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Exploring Concerns of K-12 Online Educators

Tadd Spencer Farmer
Brigham Young University

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Exploring Concerns of K-12 Online Teachers

Tadd Spencer Farmer

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

Richard West, Chair
Stephen Yanchar
Charles R. Graham

Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology

Brigham Young University

ABSTRACT

Exploring Concerns of K-12 Online Teachers

Tadd Spencer Farmer
Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology, BYU
Master of Science

Although a relatively small number of K-12 students are currently enrolled in online classes, the dramatic growth in online enrollments in recent years suggests that online education will play a significant role in the future landscape of public education. While our understanding of online teaching and learning continues to grow, relatively little is known about the experiences of teachers as they engage in online teaching. In particular, very little is known about the concerns of teachers as they navigate their teaching roles and responsibilities in an online teaching environment. Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach, this qualitative study explored the concerns of seven online K-12 teachers through video interviews and bi-monthly journal entries. The findings in this study resulted in six themes with associated sub-themes. These themes suggest that online teachers are highly concerned about themselves, their roles, and their students, along with concerns found at the intersections of these areas. Additionally, this study reveals that the political, educational, and organizational contexts surrounding these online learning environments significantly influence the development and degree of teachers' concerns. The implications of this research encourages greater dialogue between teachers and online educational leaders to better understand teacher concerns and mitigate the negative impact of these concerns on online teachers.

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I am eternally grateful for the family I come home to each night, and for the important role they have played in building my foundation. My son, Bennett, and my daughter, Emery, were extremely patient and understanding with their part-time dad. At the end of every day, I can always count on eager faces peering through the window when I arrive home and big hugs when I walk in the door. Of course, my immense gratitude extends to my beautiful wife, Stephanie, who continues to be the singularly most important person to me in my life. I am grateful for her patience and understanding with a stressed out, fed up, and weighed down husband and father. To say that she deserves half the credit for this accomplishment is dishonest; in truth, she deserves *all* the credit. I love you!

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my Heavenly Father and my Savior, Jesus Christ. I have felt Their guidance, comforting power, and strengthening influence throughout this entire process. I am grateful to Them for the blessing it is to be here at BYU, and to have the opportunity and capacity to learn.

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DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis, *Exploring Concerns of K-12 Online Teachers*, is written in article-format, mixing traditional thesis requirements with the format generally used by research journals in the field of instructional design. I propose submitting this article to *Distance Education, Online Learning Journal, Journal of Online Learning Research,* or *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning.* The article is thus formatted to be appropriate for submission to these journals.

Due to space limitations in the article-format thesis, the following items have been placed in the appendix at the conclusion of the thesis:

- Individual participant case studies, found in Appendix A, were written as part of the data analysis process. While the article's results section synthesized much of the information contained in these individual cases, length requirements prevented these cases from being included in their entirety.

- The cost or participant compensation is shown in Appendix B. This table shows the individual and collection compensation for the study.

- A detailed description of the methodology found in Appendix C, includes background on the method, rationale for its use, and an explanation for how the method was implemented for each stage of the data collection and analysis process.

- The interview protocol used for each participant is given in Appendix D. This protocol shows the major structure for each semi-structured interview.

- The journal entry prompt completed by each participant on multiple occasions throughout the study can be found in Appendix E.

- Appendix F includes an email exchange between the lead researcher and a peer as as part of the peer debriefing process. This exchange occurred when the data from one participant was analyzed and reported.

- The proposed and actual research schedule, including the various research activities with their specific timelines, is given in Appendix G.

- An extended review of the literature is found in Appendix H. This review contains a broader and more detailed review of the literature and is designed to fulfill the traditional thesis requirements.

- A subjectivities statement for the lead researcher is included in Appendix I. This document provides transparency into the assumptions, biases, and attitudes of the researcher at the beginning of the study.

- Appendix J contains a trustworthiness statement, or statement outlying efforts made to establish the credibility of the research.

- Appendix K contains the conclusion to my thesis including the benefits to using interpretative phenomenological analysis, the contributions of this study to existing research, and opportunities for future research.

In addition to these appendices, there are also three reference lists in this article-format thesis. The reference list immediately following the article will contain all references contained in the journal-ready article. The second reference list, found immediately following an expanded discussion of methodology in Appendix C, includes only references relating to the research methods used in this study. A third reference list, found after the literature review in Appendix H, contains all the citations referenced in the extended literature review.

Introduction

The growth of online K-12 education in the United States is accelerating at a rapid pace. During 2013-2014, 2.2 million K-12 students were enrolled in nearly 4.5 million online or blended courses (Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, & Watson, 2015), a 68% increase from the 2009-2010 school year (Wicks, 2010). All states and the District of Columbia have at least some level of online learning opportunities for students in their states (Barbour, Archambault, & DiPietro, 2013; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012; Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2011), and five states (Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Michigan, and Virginia) currently require K-12 students to take at least one online course prior to graduation (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016). It is nearly certain that online learning will continue to impact the future of K-12 education.

As online education continues its rapid growth, research to support the teaching and learning in online settings is struggling to keep pace (Archambault & Kennedy, 2014). The growth and development of teachers within their online experience, is still a new, largely unexplored territory in this burgeoning field of research. While the presence of an effective teacher is largely considered to be a major factor in a successful learning experience in any setting (Wicks, 2010), relatively little is known about the lived experience of these important individuals.

This current study is focused on the concerns that online teachers have as they navigate their teaching in an online K-12 environment. Concerns, as defined in the current study, are the emotional reactions of online teachers towards actual or anticipated experiences associated with teaching (Fuller, 1970; Mok, 2005). Fuller (1970) suggested that teachers exhibit "regularities in their concern" (Fuller, 1970, p. 16) as teachers gradually shift from concerns about self to

concerns about students, a finding confirmed completely or partially by others (Adams, 1982; Kagan, 1992).

The effort to identify patterns of teacher concerns has already begun with traditional teachers, starting with the pioneering efforts of Frances Fuller, but it has yet to be considered in the realm of online teaching. It is currently unknown if the differences between traditional and online teaching give rise to new concerns for online educators, and if those concerns develop and change along the same general pattern that appears to be experienced by traditional teachers. Revealing the concerns faced by online teachers can provide a useful perspective into the lived experience of online teachers. This understanding can contribute to the design of effective teacher education programs, professional development opportunities, and structural support for this growing field of educators.

Statement of the Problem

The dramatic increase in online K-12 education calls for additional research to encourage the best practices of online teaching. Over 2.2 million K-12 students were enrolled in an online course in 2014 (Gemin et al., 2015), a small, but growing fraction of the 54.7 million K-12 students. Additionally, 75% of school districts nationwide are currently offering online options for K-12 students (Connections Academy, 2016). This rapid growth of online student enrollments will surely require a growing number of online teachers, a group that is traditionally undertrained (Dawley, Rice, & Hinck, 2010). Recognizing that the effectiveness of a teacher is one of the main factors in a successful learning experience (Wicks, 2010), teacher education programs and professional development opportunities must be well-informed regarding the experiences of online K-12 educators. In particular, understanding the concerns of teachers can help teachers grow their sense of independence (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993), develop a realistic

view of teaching within the learning context (Kagan, 1992), and promote greater teacher retention (Cooper & He, 2012). Despite these benefits, very little research has been conducted to consider the concerns of online teachers as they engage meaningfully in the task of teaching.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to provide insight into the experiences of online teachers in K-12 settings. Though online teaching is growing rapidly in K-12 education, research on this topic of online teacher concerns is underdeveloped and could significantly influence the preparation and training of online teachers. Therefore, the research questions for this study include:

1. What concerns do online K-12 teachers have related to their teaching?
2. How do these concerns develop as teachers gain experience?
3. How do online teachers experience concern for their students?

Method

This study used an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach advanced by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). After a brief discussion of the phenomenological research design, we describe the participants, their respective settings, our data collection methods, instruments, and data analysis strategies. A more detailed account of method can be found in Appendix C.

Research Design

At the heart of IPA are the principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography. Phenomenology is concerned with developing an in-depth understanding of a small group of individuals with the goal to "reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) by removing unessential characteristics.

Hermeneutics involves the interpretation of texts through iterative part-to-whole and whole-to-part analyses. This present study can be considered a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2003) as the researcher seeks to make sense of a participant's interpretation of their lived experience. Idiography is the focus on the particular and is an additional foundation principle in interpretative phenomenological analysis. Idiography provides the scope of the study by committing to systematically explore the rich detail of a phenomenon within a specific context (Smith et al., 2009). The methodology that flows from this theoretical commitment is significant; interpretative phenomenological analysis research seeks few purposively-selected samples within a contextually-rich environment.

Participants

Information was gathered from seven teachers currently teaching in an online K-12 school during the fall of 2016, although two of them also taught at other online schools as well. These teachers represented a range of total teaching experience (0 to 20 years) and a range of completed online teaching experience (0 to 4 years). Below we briefly describe some essential details about each case (see Table 1 and the following descriptions).

Table 1

Participant Information

Name	Gender	Content area(s)	Current education role(s)	Years of teaching experience completed (traditional/online)
Abby	Female	World Languages Social Studies	Full-time teacher (traditional) Part-time teacher (online)	20/0
Athena	Female	Social Studies	Full-time teacher (online) Lead instructor	14.5/4
Emily	Female	Math	Full-time teacher (online)	1.5/3
Jackie	Female	Science	Part-time (online, two institutions)	3/1
Jacob	Male	World Languages	Part-time teacher (online) District administrator (traditional)	12/3
Katie	Female	World Languages	Full-time and part-time teacher (online, two institutions)	1/1
Leah	Female	Science	Full-time teacher (online)	0/1

Abby. As a first-year online teacher, Abby was already interesting in making online teaching a full-time proposition. Concurrent with her part-time online teaching position, Abby also taught world languages at two traditional schools. Abby's case illustrates how new online teachers may develop concerns in an online teaching environment, and how those concerns may be influenced by traditional teaching experience.

Athena. Athena worked full-time with her online institution as a teacher and department lead. Her role as a lead teacher required the performance of additional tasks including course review, teacher evaluation, and course design. At the end of the final interview, Athena revealed that she had just resigned her position as a full-time, lead teacher to assume a new role in

administration. Athena's position is significant as her administrative duties and responsibilities not only introduced unique concerns, but also provided additional perspective on concerns common to other teachers.

    Emily. While still in high school, Emily was able to participate in teacher preparation courses, which established an early trajectory into the teaching profession. She excelled in her traditional teaching experience, although she acknowledged severe administrative problems in this environment, eventually leading her to explore online teaching. Currently in her fourth year of online teaching, Emily represented one of the more seasoned online teachers in this study and helps to demonstrate how seasoned teachers may experience concerns.

    Jackie. Jackie was interested in online teaching as a way to continue working while staying home with her children. During this study, she taught part-time at two online institutions; one in which she was in her second year of teaching and one in which she was beginning her first year. Her experience at two online institutions illustrates the potential influence of an organization's structure, policies, and practices on the concerns of a teacher.

    Jacob. Driven to online teaching in order to prove that "online learning was not conducive to foreign language," Jacob quickly became convinced that online learning was an effective educational option for students. At the time of the study, Jacob worked as a part-time world languages teacher in addition to his role as an administrator in a traditional school district. Jacob's role as an experienced online teacher, as well as a past online mentor, provides a unique perspective of an experienced teacher with various institutional roles.

    Katie. As a relatively new teacher in the profession, Katie came into online teaching with only a year of traditional teaching experience. During this study, Katie was in her second year of online teaching where she taught full-time at one institution and part-time in another

institution. With limited teaching experience in both teaching environments, Katie's case provides an example of how novice teachers experience concerns in an online setting.

