an individual with good resilience can push on, and can develop further resilience by surviving the challenges that difficult situations bring. Their own thinking and reflection enabled them to look back and learn from their earlier experiences. In the case of Shawn, being an active part of a “Community of Practice”

(Wenger, 1998) created within the school ecosystem enabled him to sustain his balance in innovative teaching as well as open paths for his colleagues to take action in accordance with the changing demands of racing during COVID. The experiences of Shawn, Joe and Zeynep align with the proposition that when facing stress, anxiety, and depression, resilience and self-esteem have an influence on a teacher's psychological well-being (Greenfield, 2015; Ratanasiripong, *et al.* 2020). It was heard in the voices of the teachers that social support mechanisms in the family and the school setting can be powerful instruments to serve as positive “*protective factors*” to develop resilience in challenging conditions, and ultimately to succeed. This study enabled us to look from the lenses of three teachers and learn from the intricacies of their unique experiences. Their voices echoed Craig (2020) that “the reciprocal learning experience can enrich our best-loved-self, extending our knowledge communities and our world view” (p. 159).

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