Leah. A lack of available teaching positions led Leah into the field of online teaching. Leah was hired on as part of a two-year teacher preparation program aimed at developing new teachers for future employment in traditional class settings. Her role in this program was significant as it framed a great deal of the concerns she experienced as an online teacher. During this study, Leah also obtained additional part-time employment in a non-teaching related field.

All research participants taught at the same online K-12 school in the Midwestern United States, a school which follows an independent-study model of online education characterized by students' self-paced movement in a largely asynchronous learning environment (Anderson, 2008). Despite shared employment at this institution, two participants had additional jobs in a traditional educational setting and two participants had an additional online teaching jobs at another institution (which followed a more synchronous model of online learning). Each participant varied by subject taught, years of traditional teaching experience, and years of online teaching experience, resulting in seven unique cases. A significant portion of the first interview examined the participant's background experience to better understand the context of each participant.

Data Collection

Participants engaged in a two-stage interview process and a bimonthly journaling exercise to reveal their concerns as online teachers. All seven participants completed both interviews, but one participant completed the second interview via email due to intervening family circumstances.

The initial interview focused on contextualizing the participant's experience with online teaching by exploring relevant background information, educational training, and traditional teaching experiences. This initial interview also explored detailed accounts of the participant's online teaching experiences, including concerns, challenges, and obstacles they faced. In the concluding interview, additional experiences and relevant concerns were also sought in detail, but the primary focus was on co-constructing meaning of the experiences previously described. Researchers directed the participant's attention to a particular quote or episode in the initial interview transcript and allowed the participant to add to, restructure, and appropriately emphasize previous comments.

Each participant was also asked to complete a bimonthly online journal entry about their current concerns and experiences teaching online throughout one semester. These journal entries were completed over the course of the first half of the 2016-2017 school year (August to December). Participants completed between 5-7 journal entries each, averaging six entries per participant. The questions posed to the participants in these journal entries were (a) regarding your position as an online teacher, what are you most concerned about right now?, and (b) describe in as much detail as possible a recent situation(s) related to this concern.

Each participant was compensated $20 for each interview completed ($40 in total) and $5 for each journal entry completed ($35 in total). Total compensation was provided to each participant as an electronic gift card issued at the conclusion of the study.

Data Analysis

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to analyze the interview transcripts and completed journal entries. In the first step of IPA, each transcript was read and reviewed until the lead researcher had a close familiarity with the participant, the context, and

some of the general ideas. In the second step of IPA, the lead researcher read and annotated the text with descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments (Smith et al., 2009) which extracted key phrases from the data, analyzed participant word choice, and created preliminary interpretative notes. Each comment was placed in an additional column for further analysis.

During the third step of IPA, the lead researcher analyzed each comment, reviewing the original text as needed, and developing a concise, meaningful statement, or code, that represented each comment. Once all of the comments had been carefully analyzed and codes were developed, the fourth step of IPA explored relationships between these newly created themes and clustered them into superordinate, or higher-order themes. This organizing experience occurred through the processes of abstraction (related themes cluster together and are given a new name) and subsumption (an emergent theme takes on superordinate status and subsumes other related themes) as advanced by Smith et al., (2009). In the final analysis step of IPA, each superordinate theme was checked with the transcript to ensure it could properly be accounted for in the data.

Since multiple participants were considered in this study, each participant was analyzed individually before they were considered collectively, and individual case studies were written after each analysis (see Appendix A). The first case analysis resulted in themes used to analyze the remaining transcripts. Evidence to support those themes were sought with each subsequent participant, as well as the emergence of possible new themes not previously discovered. The analyses of each participant resulted in a master table of themes and superordinate themes for the entire group. This master table of themes was then analyzed and sorted to look for natural relationships between themes and superordinate themes, and these ideas were combined, reorganized, or eliminated.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work on qualitative research provided the basis for trustworthiness checks for this study. The process of triangulation was used by investigating the experiences of multiple online K-12 teachers who offered their insights through two interviews and a collection of journal entries. Member checking was also integrated by using the transcripts from the first interview and completed journal entries for further investigation during the second interview. When each case study was completed, a copy was also sent to each participant, allowing them to clarify, dispute, or elaborate on any findings presented in the case. Negative case analysis was applied to check the emerging conclusions with the data. As patterns and themes emerged from the data, the data was extensively searched to find contradictory instances that may have challenge conclusions of the research. This study sought transparency through the practice of a reflexive journal that documented the decisions, rationale, assumptions, and actions from the initiation of the research to its conclusion. This reflexive journal and related research documents were given to a peer to be critiqued and scrutinized at the beginning of the data analysis process and again at the end. Her critique of the research provided valuable insights that required changes to research process and conclusions. Taken together, these methods represent strategies designed to overcome some of the limitations imposed by researcher subjectivity.

<div align="center">

Results

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Figure 1 categorizes the various concerns of online teachers represented in the data and considers their possible relationship with other categories of concerns. Both the main categories of concerns (personal, instructional, and relational) and the intersections of these main categories (responsibility, experience, and interaction) are represented as themes in this analysis and will also include individual sub-themes and examples from research participants.
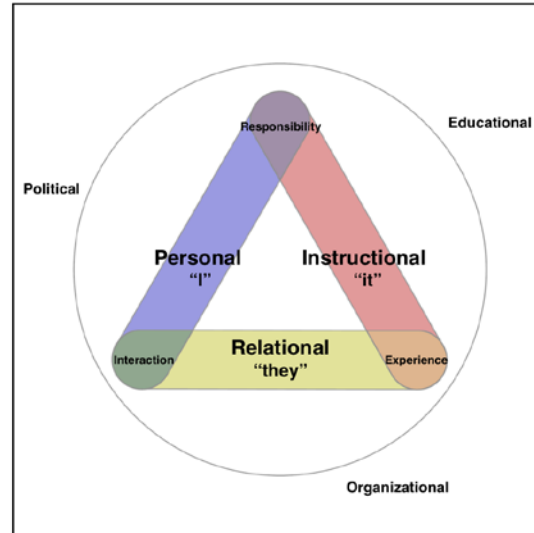
Figure 1. Teacher concerns illustration.

To acknowledge the close relationship between personal, instructional, and relational concerns, additional categories at the intersection of these concerns have also emerged. These intersecting categories include responsibility, experience, and interaction. The themes, definition of themes, and the associated sub-themes can be found below in Table 2.

Table 2

Names and Definitions of Themes, and Examples of Related Sub-Themes

Themes	Definitions of theme	Associated sub-themes
Personal	These "I" or "me" concerns arise from the individual teacher, often through reflecting on past performance, considering current experience, and forming future expectations.	Job outlook, expectations and evaluations, time management, and compensation
Responsibility	At the intersection of personal and instructional concerns lies the theme of responsibility which addresses the actual or expected interactions between the teacher and the course.	Teacher roles, teacher grading responsibilities, additional duties, and content interaction
Instructional	These "it" instructional concerns describe concerns embedded in the course curriculum and local teaching environment.	Technology and course quality
Experience	At the intersection of instructional and relational concerns lies the theme of experience which considers the interaction of others with the instructional environment.	Student enrollment and attendance, student movement, student experience
Relational	These "they" relational concerns detail the concerns associated with other individuals in the learning environment including students, other teachers, mentors, and parents.	Mentors concerns, student concerns, and student management
Interaction	At the intersection of personal and relational concerns lies the theme of interaction which represents concerns teacher's experience as they interact with various individuals within the online teaching environment.	Communication, relationships with students, parents, mentors, teachers, and the organization

In addition to the main themes of concerns, this illustration includes external factors in the teaching environment. These factors, immediately outside the specific teaching context, influence the degree and development of teacher's concerns through the policies, practices, and cultures of the external teaching environment. The three main external factors contributing to teacher's concerns include organizational, political, and educational factors and are more clearly defined in Table 3. Taken together, these external factors recognize the impact of the greater

educational context and acknowledges its direct impact on the development of teacher's concerns. While not specifically addressed as themes in the present study, these factors will surface throughout the themes and subthemes discussed.

Table 3

Definitions and Examples of External Factors

External Factors	Definition	Example
Political	Laws, rules, and regulations passed by state, local, or federal governments that impact education generally or online teaching specifically	Emily: "The [State] is changing its requirements for teacher certification . . . To progress from provisional to professional, three successful years of teaching need to be documented on the [education department's] website by a public district or school you have worked for. However, I do not work for a school; I work for a 503(c) non-profit company. So, I have no evaluations in there, and theoretically could eventually lose my teaching certificate."
Organizational	Policies, practices, and structures established and enforced by educational institutions	Jackie: "With [Organization A] it's asynchronous, so it's like . . . I have a few days to get grades done, I can spend my time grading. With [Organization B] and live sessions, suddenly I have to be at my computer at these times to teach live, and so I'm still finding that balance . . . And so I think [Organization B] is a lot harder."
Educational	The values, cultures, and accepted practices of the larger educational environment	Leah: "A lot of us that have been applying for [traditional teaching] jobs are getting passed over for people who have just been long-term subbing. So I think a lot of principals and people hiring for districts are more concerned about classroom management, and they look at our resume and might not even call us, in my case, because they think we don't have any experience with that."

Six themes will be hereafter presented in this section, along with multiple sub-themes for each one. A minimum of three teachers were required to respond for these concerns to be reported in this analysis.

Theme 1: Personal

Personal concerns represent concerns that emerge from the teacher's internal experience in teaching. Simply, they define "I" or "me" concerns stemming from the individual's experience. Often, these concerns result as teachers reflect on their experience, or consider their future in the profession. The sub-themes considered in this analysis include job outlook, expectations, evaluations, and priorities, and time management.

 Sub-theme 1: Job outlook. A questionable future in teaching was a concern for some online teachers. Leah, a second-year online teacher, admitted that concerns about her teaching future began with worries about the larger educational context. She said, "now that we have a changing mindset about education, different from what I thought it was changing to, I am concerned about there being a place for me in this new era of public education." These worries seemed to be triggered by recent political appointments in federal offices, a move that she described as "really discouraging." Even in traditional teaching settings, Leah admitted this frustration exists: "I am concerned about keeping my own job. And that's, I think any teacher has that concern the way things kind of go nowadays."

Leah's uncertainty in education generally carried into worries about her local teaching context, saying "I don't dislike [online teaching] to be fair. I just know there's no future at my company, so I've got to be realistic." Part of this concern stemmed from an "uncaring" relationship between her and her organization, resulting in feeling like she was being "[pushed] out the door." Abby was also uncertain about her future with the company, but viewed

compensation and a lack of full-time opportunities as the major causes. She said, "I don't foresee being able to make a living as a part-time instructor. It is a concern to me because I would love to be able to work from home, but financially, it could never happen." Even with better compensation for full-time teachers, the lack of available positions was concerning for Abby. "It would be really nice if I could eventually retire from my face-to-face teaching job and then do this part-time. Or even-full time . . . I don't see that full-time position happening."

Emily, a full-time instructor, acknowledged the recent impact of state government policies on her job outlook. Recently, her state passed legislation requiring all teachers to have teacher evaluations in the state system in order to renew their teaching credentials. This legislation posed concerns for Emily because her institution is technically a company and not a school. "I do not work for a school; I work for a 503(c) non-profit company. So, I have no evaluations in there, and theoretically could eventually lose my teaching certificate." This legislative movement motivated Emily to quickly renew her license before the law took effect in 2018, a step requiring the completion of a $2,000 course to maintain her teaching license and continue teaching online at her current institution. While Emily likely avoided the future impact of this law, she admitted that "post-2018, it's going to be a very big deal for any teachers that renew after that."

Sub-theme 2: Time management. The amount of time needed to be an effective online instructor requires was significant. While this time investment was not unique to online teaching, it is a reality faced by some online teachers. Jacob reported that "critical attributes" of successful online teachers included the skills of "time management organization, prioritizing." As a new teacher, Leah admitted to lacking time to complete required tasks. When faced with an

outdated course with broken links, Leah said that with "eight classes, I don't have four hours to sit there and basically audit a class."

The scarcity of time to complete required teaching tasks is aggravated by the fact that most of these teachers have additional teaching jobs at other institutions. As a full-time traditional teacher, Abby realized the difficulty in balancing her two jobs. With her full-time position alone, Abby had "more work than [she could] handle." The busy holiday season in traditional school settings also aligns with the busy season in online teaching, a situation that provided pointed concerns for some teachers at a particular point in the year. Jacob mentions, "this is a . . . tough season right now . . . especially for those of us who are part-time instructors here, because it's a busy time in our full-time educational profession."

The concern of time also includes the difficulty of balancing personal and work responsibilities. This concern was particularly challenging for some participants due to a lack of physical boundaries separating work from home. While Jackie admitted that this was often a concern in traditional teaching as well, she noted that it was more pronounced in online teaching. "I think that when you actually physically leave the classroom and you're driving home, it's like, okay, well my setting is different." Again, the lack of physical boundaries in online teaching blurred the line between work and home for Jackie. "When you leave a brick-and-mortar classroom, you may have work that needs to be completed, but it is easier to understand that work is in addition to regular tasks."

Balancing personal and work responsibilities is magnified by a lack of "school hours." Jacob reported, "there's no . . . 'It starts at 8:00am and it ends at 3:30pm.' . . . I do a lot of my work at . . . you know, 10:00pm, 11:00pm, 12:00am, four in the morning, five in the morning." While creating time boundaries between work and personal responsibilities can be difficult for

teachers, it was even more difficult to get others to understand those teacher-created boundaries because, according to Athena, the "hours that you are available appear to be 24 hours a day."

For Jackie, a stay-at-home mom who reported this work-life balance to be "the hardest thing about being an online teacher," this concern of time was more than just an inconvenience. Now that her "computer is always there," her school work no longer appeared as a "foreign thing" introduced into her home environment. This ever-present nature of work seemed to have created a sense of urgency even when the work encroached into her personal life. "I might be in the middle of something and I get an email and I want to answer it immediately. And I want to log in and get it taken care of immediately." For Jackie, she admitted that she "always feel[s] that pressure."

Theme 2: Responsibility

At the intersection of the personal and content levels is the theme of responsibility, which considers the potential concerns of teachers as they engage with the course content, the learning environment, and other associated factors. In this analysis, teachers expressed concerns about their roles and various responsibilities within the instructional environment.

Sub-theme 1: Teacher roles. The lack of influence that online teachers in this study have on the content and organization of their courses was repeatedly mentioned. This particular organization provides online teachers with a set curriculum (i.e., content, assessments, grading system), thereby eliminating the teacher's instructional design role. While some teachers appreciated this role reduction, nearly every teacher bemoaned the lack of course control. Jackie stated, "I think my biggest concern with [the organization] would probably be not having any influence over the content." This concern was particularly poignant when curriculum shortcomings became glaringly apparent with no given power to change them. Katie reported,

"we could just make it so much better, and it would be so much less confusing." Continuing on Katie said, "It's very difficult to not be able to have that control where you have all of that control in a brick and mortar for the most part."

Without potential to change and improve the curriculum, teachers were reduced to creating supplemental learning materials, extra materials that students may be "intrinsically motivated to do" (Katie). Without the ability to add or modify assignments and include them in the gradebook, these teacher resources often went unused. "Most of the time the student has not used the tools I have created. In order to help students succeed in my class, I have created many . . . assignment directions and examples, study guides, and even video tutorials," Katie reported. This under-utilization of teacher-created resources, was one of Katie's "biggest gripes."

This lack of content control impacted how teachers viewed themselves and their roles in the teaching environment. As a teacher focused on helping students develop important skills, Jackie was concerned that her own skills were not fully utilized in the online teaching environment. Her transition to online teaching was "hard," a fact that was aggravated by her limited roles. She said, "the first few months teaching online I felt like my only role was to grade work and hope students read my feedback and learned from it." With the content set, grading became her main responsibilities. Her concern regarding her role as an online teacher came from "not using as many of the skills" she developed as a teacher, or in other words, "the strategies you learn as a teacher to help students . . . I can't look at the data, identify a weakness, and then teach a lesson specifically to address this deficit the way you would in a normal classroom."

Sub-theme 2: Teacher grading responsibilities. With the content of the course largely set, one of the main responsibilities of these online teachers was on grading and providing feedback to students. As previously noted, online teaching is not limited to regular, weekday school hours. Similarly, online learning lacks time boundaries, allowing students to work and submit assignments at any time of the day. Katie admitted, "I still wake up sometimes on Monday and I'm like, 'ahhh!' because the kids can work over the weekend and I'm swarmed." Jacob reported that weeks leading up to the end of the semester were particularly overwhelming as students worked feverishly to catch up in their online classes. Jacob refers to these final weeks of the course as "grading marathons" as students submitted assignments "by the buckets."

The "grading-intensive" (Katie) weeks were worsened for some teachers by additional organizational responsibilities, a concern described often by Athena. In addition to her job as a full-time online teacher, Athena also worked on various administrative tasks including developing courses, trainings, and professional development for teachers. Often, she admitted to feeling "pulled in many different directions" by these different responsibilities. "It becomes difficult to balance job responsibilities . . . my role as instructor of students as well. I work to keep students first and give them my very best . . . It's difficult to maintain balance between students and instructors." This lost classroom time took a personal toll on Athena, requiring her to work "very late nights for me as I work to catch up with the student load." This late-night schedule was not limited to a singular experience; "these last couple weeks have been exhausting. And I've had some really late nights, and that's not like me . . . I have been beat."

Theme 3: Instructional

Instructional concerns are concerns that develop through the instructional environment and include ideas such as course quality and technology. This category of concerns could be

simply described as "it" concerns, or concerns originating in the instructional environment, and include the sub-themes of technology and course quality.

Sub-theme 1: Technology. The infusion of technology into the learning environment led to the development of concerns among some online teachers. Abby described herself as being "pretty good with technology," but admitted to concerns that began with her organization's "cumbersome" learning management system. Her lack of knowledge with this technology prevented her from personalizing her course for students. Inserting links, YouTube videos, PowerPoints, and games into her announcements was prerequisite knowledge for Abby in order to accomplish her goal of personalization. "Once I can get a handle on that, then I think I'll be able to personalize everything a lot better."

Jacob, an experienced teacher at his online institution, found the technology to be limiting. While Jacob's teaching philosophy mirrored a mastery approach to learning, the learning management system was set up to operate within a traditional grading system with "previous work . . . counting against" students. To match his philosophy and practice, Jacob often changed or removed earlier grades if competency on the same principle was demonstrated on later assignments. These grading practices became a lengthy manual process for him as the LMS they used was not set up for a mastery learning environment.

The technology-rich online environment introduced some teachers to concerns as they experienced technology problems in their teaching context. Emily experienced a significant concern from the auto-graded function of her organization's learning management system. The auto-graded function was character specific, meaning that unless a student composed the answer in the exact prescribed way, the question would be marked incorrect. Emily explained, "if the answer to the math question is one thousand, it accepts 1000. If you put in a comma, if you put

in a decimal point, if you put in anything before or after, it's marking it wrong." While this feature is designed to save teachers time on grading, it can also add to an instructor's workload as they must go through and manually grade questions to ensure accurate assessment.

Sub-theme 2: Course quality. The content of the courses, including their functionality and relevance, was a significant concern for some teachers. Katie noted conversations with coworkers in which they "agonized" over the current course situation, and hoped that the organization would work to improve the courses. "It hurts knowing that I have to use something that I don't think is the best," she said.

The outdated nature of some courses, some of which were purchased from course vendors, was a major stumbling block to course quality. For example, Emily reported that the social media course offered by her institution still mentioned Myspace as the biggest social network despite the fact that Facebook, the social media giant, is over 10 years old. "The class that's 10 years old, we're still teaching. So making sure that those classes are not only content-wise accurate, meeting all the standards and whatever, but making sure that the way that they're presented is with the times."

Outdated courses also suffered from broken links and unavailable resources. Leah acknowledged that linked material gets "taken down so much," and that websites "no longer support content" in older classes, leaving "holes and gaps in the content" (Katie). After a while, these gaps were often filled by the organization, but these fixes were also problematic. In one of Leah's courses, the replacement content "isn't an exact match" leading to a poor alignment between content and assessment. "Kids just bomb [the test]. And it's not their fault . . . you try to find different stuff that might kind of go with it, but you don't want to disturb the force further."

For Jackie, most of her concerns about course quality stemmed from disagreement about what should be emphasized in the courses. Jackie believed that the courses "[focus] too much on throwing facts at students and not enough time teaching them how to learn." As a teacher interested on teaching skills, Jackie found that "a lot of the soft skills I have a hard time teaching asynchronously . . . I can teach them more than I can asynchronously." Emphasizing the right content was especially challenging when an online institution is focused too much on credit recovery. Jackie continued, "I think the biggest disadvantage that online schooling is giving them right now is that a lot of times when you get into remediation, they try to dense down to do credit recovery."

Theme 4: Experience

At the intersection of instructional and relational concerns lies the theme of experience. This theme deals with the challenging and difficult experience of others, particularly students, within the learning environment. Here the sub-themes of student enrollment and placement, student movement through the course, and poor student experience are considered.

Sub-theme 1: Student enrollment and placement. For some teachers, the concerns about the student experience began with student enrollment in the courses. Leah noted that the open enrollment period for the online institution was four weeks long, meaning, teachers could have students at different positions in the learning experience based solely on when they were enrolled. "There are new students in my courses that are already four weeks behind their peers," Leah described. Emily acknowledged a similar experience in her courses. "In week one I could have the kids start week one, day one, and I could have a kid be enrolled in week four, day five." With a responsibility set on facilitating student movement through the course, the concerns of some teachers were magnified when students failed to engage in the early weeks of the course.

Even with early enrollment of students, there was no guarantee that students would be placed in the appropriate courses. As a language teacher, Jacob's courses typically built off one another, requiring students to master the concepts and skills in an earlier course in order to have a successful learning experience in a later course. However, without placement tests, the organization assumed students had prerequisite competence before registering for a course. Since not all schools are adequately aligned to the state core, there was no guarantee that students would be positioned at the appropriate course level. "When the student has the credit for [Language 1] and comes to us for [Language 2], that doesn't mean they have the proficiency of [Language 1] to start off in [Language 1]." Jacob recommended that students be placed in courses "according to ability rather than credits," but acknowledged that this would be "another test" for students.

Sub-theme 2: Student movement. The movement of a student through the course was a concern common to all teachers in this study. Once students were enrolled in the course, their pacing from the beginning of the course became a subject of concern for many online teachers. "I have a handful of students right now who have never logged in to their class," Emily reported. "We're in week eight. And there's only so much I can do." Athena was "surprised at how many students are moving slowly at the beginning of the course," but admitted that this was not "terribly unusual." With students enrolling at different times and at different paces, Athena acknowledged that "instead of having a class of thirty kids, I have 30 classes of one kid . . . for that subject," a challenging situation introduced by a flexible and personalized learning environment.

As the end of the semester approaches, many teachers reported an increased pace of student activity. "There have been kids, oh my goodness, who will not work the whole semester

and then the last week they'll try to do the whole class. And their work is really good. And I'm like, 'What are you doing?'" The challenge in these situations, as noted by many teachers, was that student's frantic end-of-semester pace often limited the learning experience. "It's not unusual for high school students to start slowly and pick up once they feel a bit more pressure," Athena admitted, "but I work to prevent that since working at the last minute is not the best for learning the material."

Students' rush to complete coursework also rushes instructor's assignment feedback, and reduces the likelihood that feedback will be utilized on later assignments. Jacob reported this danger, "if they made the mistake here, and they've moved forward so much in such a pace so fast that they didn't get the feedback, here, here, here, here." Noting the impact of this rush to complete the course on student learning, Leah similarly reported that "my feedback doesn't help them prepare for quizzes or tests, and that they are less likely to be learning the material than they are to be regurgitating facts for a test and forgetting about it." Learning, it appears, seemed to be sacrificed as students rushed to complete the course by the established deadlines.

For many teachers, student attendance seemed to be one of the greatest hindrances to student progress in the course. Jackie admitted that attendance "is always a problem in any kind of setting," but poor attendance in online settings seems to be "more unmanageable" for online teachers. "If they're not logging in, if they're not there, it's really hard to reach out to them," Jackie admitted. Inconsistent student attendance created the feeling that "[teacher's] hands are tied more." Jackie described a situation with a particular student who was reputably hard-working and competent by her parents and mentors, but failed to log into the class. "when you run into situations like that, it's frustrating because . . . there's only so much I can do from my end." Emily echoed this helpless feeling: "and online, if that kid doesn't show up, I can't do

much. I can reach out . . . you have to reply." Student attendance not only limits the learning students experience, but also the amount of help teachers can provide.

Sub-theme 3: Student experience. Some online teachers reported concerns about challenges faced by students in the course. Comparing the experience of learning with a journey to Florida, Jacob would often tell his students,

> some of you are going to go to Chicago first by train, then you're going to take a bus to Utah, then you're going to pick up a rental car and go to California and so for you it's going to be a longer route. It's going to be much more expensive whether it be your time, money, resources.

When difficulties arose with students, he would again reference this journey metaphor, saying, "well, you're not on the first-class direct, non-stop flight to Florida. And that's cool, it's okay. We're all still going to Florida but it's going to be a longer trip."

For some students, the difficulty of the course began with the content. While Katie noted that most students exhibit a great deal of excitement for new languages at the beginning, she also reported the harsh realization of students when they discovered the challenge of learning a language. "[The language is] like . . . five out of five difficulty for native English speakers to learn. And they either embrace that challenge, or they muddle through to get a grade, or they give up." Interest in the content alone does not make the language any easier, especially if students come to class without a background in the language. "I mean [the language] is really hard as it is, I think especially if you don't have any background. And so just the curriculum alone is a little overwhelming."

Beyond the student struggles with the content, some teachers reported concerns about student learning in the online environment. Jackie's concern about the student learning

experience centered on the compatibility of the course content with what she felt students need to learn to be successful in life. Jackie reflected on her courses, "at the end of the day, is it really teaching them what they need to know?" The knowledge retention of her students was also concerning to Jackie: "My students are spending so much time cramming material, selecting an answer on a multiple choice, and then immediately forgetting it again. I worry how this will translate to the world." Jackie's perspective clearly demonstrated her concern for the value and retention of knowledge that would help her students beyond the course. Leah sympathized with her students simply by saying "I felt bad for [students] because they're not getting what they should be getting from [the course]."

Theme 5: Relational

Relational, or "they" concerns, deal with the concerns that online teachers have towards others (i.e., students, mentors, parents) in the teaching and learning environment. These concerns emerge from the experiences of others as they engage in instructional environment. In the current study, this theme is limited to a discussion of student mentors and students.

Sub-theme 1: Student mentor concerns. The online institution common to all of the online teachers in this study included student mentor as part of their organizational infrastructure. These mentors are typically teachers, counselors, or administrators at the traditional schools of the students, and are given the responsibility to encourage, support, and guide the student in their online learning experience. Including student mentors in an online learning experience is designed to prevent student isolation in the online learning environment. In practice, however, traditional school districts vary in the way they implement the mentoring component of online learning. Athena described some of these variations as follows:

Some students have one hour a day devoted to their course at school, and the mentor is there with them. Others never see their mentor but are assigned someone in the building. Some mentors have a few students they are responsible for, and some have hundreds of students they are supposed to work with.

Jacob reported that he knows mentors who have "300 kids." The implementation of student mentors "can lead to differences in the student's experience and completion rate" and "in the success of students," according to Athena.

As a former student mentor, Jacob, stated that many mentors are not really "set up to be operating as mentors." He said, "they're labeled as mentors but they're more 'monitors' than they are 'mentors.' Because they're just monitoring student progress, or monitoring assignments, or monitoring their behavior, or monitoring their performance, and not really mentoring." While some student mentors may view themselves as mentors, "the majority are compliance officers," according to Jacob. This lack of mentoring can be concerning to teachers who feel deeply responsible for student learning. Jacob admitted that students mentor priorities are often different than online teachers, a misalignment that can be concerning for online teachers. "When for us instructors, that student is our priority. For those mentors, they're wearing multiple hats with competing priorities. They're really looking at their job . . . as compliance."

In addition to the concern of overloaded mentors, Leah also acknowledged that "some of the mentors just don't even seem to know how to use the courses themselves." Leah worried, "how can they help the kids if they can't even do anything?" Training mentors to be able to "have a basic understanding" and to "how to view students' grades" was critical, according to Leah.

Sub-theme 2: Student concerns. Online learning provides flexible learning options for students with unique and challenging personal circumstances. These online teachers were keenly aware of the major challenges students endure including medical issues, learning disabilities, economic distress, and social anxiety, among many others. "A lot of them are just in very interesting situations that I might find sad or horrible, or just worrisome," Katie said. In addition to teaching students who were "second or third chance students," Jackie reported "75-80% of my students have an IEP or some other health care problem which makes it difficult to be in a traditional setting."

While unique challenges arise out of students' personal circumstance, the characteristics of students presented additional concerns for some teachers. In some situations, the absence of required characteristics, including responsibility and organization skills, were most alarming for teachers. Katie mentioned, "I have had some students who do not do well in an online setting, because there's not enough structure." Students who required more structure may struggle in an online class because ultimately the responsibility of learning is largely with the students. "They can feel like they have to do it all themselves. Which a lot of it is. They are responsible for their own learning, and that's tough." Emily described the missing skillset for some students may be organizational skills. "I don't want to say lack of motivation, but maybe lack of organizational skills. Most 16 year olds . . . if they keep an agenda planner, don't pay attention to it."

One specific characteristic that appeared in several teacher accounts was the importance of student confidence. Comparing student confidence to a plate, Emily metaphorized, "You can have a plate, and if you drop it, you can piece it back together. It can look whole, but it's still broken. And that's how I felt about kids' confidence." Even when the plate is pieced back together, Emily admitted that "it's not the same as if it was never broken to begin with. And it

takes a lot more work to build a kid up than it does to break them down." Katie found in her teaching that "many students . . . may not attempt an assignment due to the feeling that they will fail." Jackie provided a poignant example of this very situation when she was working with one of her students.

> We seemed to be working through successfully and she indicated she was understanding the material well when all of the sudden she shut down and refused to try, constantly repeating that she couldn't do it. I tried encouraging her but found that no matter what I said she refused to even try.

Jackie, an online teacher at two institutions, was quick to draw comparisons between the different student populations served by each of her online institutions, illuminating the impact of organizational factors on relational concerns.

> [Institution A] I work for . . . is an at-risk school. These are students who failed out of a regular school. They didn't do well and so now they're doing online education. So a lot of them don't have those skills and they need reinforcement. Whereas I find a lot of my [Institution B] students, they have the skills.

The lack of skills with some of these students caused Jackie to "pull more from [her] arsenal" to help her students be successful than when she was teaching in at-risk, urban traditional schools. Despite the population differences between schools, Jackie admitted that "they're just still teenagers who need that kind of guidance."

> While the concerns described in this section may not be entirely unique to online teaching, the flexibility of online education attracts students with challenging circumstances who may struggle in traditional learning environments.

Theme 6: Interaction

At the intersection of relational and personal concerns lies the theme of interaction. This theme considers how online teachers may experience concern as they engage in meaningful interaction with others in the learning environment. Of particular interest in this theme are communication and relationships concerns between teachers, students, and parents.

Sub-theme 1: Communication. The importance of parental interaction was mentioned by several teachers and often cited as problematic due to limited access to parent contact information. Emily described the experience of obtaining this information as "pulling teeth," requiring her to "beg and plead for contact information" from the traditional school the student is enrolled in. Athena explained that school districts often like to surrender parental information, preferring instead to that teacher communication "go through the district." Some teachers tried to collect parent information directly from students or parents rather than hope to receive it from the district. These methods, however, are subject to inaccuracies. Emily surveyed her students at the beginning of the year and asked for parent contact information, but acknowledged that students may sometimes set the parent email as their own personal email "so when I think I could be emailing a parent, the kid sets it up so it goes right to them. It's like intercepting the mail in the mailbox, like I did when I was a kid."

In the absence of face-to-face interactions, online teachers often rely on email, phone calls, and texts to effectively communicate, modalities not commonly used between teachers and students in traditional learning environments. "It can be weird to call your teacher, or to have your teacher say, 'Hey, text me.' . . . So it's getting the kids to take that step over that line that might feel weird," Emily acknowledged. Even when the teachers initiate a phone or text

conversation, the communication depends on the students responding to the conversation request.

> It's getting them to meet me halfway and say, 'Alright, I'll text you back,' or, 'I'll answer that phone call.' Because they don't call their teachers. They don't text their teachers. So it's a little weird until you break down that barrier.

More commonly, teachers in this study reported struggling with unresponsive students. Athena reported that trying to communicate with students was like "talking to a brick wall." In the online environment, "it can be easy for them to ignore the instructor in an online class if they choose to." This unresponsiveness of students is concerning to teachers as they rely on two-way communication to understand how to best support their learning. Emily noted, "if I say, 'Hey, are you stuck on this problem because you don't get it, or because you don't want to do it?' I have to get a response from the kid to get that answer. I can't guess." Abby echoed that "knowing how [students are] struggling" was one of the hardest aspects about limited communication, and admitted that she could "probably be helping them a lot more if I had more communication with them."

Sub-theme 2: Relationships. The physical separation between individuals in the learning environment, particularly between teachers and students, was significant for most teachers in this study. Katie mentioned that "when you're in online, it's much harder to just connect, reach out, talk to people, because you aren't in the same physical space with them." Drawing comparisons from their traditional teaching experiences, many teachers admitted that relationship-building is more difficult in online spaces. Jacob admitted that "relationship building . . . the care and the affection, the sincerity in person are so much easier because the smile the empathy can all be communicated through non-verbals." Leah also acknowledged that

she was unable to be "as personal" with her students despite her efforts to "build some kind of sort of relationship with the kids." For Athena, the difference in relationships with students in traditional and online learning represented a reality of online teaching that she missed. "I do miss those connections where . . . they get you and you know, you're willing to work well together and that kind of thing."

While there are likely numerous reasons why relationship-building online is difficult, several teachers mentioned the possibility that some students may be uninterested in forming relationships with teachers. "A lot of kids kind of seem to like the anonymity that comes with being online," Athena noted. "Kids might still just hold back either because they're not interested, or they don't need that from the instructor, or they just want to get stuff done." Leah stated succinctly, "[students are] just there to get a grade. They don't care."

While student-teacher relationships appeared important for these teachers, some proposed that these relationships may also benefit students. When those connections exist, "you get that student and they get you and you know, you're willing to work well together," Athena stated. Emily believed that personal connections help teachers push their students. "It's a little bit harder that way when you don't have that personal connection to say, 'Okay, why aren't you doing your homework?'" The value of teacher relationships with students appeared to go beyond teacher satisfaction and into instructional effectiveness.

Sub-theme 3: Help opportunities limited. The physical separation of teacher and students appeared to limit teachers' perceived ability to help students. Drawing on her experience in student teaching in a traditional setting, Emily admitted that "sometimes face-to-face, you have a great personal connection with a kid that doesn't do a thing in your class . . . And online, if that kid doesn't show up, I can't do much. I can reach out, but . . . you have to

continue to work." Continuing on, Emily stated, "I can't do more than I'm already doing, shy of showing up at her house. But I don't have an address, so I can't do that either." Jackie agreed, "it's frustrating because it's like, well I don't know how much more I can do because there's only so much I can do from my end."

The limited opportunity to help students in online settings was often felt by teachers in a personal way. Leah confessed, "I don't always feel that success of like 'hey, I got a kid to care or do something.' Because often times, especially the ones who need the help the most, they never log on."

Discussion

The major themes considered in this analysis (personal, instructional, and relational), along with their intersecting themes (responsibility, experience, and interaction) correspond generally to the self, task, and student categories of concerns developed by Fuller (1970). The current study found little evidence to support the presence of Fuller's concerns model in online environments, which suggested that teachers exhibit regular and predictable patterns of concerns as they move from novice to experienced educator. The participants in this study exhibited no such pattern when considered individually or collectively. Rather, teachers' individual cases were irregular and unpredictable based on teaching experience alone. For example, three second-year teachers, Jackie, Katie, and Leah, all manifested vastly different concerns that could not be accounted for merely by years of teaching experience. The three teachers with the most experience, Emily, Jacob, and Athena, also refuted the model as they all experienced a high number of personal and instructional concerns. In general, the pattern of progression from self concerns, to task concerns, to concerns about students cannot be supported by the participants in this study.

Fuller's assertion that novice teachers do not experience high levels of concerns for their students has been widely contested in the literature (Adams, 1982; Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999; Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; Marso & Pigge, 1989; Pigge & Marso, 1997). In this study, all teachers generally experienced a high level of concern for students and their learning. Factors including the nature of the online environment (i.e., distance from students), the organization's control of the curriculum, and the limited roles of teachers may all influence early development of student concerns.

In addition to applying Fuller's model to online environments, this study also revealed that the development of concerns was significantly impacted by organizational, educational, and political factors that were external to the teacher's immediate context. Noting the impact of organizational factors on teacher attrition, Ingersoll (2002) indicated that factors such as student motivation and discipline, poor administrative support, and lack of faculty influence are top factors leading to teacher attrition. Guarino, Santibanez, and Daley (2006) reported mentoring programs, teacher autonomy, administrative support, and teacher accountability practices as additional organizational factors influencing teacher attrition. Other organizational factors contributing to teacher attrition include teacher's pedagogical preparation (Ingersoll, Merrill, and May, 2014), excessiveness of testing (Johnson, 2006), urban school demographics (Borman & Dowling, 2008), quality of facilities (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Ladd, 2011), instructional resources given to teachers (Borman & Dowling, 2008), and opportunities for career growth (Johnson, 2006).

While no research has been conducted to understand the retention and attrition of online teachers, in our study we found that online teachers may be similarly impacted by many of these same organizational factors as classroom teachers. All of the participants in the current study

lacked formal online pedagogical training prior to their current teaching positions, a significant predictor of teacher attrition in traditional settings. Six of the seven teachers bemoaned the lack of autonomy and curriculum control, a factor aggravated by outdated and poorly written content. As a teacher at two different online schools, Jackie admitted the lack of control given to her at one institution, describing this reality as her "biggest concern." The practices, policies, and structures implemented at an organization level appear to have had a significant impact on the development of teacher's concerns among teachers in this study.

In addition to organizational factors, the current study suggests that political factors may also affect the development of teacher concerns. A poignant example that illustrated the influence of political factors was provided by Emily, a four-year online teacher. Recent education legislation passed in her state threatened her ability to upgrade her teaching credentials, a situation that could undermine the long-term vitality of her teaching institution. The dramatic rise of online education has left state governments scrambling to determine how online education will fit in the current educational context. Of particular concern to online teachers may be states' efforts to certify online teachers and hold schools and teachers accountable for student performance (Gemin et al., 2015). State policies regarding teacher certification varies from state to state, but most states still require teachers to be certified in the state they teach (Gemin et al., 2015). While online education has access to large amounts of quality data that could be used to assess students, teachers, and programs (Watson, 2007), online education continues to struggle with accountability systems that do not properly acknowledge "schools with high rates of student mobility or a high number of students who enter as over-age or under credited" (Gemin et al., 2015 p.110). As online education continues to be considered in

the political discourse, legislative action and inaction may continue to have a significant impact on the concerns of online teachers.

Finally, factors within the larger educational context have the potential to impact the concerns of online teachers. One educational factor that greatly impacted the teachers in this study was the lack of perceived legitimacy of online education. While state and organization reports have noted the general devaluing of the teaching profession (American Federation of Teachers - Michigan & Michigan Education Association, 2016; Owens, 2015), online education is involved in its own struggle for legitimacy. A recent report published by the Sloan Consortium has detected very little change in the acceptance of online education since 2002 (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, & Straut, 2016). Their report indicated that faculty acceptance of online courses has hovered consistently around 30% despite the increasing number of online student enrollments.

This lag of acceptance, present in the general population as well, is likely influenced by perceived questionable course quality in online settings. A survey by Northeastern University (2012) found that 42% of Americans viewed online courses as inferior to traditional courses. Within the K-12 environment, concerns persist about the quality of courses in online environments (Picciano & Seaman, 2009), although this negative perception of course quality has fallen nearly 20% since 2003 (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Within the current study, teachers reported the impact of the greater educational context in their individual experiences. Leah noted that principals in traditional schools failed to appreciate her online teaching experience in considering her for open positions in traditional school settings. Leah also noted that students often did not view her online course as a "real class." The struggle for legitimacy within the educational context is a factor that impacts the development of online teacher's concerns.

Taken together, the external organizational, political, and educational factors were serious drivers of teacher's concerns in this study. Each of these factors extend unequally across state, school, and individual contexts, and produce varied experiences of online instructors. While some of these factors may be beyond the control of teachers or schools to control, careful consideration should be given to factors that are amenable and likely to improve the experiences of online teachers.

Limitations

Unlike earlier studies on teacher concerns found in traditional teaching literature, the concerns of online teachers in our study did not appear to follow predictable patterns of concerns based on teaching experience. Rather, the patterns of concerns which emerged were impacted more by organizational, political, and educational factors external to the teaching situation. Despite these findings, the conclusions we draw are limited due to various methodological factors. First, this research included participants from a single online institution which followed an independent study model of online education. While two participants also taught at another online institution with a synchronous learning environment, most of the concerns explored arose from their experience at the shared institution. Drawing participants from different schools may have illuminated different patterns of concerns influenced by a different online learning model or organizational structure. Second, research was limited to a small number of participants who responded to email invitations and indicated their willingness to participate. While this small sample size was intentionally designed due to methodological considerations, including more participants may have provided some helpful cases to discover new concerns or to gain a better understanding of concerns already observed. Third, this study was limited to the first half of the school year. A more longitudinal study may have illuminated new concerns at different times of

the year, or provided added insight into the pervasiveness and persistence of various teacher concerns over time. Fourth, none of the teachers had taught online for five years, a fact that keeps all participants in the beginner teacher phase (Ingersoll, 2003). To understand how teachers transition in their online teaching concerns over time, we would need to study teachers with a longer online teaching history—a difficult task in an emerging profession. Finally, the negative connotation associated with "concerns" may negatively prejudice the participant's experience and may not reflect an accurate view of their holistic experience. While this study was specifically designed to consider concerns of online teachers, it is important to note that the participants also spoke freely of many positive aspects of online teaching. Additionally, six of the seven online teachers fully anticipated maintaining or even increasing their employment in online teaching, a fact signifying at least some level of satisfaction with their position. Despite this limitation, exploring concerns of online teachers remains a profitable inquiry into the challenges and shortcomings of the developing field of online K-12 education.

Implications for Research and Practice

From this study we make several recommendations for future research and practice. While additional research featuring a larger, more diverse sample of online teachers has already been suggested, future research could also explore the dispositions and characteristics of online teachers that enable them to persist and succeed despite serious concerns, as well as what support structures are most helpful in overcoming them. This paper also discussed the possible impact of teacher concerns on teacher attrition and retention challenges, a topic unexplored in the current research. It is unknown if the same attrition problems that plague the traditional education system affects online education, or if the distinctness of the online environment produces different patterns of attrition. Online K-12 education, while still an emerging field, should begin

to provide insight into the career mobility and attrition patterns of online teachers. Such research could provide valuable information to be used in program and organizational design in both online and traditional K-12 settings.

The results of the current research also have implications for practice. Fuller suggested (Fuller, 1969; Fuller & Bown, 1975; Fuller, Parsons, & Watkins, 1974) that teacher preparation programs and professional development opportunities should be more focused on resolving the current, relevant concerns of teachers. While Fuller's concerns model was not supported by this study, the experiences of these online teachers suggest that training opportunities targeted at improving these concerns would be useful. Additionally, policies and practices at an organizational level should be enacted only after careful consideration of their impact on teachers. Dialogue between teachers and organizations must be established to understand the impact of these organizational decisions on online teachers.

Conclusion

This study explored concerns of seven online K-12 teachers from a single online institution in the Midwestern United States, who came from different content areas with varied levels of teaching experience in both online and traditional settings. Data from this study revealed that these online teachers experienced three main categories of concerns: personal, instructional, and relational, and that these categories intersect, illuminating concerns about teacher responsibility, experience, and interaction. While this study is information, further research is needed into the experience of online teachers if online learning is to continue to play an increasingly important role in K-12 education.

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APPENDIX A: Case Studies

When conducting research using interpretative phenomenological analysis to analyze multiple cases, each case is considered individually before findings are synthesized together. In the current research, part of my process during this step involved writing up individual case studies to synthesize the ideas presented in each case before moving on to the next. I felt like this was an important step because it took me back to the data to understand what concerns really were salient in the experiences of these teachers. Only concerns that were noted repeatedly, described at great length, or were given added emphasis by the participant (i.e., "the *biggest* gripe I have") were considered in these case studies.

Abby - Case Study

Abby is currently in her first year of online teaching and her 20th year as a traditional teacher where she teaches several levels of language courses. In addition to teaching languages, her online institution recently offered her a section of a civics course which she is set to start in January of 2017. In her traditional setting, Abby splits her instructional time between a middle and a high school because there is not enough demand for her language to justify full-time employment in a single school.

Despite her early desire to be a teacher, the lack of employment opportunities for teachers during the early 1980s persuaded her to move in a different direction than her initial ambition. Because of an intense interest and passion for languages and cultures, she obtained an associates degree in travel and tourism and began working in that industry. Her time in the travel industry was short-lived as government actions spurred changes that led to job loss among airlines and other tourism entities. During this time, Abby also got married, had a few kids, and generally lost her desire to be away from her family for long periods of time. Luckily for her, the

education field had begun to rebound and teaching became a viable option for individuals who wanted to work while preserving time for family. She returned to school to pursue her education degree, majoring in language teaching, where her love of culture was coupled with her desire to teach.

Abby's teaching experience began during her student teaching, where she was placed in a struggling urban school. Her concerns during this experience were common to many novice teachers; learning to manage student behavior, working with a challenging cooperating teacher, and operating with a lack of adequate material. In addition to these challenges, Abby's placement lacked access to basic classroom technologies (i.e., printers, projectors). These concerns shifted dramatically when she graduated with her teaching degree and found placement in an affluent neighborhood school where she "had everything." After a few years of teaching part-time, and after obtaining a social studies endorsement, Abby began teaching full-time, splitting her workload between language and civic courses.

Path to Online Teaching

Abby was encouraged to apply for an online teaching job with her current institution by a friend who endorsed the reputability of the online institution. After hearing the job description, Abby applied for the job and received an offer to teach language courses. Following her hiring, Abby attended two days of face-to-face training where she was able to learn some of the basics of the LMS used by the institution and met with other teachers in her department. This social support structure with other teachers appears to be a significant factor for Abby as she often laments the lack of similar face-to-face support opportunities.

Abby's position in this study is unique. Not only is she the most experienced teacher in the traditional setting, but she is also the most inexperienced online teacher among all

participants. Her inexperience as an online teacher may illuminate concerns that are unique to online teaching. Additionally, her perspective may help illustrate how concerns of online teacher are impacted by teaching experience in traditional settings.

Theme 1: Organizational Infrastructure

The sub-themes represented here are embedded in the institutional organization. These themes are largely out of the control of the instructor but within the control of the local organization. While many of these concerns may apply to online teachers in other organizations, these themes are likely to vary across different organizations.

Sub-theme 1: Training and support. As a new teacher, Abby keenly felt the inadequacy of the training she received when she was first hired as a teacher. "Being an online instructor is difficult when one has only one day of training in regards to the gradebook and online curriculum a month before the courses begin." The challenge for Abby seemed to stem from instruction that was far removed from actual practice; it lacked immediate relevancy but became relevant well after the training concluded. "They kind of just said . . ., 'Well this is how you do it . . . this is how you log on. And this is how you access your email' . . . At the time it seemed like, 'Oh, okay. Yeah, I get it . . .' And then when you're actually trying to do it on your own, you're totally lost." More face-to-face, just-in-time training would be welcomed by Abby.

The lack of initial training Abby received was compounded by the difficulty in finding and using ongoing supports. For Abby, a set of "written instructions . . . step-by-step instructions of how to begin a course and how to end a course" would be highly desirable. Lacking these useful resources, Abby often got lost in the supportive materials that were provided and found them largely overly generalized and lacking organization to answer her specific questions. "There's links that I can click on to watch different videos about how to do

certain things . . . If I want to spend an hour watching a video that I only need two minutes of information about, that's what I think is the problem."

Abby's difficulty in navigating available resources may be influenced by not knowing the right questions to ask, or knowing the right individual to approach with her questions. "It's hard to even find the way that I'm supposed to find out how to do it," Abby reported. "Maybe they have them and I just don't know. So maybe I just need to reach out and you know, ask the right people. Maybe I'm not asking the right people." Regardless of the reason behind this concern, the experience was "nerve-wracking" and time consuming for Abby. "When questions arise, finding solutions may take a day or two," time that is already difficult to manage.

Sub-theme 2: Familiarity with course. Towards the end of her first semester, Abby was offered an additional course with her online institution. This was a welcomed offer, enabling her to make a little extra money. At the time of our conversation, her concerns about this new course were heightened as she lacked access to the new course she would be teaching just weeks before it was set to begin. "[The course is] going to be starting in a couple weeks . . . it's been on my mind, you know, just to make sure that I know what I'm doing." The concern was impacted by the winter vacation as her organization went on break at the same time as she was trying to gain access to her course.

As a novice teacher with new content, familiarity with the course was extremely important. "The biggest concern is knowing the curriculum. Like being aware of what the students are doing on their end, versus what I see on my end." Gaining access to the content and having the opportunities to become familiar with it appeared to be important in order to form appropriate expectations for herself and her students.

Theme 2: Technology

These themes represent concerns introduced into the teaching situation as a result of the technology-rich environment of online teaching. They include ideas such as technology knowledge, problems with technology, and the difficulty in problem solving and troubleshooting technology problems when they occur. For Abby, these concerns regarding technology are prolific and profound.

Sub-theme 1: Technology understanding. Abby's concern regarding her technology understanding begins with her organization's learning management system. As a new teacher in a new system, much of the communication with her students was copied from more experienced teachers. Her lack of knowledge with this technology prevented her from personalizing her announcements and resources. "I feel like once I learn more about [the LMS], I would like to start doing my announcements more personalized, and I would like to be able to put a little bit more modern types of technology in my announcements." Inserting links, YouTube videos, PowerPoints, and games into her announcements is definitely important knowledge for Abby to know in order to accomplish her goal of personalization. "Once I can get a handle on that, then I think I'll be able to personalize everything a lot better."

Sub-theme 2: Using technology. Despite her self-admitted aptitude with technology, Abby admitted that using the required technology can be "cumbersome" and require a great deal of time. Again, her concern about her regular use of the technology begins with the LMS. "I think it's hard to kind of read the gradebook. Like the way that it's set up is not . . . to me, it's not very informative. So it's hard for me to understand what all of the information is." Abby suspects that there may be a way to set up the gradebook in a more intuitive way. However, Abby admitted "I'm afraid to change it around because I'm afraid I might mess something up."

As an online teacher, Abby has relied heavily on student data to understand student progress. Concerns with technology that hinder her ability to view student data were particularly aggravating. "I am still learning all of the programs at this new position, I am finding it difficult to understand how to access all of the student data." She admitted that part of her problem in accessing student data may be the personal technology she used for this task. "I also now realize that using a tablet is not an effective way to manage this job. I was hoping to buy a new laptop with my paychecks, but I haven't made enough money to save up for one yet."

Theme 3: Teaching Task Concerns

These themes represent tasks that are not primarily concerned with the student experience or embedded in the organizational infrastructure. These concerns may be more global to online learning generally, or more local to the individual instructor.

Sub-theme 1: Compensation. While compensation concerns are not unique to online teachers, Abby's experience with compensation describes the influence of expectations on teachers' concerns. When Abby was hired at her institution, she was told that the rate of pay would be "$125 per student per academic term. So when we heard that, being regular public school teachers, a term is half of a semester." However, at a future meeting, she was informed that the "term" at the institution actually referred to an academic school year. "Our expectations of the compensation . . . was cut seventy-five percent. So we were pretty shocked about that, and kind of felt like it was misleading a little bit."

Despite these unmet expectations, Abby admits that she would gladly transition to full-time online teaching. "If you're full-time, it might be worth your money . . . The position I was talking about that opened up . . . the base salary was like $60,000. So that's something that would be manageable. But right now it's not. A full-time position might be something I would

think about, but other than that I wouldn't be able to afford it." While full-time teaching would be compensated adequately for Abby's needs, she admitted that available full-time positions are few. "Making a living at it would be very, very difficult . . . [the organization] doesn't have many full-time instructors . . . So there's very, very few people that can actually make a full time living at it." As a result, Abby is faced with settling for part-time employment as an online teacher while she maintains her full-time employment in a traditional school.

Sub-theme 2: Poor job outlook. Closely related to her concern with work compensation is her job outlook. "I don't foresee being able to make a living as a part-time instructor. It is a concern to me because I would love to be able to work from home, but financially, it could never happen." With the inability to make a living as a part-time instructor and a lack of available full-time jobs, Abby was doubtful that the ability to work from home as an online instructor is possible. "It would be really nice if I could eventually retire from my face-to-face teaching job and then do this part-time. Or even-full time. But I just don't see that happening . . . I don't see that full-time position happening."

Her concern about her future job outlook is particularly concerning because of her desire to transition to a full-time online teacher. "Very few people can actually make a full time living at it. I would love to get to that point, because I really, really like the school . . . So it would be nice if I could get to that point. I don't know if it will ever happen."

Sub-theme 3: Balancing time with other job. As a full-time traditional teacher, balancing her work between her two jobs is a difficult task. "I have way more work than I can handle." With her work in the full-time position alone, time is a rare commodity. "I'm just trying to keep up with my full-time job and my part-time job." Abby recognized that her lack of time prevented her from learning and implementing technology for the improvement of her

courses. "If I didn't work full time as a teacher, there would be a lot of time for me to work on, you know, putting all those cool technology effects into my online job."

Sub-theme 4: Unsure of personal effectiveness. As a new teacher, Abby was concerned with her personal effectiveness. "I want to do a good job, but am not sure if I am or not!" Her desire to know her effectiveness led her to search for evidence to validate her efforts, a search that was challenging. "[Evaluating your effectiveness is] difficult. It is . . . I'm still not really sure. I mean, besides looking at the student's grades . . . I'm still kind of in the dark about that. You know, did they succeed because of me?" While student grades may not be the perfect measure of teacher effectiveness, it appears to be the best measure Abby could find. "The grade that the student gets I think reflects on me, or I feel, you know, responsible for that in some sense." A positive teacher evaluation conducted later in the year gave at least a little piece of mind to Abby that she lacked towards the beginning of the year.

Theme 4: Relationships

The relationships between Abby and other agents in the teaching and learning environment are considered in this theme. For Abby, the communication between individuals in the learning environment represent the focus of this concern as she engages in online teaching.

Sub-theme 1: Mismatch in communication mode preferences. It is clear that Abby's preference for communication is face-to-face interaction. This is particularly true when she is looking for support and help in resolving some of her questions and concerns. "It's still hard because it's so much easier for me just to talk to someone and try to resolve it, you know, resolve a problem visually, face-to-face basically." She assumed face-to-face communication was likely easier for the person offering the support as well. "I feel like even for the people I'm asking it's got to be a lot more complicated for them too to have to explain it to me through a written

conversation." The difficulty of explaining possible problems and the time it takes to communicate the problem is concerning.

The challenge for Abby seemed to be the mismatch in communication preferences between her and her online organization. While Abby would prefer to "just walk to the next classroom or down the hall to get help from a colleague," her organization seems fixed on written forms of communication. Part of the reason for this practice is the asynchronous nature of various teaching tasks. "A lot of times [written is] the only way we can [communicate], because they're, off doing something else . . . or I'm busy at the time. So far . . . everything's been resolved. It's just I think a way more complicated way of solving it." While she accepts this concern as a reality, it is clear that other forms of communication would be preferable for Abby.

Sub-theme 2: Communication with students. Abby has always considered herself a social person so interacting with students is really important to her. The lack of interaction with her students is troubling. "I don't know these kids except for interacting with them the minimal amount that I do through, you know messaging them." Even getting minimal interaction from students can be a challenge. "Some of the students like you just don't hear from. And you know, you contact the mentors and you don't hear back from them. You contact the students, you don't hear back from them."

While communicating with students is concerning, Abby also struggles with two-way interaction with students, particularly conversations initiated by students. "I don't get hardly anybody asking me questions. I mean every once in awhile there might be a technical question that they ask . . . That's definitely something I would want to do more, is, have a lot more interaction with them. But usually when I comment on their assignments or things like that, you

know I'm always like, 'Well if you have any questions, I'm always here!' But I don't hear a lot back from them." Even in a language course that requires conversation, Abby admitted that "there's no back and forth conversation."

The lack of communication and interaction with students is concerning largely because it is difficult to know how students are faring in the course with limited teacher-student interaction. "And understanding how they're struggling. I think that's probably the hardest thing, because there's not a whole lot of communication. So I don't really know what they're doing on a daily basis, you know? And I could probably be helping them a lot more if I had more communication with them." The real significance behind this communication concern is that it impacts how Abby is able to support her students.

Theme 5: Student Experience

This theme considers the instructor's relationship to students, how instructors conceive of the student experience in the online course, and how an instructor experiences concern for their students. While Abby is often concerned with student interaction, progress, and course completion, the primary concern for Abby in this theme is understanding and interpreting student data.

Sub-theme 1: Student data. Abby's concern about student data begins with understanding the learning management system used by her organization. While this system includes a great deal of student data, this data was not always easy for Abby to understand. "It's hard for me to understand what all of the information is. There's a lot of data there, but a lot of it doesn't mean very much to me. You know, and maybe a lot of it I just really need to disregard, and I don't know that."

Understanding the meaning of student data was significant because it is difficult to fully understand "where [students] should actually be" in regards to the course. "It's very hard to know, 'Are these kids doing okay? Because all I see is that you've done, maybe 15%. And of the 15% that you did, you're fine. But how are you going to do on the other 85%? And are you going to be able to do the other 85%?'" Recognizing the current student position, and to be able to reasonably predict how they will fare in the future, seems contingent on understanding student data.

In addition to understanding current student data, Abby also feels like other important student data is missing. In particular, having student performance data from other classes would be helpful to determine the magnitude of potential student difficulties. "I think it would be helpful if I knew how they were doing in other classes, because, in my face-to-face classes, that's how I kind of check up on students. I'm like, 'Okay, well they're doing nothing in my class. Let's see how they're doing in all their other classes.'" Knowing how students are performing in other classes could help Abby know if proper interventions should require the involvement of additional individuals.

Theme 6: Concerns through Experience

While Abby's online teaching experience is limited, her experience has helped her resolve concerns that were significant when she was first hired. It appears that concluding a complete cycle of courses has eliminated or reduced at least some of her major concerns. In particular, her knowledge and familiarity with the courses she teaches and her job expectations are two areas where her concerns have changed with experience.

Sub-theme 1: Content and course knowledge. At the beginning of her teaching experience, Abby was concerned about the content of the course, particularly because her access

to the course was limited to just prior to when the course began. "I think when I was at the beginning, I was concerned about just knowing what the curriculum was . . . I had the job like the beginning of August, and we didn't really get the curriculum released to us till right before the classes started . . . I didn't have a lot of time to even, you know, look over the curriculum and organize it and organize my thoughts about it. So that's not a problem anymore."

While this same concern of access and course knowledge repeated recently when she was asked to teach a new course in a different content area, it is likely that this will also fade away once the new class concludes. "I have one term under my belt. I feel for comfortable now because I am teaching the same course again."

Sub-theme 2: Lack of expectations. Beginning a new position was concerning for Abby because of a lack of expectations. Part of that concern was about knowing what was expected of her by her employer. With a little experience now behind her, these expectations are more clear. "I understand a bit better what is required of me by my employer. I was nervous about not doing a good job, but I received a good evaluation from my supervisor, so that makes me feel good."

While Abby continues to work through other concerns in regards to her online teaching position, some of her concerns have been largely resolved by virtue of going through an entire teaching cycle.

Athena - Case Study

Athena is currently in her fifth year of online teaching at her institution where she works as one of the few full-time social studies instructors. In addition to her full-time teaching position, Athena is also the lead social studies instructor, a position that includes added administrative responsibilities. During our second interview, Athena announced that she would

be resigning from her full-time and lead teacher position to take an administrative position within the organization. While some of her concerns during this second interview are related to this new position, the focus of this analysis will reside with her concerns associated with teaching.

Since a very young age, Athena's close connections with her teachers instilled within her a desire to be a teacher, a desire she fought during her early college years. When she began taking classes in college, her initial hesitations gave way to a felt "natural progression" from her major coursework to the field of education. Additionally, Athena had opportunities to teach dance lessons and admitted that these experiences also "pushed" her towards education.

Athena described her teacher preparation in college as "decent," acknowledging her one-semester student teaching assignment as the "best education" for teaching. Her education continued with a master's degree in curriculum and instruction, an experience that helped her further develop expertise in lesson planning and assessment. Her master's coursework also included some technology courses, although she admitted that this technology training was inadequate for her current online teaching position.

Move to Online Teaching

Athena's experience in the traditional classroom illustrated a gradual shift from full-time face-to-face teaching to full-time online instruction. As a traditional teacher, she was always "looking for ways to make what [she] was doing work better for students," and technology appeared to hold great promise for her students. She often took professional development courses and conferences geared towards using technology and would implement these new ideas "right away" when she returned to her classroom. One particularly meaningful course was offered by her school district that encouraged teachers to make their content more available to

students by placing content online. She began to experiment with her AP course by putting a test bank of questions online for students to work through on their own.

From these early experiments in blended learning, Athena and a couple of other teachers persuaded her local school district to "try a couple of online classes" with their students. Each teacher designed the online courses slightly differently; some teachers transferred the majority of their content into the online environment, whereas other teachers supplemented face-to-face activities with online supports typical of blended learning models. These early experiences were significant events in a gradual transition from traditional to online teaching.

After teaching in a traditional teaching role for over 14 years, a part-time online teaching position opened up at her current institution. She applied, received the job, and worked in this position concurrently with her full-time traditional job until a full-time position opened up a year later. Athena admitted that after working in a big school district for so many years, she was "frustrated" with various elements of her position including pay cuts, rising insurance costs, and a lack in "leadership responsibility." These factors created a situation where she felt "ready for a change," a change that online teaching provided.

Athena's role in this study is unique. Not only is she one of the more veteran online instructors in the study, but she also has the distinct perspective of being in administrative role within the online organization. Her roles within her institution provide valuable insights into the influence of institution's policy, structure, and practices on the development of teachers' concerns.

Theme 1: Organizational Infrastructure

The sub-themes represented here are embedded in the institutional organization. These themes are largely out of the control of the instructor but within the control of the local

organization. While many of these concerns may apply to online teachers in other organizations, these themes are likely to vary across different organizations. Athena's position as a lead instructor, and the added duties and responsibilities of that position, influences the development of her concerns and presents new perspectives on concerns that may be shared by other online teachers.

Sub-theme 1: Lack of control. Athena admitted that online teachers at her organization lack the ability to control the course content. With her position as a lead teacher with additional insight into the organization, Athena placed the blame for course quality and fixedness with the vendors of the courses and not with the organization. "It seems that the vendor courses . . . a lot of times, like there's nothing we can do in the course itself. We can fix our LMS, our shell, and add details or resources or, you know, kind of guide students through some of the issues. But if it's in outside content, we have no way to change that." Athena also predicted that the most unsatisfactory course are the courses the company purchases from the vendor, and "not with the courses that we build."

While this information is insightful, Athena was also constrained by the lack of course control. As a teacher focused on teacher-student connections, the inability to better build these connections was concerning. "I'll try to create ways for them to engage with me a little bit more, and they just don't always pick up on it. And I can't always make them if it's not for a grade." Without the ability to create new course requirements and holding students accountable for their participation, Athena's attempts for better connections with students remained optional.

Sub-theme 2: Communication with parents. As an instructor, Athena was active in reaching out to parents and mentors to help her students progress in the course. While that communication was important for Athena, "the difficulty is in getting accurate contact

information for all parties involved in the student's education." Again, her perspective on the administrative side of the organization provided useful insight. "I try to collect parent information. Sometimes it's not accurate. Sometimes it's difficult for us to get that as a [virtual] school. Schools don't always want to give that to us, they kind of keep it private and think that stuff should go through the district as opposed to the [virtual] school." Lacking the ability to "catch parents" and discuss the progress of their students, Athena was often limited to contacting students and mentors, both of whom were inconsistent in their responsiveness.

Sub-theme 3: Stress from extra duties. This sub-theme, closely related to the following sub-theme about balance, considers the general impact of Athena's extra duties on her concerns. While Athena appreciates the opportunities for administrative tasks and the confidence the organization demonstrates in asking her to perform these tasks, she acknowledged her organization's expectation for her to perform tasks "outside of [her] normal duties." Admittedly, Athena enjoyed these tasks, but there remained a concern that these tasks were imposed on her. "I like to do [professional development], and I like to present to teachers, so I was kind of like 'volun-told.' That's the word we use a lot. Like, 'Hey, we'd love for you to do this. Thanks.'"

The long list of tasks that Athena performs for her organization included reviewing courses from vendors, preparing and giving presentations, attending meetings, planning and delivering professional development, and evaluating teachers. These tasks, considered "extra work" in Athena's mind, contributed to her feeling of "running around like a maniac" as she tried to complete all of these tasks beyond her teaching duties.

Sub-theme 4: Balancing additional responsibilities. Related to the previous sub-theme, this sub-theme specifically focuses on the impact of Athena's added responsibilities on

her work with her online students. Additionally, the personal impact of her effort to complete her teaching responsibilities along with her extra duties is also considered.

Engaging in administrative duties besides her teaching responsibilities resulted in the feeling of being "pulled in many different directions." Athena reported, "It becomes difficult to balance job responsibilities that I am given with my role as instructor of students as well. I work to keep students first and give them my very best . . . It's difficult to maintain balance between students and instructors." Clearly, her desire to give students the best instruction aggravated this concern. "I feel I could give more to my students if I spent less time on the administrative end."

In addition to giving students her personal best, Athena acknowledged the amount of lost instruction time with these added responsibilities. "I also worry about the time it takes me to complete these responsibilities that are part of my job but also take away time I could use for students." Although online teaching is not limited to a physical space, Athena mentioned being frequently "out of the classroom" for meetings and other administrative duties.

This lost classroom time takes a personal toll on Athena, a comment Athena frequently mentioned. "We have an assignment turnaround deadline to keep because providing feedback in a timely manner is important for student growth and success. These other duties though have made some very late nights for me as I work to catch up with the student load." This late-night schedule was not limited to a singular experience, but seemed to span weeks rather than mere days. "These last couple weeks have been exhausting. And I've had some really late nights, and that's not like me . . . I have been beat." The accompanying "higher than normal" stress level appeared to be impacted by a lack in physical and temporal boundaries in online teaching and administration. "It's difficult to balance your schedule as an online teacher because your hours that you are available appear to be 24 hours a day."

Theme 2: Relationships

The relationship between Athena and her students are considered in this theme. While Athena was generally comfortable with her transition to online teaching, a lack of teacher-student interactions was repeated frequently in her interviews and journal entries. Comparisons between traditional and online settings were common as she described her experience in forming relationships with students.

Sub-theme 1: Relationships with students. Admittedly, Athena was a student-centered teacher who thrived on personal relationships and interactions with students. "As somebody who really enjoys students, you know, and working with students, I miss that classroom atmosphere of just chatting." This interaction with students was more than simply missed, it was an important element for her own well-being as a teacher. "Without having as much interaction with the students that kind of carries you along. So I still love it, I do really enjoy it . . . but I miss that interaction with the kids a lot." Athena also believed that students benefit from close teacher-student connections. When those connections exist, "you get that student and they get you and you know, you're willing to work well together." The relationship between student and teacher is significant for teachers and students to be successful.

Although Athena admitted that it took a "little bit more time maybe to connect with [students]," she constantly tried to "reach out for more of those opportunities." Athena used strategies like discussion boards to facilitate these kinds of interactions but reported that students do not always "pick up on" her attempts to connect. "I try to connect with them . . . not just in a teacherly way but like, 'hey, what's new with you? What's going on with you?' And again, that's been like a big frustration for me as like a lot of kids . . . they don't necessarily pick up on that."

A reality Athena discovered was that her online students may "like the anonymity that comes with being online." Although she tried to create a "classroom feel" in her online environment, she suggested that perhaps "kids don't need it as much, but I do." Part of the reason why students may "hold back" from opportunities to engage may be because of the students are "not interested, or they don't need that from the instructor" or because their focus is to "get stuff done" rather than interacting.

Theme 3: Communication

This theme of communications includes the act, mode, and effectiveness of communication, particularly with students.

Sub-theme 1: Communication with students. The concern of communication with students started with unresponsive students. Athena compared communicating with some students to "talking to a brick wall, you're like sending messages and you don't get much back. So that can be frustrating." The online environment makes it easy for students to "ignore the instructor . . . if they choose to" but Athena also admitted that some students may not respond to instructors because they may not know "where to see their messages." A combination of personal and technology factors may contribute to the unresponsiveness of students.

Athena described great difficulty in communicating effectively with students, particularly at the beginning of a course. The challenge for her was that communication initiated by students was very formalized, a concern for Athena due to her desire to have personable relationships with students. "At the beginning [students are] very . . . almost like formal about how they message me and say things like, you know, 'My test shut down. Could you please reopen it? Thank you.' The end." Communication at the beginning seemed very focused on immediate needs of the students as it related to their course whereas Athena craved conversations to extend

beyond the immediate instructional purpose. As time progressed and as students got more familiar with the course and the instructor, Athena admitted that students become "a little bit more like a human instead of like just kind of robotic from behind the screen."

Communication at the beginning of the course also impacted the questions students asked. Here, too, Athena reported students being "less personable" in their questions. "In the beginning they're more hesitant to even ask any questions. They might ask questions because they're confused about how to work the technology, but . . . less personable, I guess, in their questions." While the concerns about establishing relationships and communities with students has stayed persistent for Athena throughout her experience, the specific concerns related to communication with students seemed to be more poignant at the beginning of the course.

Theme 4: Understanding the Student Experience

This theme considers the instructor's relationship to students, how instructors conceive of the student experience in the online course, and how an instructor experiences concern for their students.

Sub-theme 1: Student movement through the course. Athena admitted that her concerns "usually" have to do with student progress. These concerns typically started with a new course as students were slow to begin their course. "I am often surprised at how many students are moving slowly at the beginning of the course. While it is frustrating to see how many students are slow to start, it's not terribly unusual." While most students begin the course early on in the semester, Athena worried that continued slow student progress would prevent students from completing the course. "I always become concerned that they may not finish." Slow student progress means that students are not only less likely to complete the course, but also more likely to cram the material near the end and limit their ability to learn. "It's not

unusual for high school students to start slowly and pick up once they feel a bit more pressure, but I work to prevent that since working at the last minute is not the best for learning the material." Additionally, students who failed to make consistent course progress fell behind the recommended pace, a situation that often lead to student frustration.

Student's movement through the course was aggravated by the reality that each student may be on a slightly different pace as the others, a condition that felt like having "thirty classes of one kid." Having students working at a different pace made it difficult for Athena to assess her students' positions towards learning. "Because they're all in different places a lot of times, it takes a little bit more work I think to see where they are . . . in terms of the whole picture. You know, how are they doing overall? Because they could be anywhere in the course."

Theme 5: Concerns with Experience

As an experienced traditional teacher with several years of online teaching experience, the development of concerns is unique to Athena's experience. Additionally, the added roles and responsibilities that she also fulfills also adds to the uniqueness of her concerns.

Sub-theme 1: Concerns largely unchanged. When asked about how her concerns have changed with experience, Athena responded, "I think they're probably not incredibly different." She acknowledged that some online teachers, particularly part-time teachers, often struggle to invest themselves fully with their online students and therefore do not experience enough concern for their students. Athena's experience is admittedly different from these teachers. "I never really thought about like, you know, 'These aren't my students,' or you know, 'They're just my part-time job.'" Athena's high level of concern for her students remained constant throughout her years of online teaching.

Despite this constancy in concern towards for students, Athena admitted an increase in concern for student in a very specific way. "I guess I didn't worry too much about, you know, 'Are they reaching out, are they, you know . . . like what kind of community is it in the classroom?' before. But I'd say now, yeah, that has become something I try to bring in more of." Athena's desire for student interaction, and her desire for a classroom community, has only increased as she has gained more experience, perhaps due to the increased time separation from her years as a traditional teacher.

Sub-theme 2: Course improving with time. Athena acknowledged that her concerns towards course quality has changed since she began teaching as a part-time instructor. Interestingly, this change stems not from her accumulated teaching experience but with the institution's adoption of new courses. "When I was part-time, we used a different . . . vendor for AP Psych. And now we do have our own course. So some of the issues I had then were in like making that coursework. It was . . . very frustrating coursework."

With administrative responsibilities, her ability to influence course design also appeared to alleviate some of these earlier concerns about course quality. "I had very little I could do to add to the course in any way. I couldn't augment anything. It was tough to even add announcements. So now that it's our own course, there's a lot more I can do with it, just in terms of resources I provide to students, or guidance I can give them through some of the material. It's, I think, a much better course experience for them. And for me." It is interesting to note that this influence with courses was only mentioned by Athena, suggesting that teacher's concerns about course quality may be related to the degree of institutional influence they possess over the design of courses.

Emily - Case Study

Emily is currently in her fourth year teaching online math courses and some electives. Prior to teaching online, Emily taught for a year and a half in a traditional setting and spent eight years as a substitute teacher in a face-to-face setting. From an early point in her education, Emily developed an interest in teaching. She excelled in school and was often called upon to teach and tutor her peers. During her secondary years, Emily enrolled in Teacher Academy, a program at her local technical school that provided training for aspiring teachers. This program gave her 2,000 hours of classroom experience in multiple education contexts (i.e., kindergarten, special education, high school) even before she enrolled in her formal teacher education program. Her teacher education program in college consisted of three semesters of largely classroom-based experience, the pinnacle of which was a semester of student teaching where she was the full-time instructor.

As a 21-year-old young woman with a freshly minted teaching certificate, Emily began teaching in a traditional face-to-face setting. Common to many first-year teachers, Emily's experience was challenging; her experience was made more onerous by severe administrative pressures that caused her to feel like she was constantly "walking on eggshells" waiting for something to go wrong. Despite these difficulties, Emily thrived on the relationships she built with kids as she tried "to be that person that kids can count on to make a difference."

Path to online teaching. After only a year and a half of teaching in this setting, Emily took a year off to travel. The following fall, Emily sought another teaching position but was passed over repeatedly for teachers with more classroom experience. Finally, a parent from her former face-to-face school told her about an open teaching position with an online school, and, despite her initial hesitation, she applied and was given the job. After only four months at this

particular institution, a full-time position at her current institution opened up, which she applied to and thereafter received. She has been in a full-time teacher with her current institution since that time.

Emily's position in this study is significant as she is one of the more veteran online teachers. Her experience helps to understand how online teaching experience influences the development of concerns. Her position as a full-time instructor with some additional non-instructional responsibilities (i.e., fixing lessons, writing lessons) may also influence how her concerns are developed and manifest.

Theme 1: Organizational Infrastructure

The themes represented here are embedded in the institutional organization. These themes are largely out of the control of the instructor but within the control of the local organization. While many of these concerns may apply to online teachers in other organizations, these themes are likely to vary across different organizations.

Sub-theme 1: Course quality. As a content facilitator, Emily is responsible primarily for delivering the content provided by her institution. As a result, Emily is unable to make any serious changes to the established curriculum. With a wide offering of courses and a limited amount of resources, courses are prone to age faster than they can be updated, a situation that results in outdated material and poor course quality. For example, Emily noted that the social media course offered by her institution mentions Myspace as the biggest social network despite the fact that Facebook, the social media giant, is over 10 years old. "The class that's 10 years old, we're still teaching. So making sure that those classes are not only content-wise accurate, meeting all the standards and whatever, but making sure that the way that they're presented is with the times."

The importance of keeping courses "[present] with the times" is closely related to the student experience, an aspect of course quality that is significant for Emily. In those courses that are a little outdated, Emily admits to students, "'I know this is a little archaic,' or, 'I know it might seem kind of boring . . . It bugs you as much as it bugs me, so let's work through this together.'" While course quality may be concerning to her personally, this concern gains more weight as she considers the potential effects it may have on her students. The course quality seems to be especially significant when "you get all the kids that come into your room already hating it."

Sub-theme 2: Technology auto-graded problems. Online teaching depends on many technologies in the learning environment that may not be present in traditional settings, or may be present in different degrees. It seems reasonable to expect a technology-rich learning environment to introduce new concerns for teachers. In Emily's case, her concerns with technology are limited to a single, yet significant factor dealing with her LMS's auto-grade function.

Many of the assignments in Emily's courses are auto-graded and automatically recorded in her gradebook. While this feature is designed to save teachers time on grading, it also presents unique concerns. The auto-graded function is character specific, meaning that unless a student composes the answer in the exact prescribed way, the question will be marked incorrect. Emily explained, "if the answer to the math question is one thousand, it accepts 1000. If you put in a comma, if you put in a decimal point, if you put in anything before or after, it's marking it wrong."

While this technological oversight may seem minute, the impact on student confidence can be significant. "When the answer's right, it's right. And you get a lot of kids that say, 'Ugh,

I just bombed another test. I don't know why. I don't know . . . I thought I was using the right formula. I thought I understood this.'" To help correct these problems, Emily has to go through and manually grade these questions to ensure student understanding was assessed correctly, but this is challenging because these questions are not automatically queued and marked for the instructor to see. Again, the student reaction is significant: "when a student misses these questions, not only is s/he confused why it was marked wrong, but then starts to doubt ability and understanding in the course." As will be explained later, Emily believes that student's confidence is something that is difficult to get back once it is lost.

Theme 2: Relationships

The relationships between Emily and other agents in the teaching and learning environment are considered in this theme. Included in this relationship theme is not only the actual or perceived social connection between two or more people, but also the communication that is required to establish these connections.

Sub-theme 1: Relationship with parents. From the beginning of the study, Emily spoke frequently about the importance of establishing a relationship with the parents of students and engaging them in the online learning experience. This relationship-building process was a major challenge with some parents who were unaware of their child's enrollment in an online course. "The guidance counselors or the principals or whoever will write a kid's schedule, and they'll throw somebody in online. And unless a parent sees that schedule or knows exactly what's going on with their student, parents that are a little less involved might not realize, 'Oh yeah, that math class is actually online and not at the building.'"

It is important for parents to make this realization early so that they can be involved in and understand the proper expectations of their child in the online experience. This is especially

true for students who may have been enrolled late in the course and may be behind the recommended course pacing. "Sometimes [parents] are thrown off when I say 'your student is behind' and they don't realize it is because their son/daughter is responsible for their own flex pacing." Communicating the teacher's expectations to the parents and helping them realize the flexible nature of online learning seems to be particularly important for Emily.

In addition to communicating expectations to parents, Emily admitted that it is also difficult to communicate student progress. "Explaining the difference to these to parents can be difficult, especially if parents do not get full reports or log in to see their child's work progress." The full reports offered by the online institution use three different grades to indicate student progress and work in a course. "A student can easily get 5/5 for doing the introduction assignment and say, 'Look, I have 100% in my class' and the parent would think nothing of it. While this would be true, and the student would have 100% in the 'work attempted' column, they could only have 5 total points out of 1000 in the course, and thus have less than 1% of the class done." Emily acknowledged that explaining these different grades to parents requires "a great deal of patience, explanation, and understanding both on my and the parents' parts, which can lead to frustration or clarity."

Of course, communicating student expectations and progress to parents is dependent on having access to accurate parent contact information, a seemingly basic need that Emily also finds challenging. Emily described the experience of obtaining this information as "pulling teeth," requiring her to "beg and plead for contact information" from the traditional school the student is enrolled in. To solve this problem, Emily surveys her students at the beginning of the year and includes a question asking for parent contact information, but this may not always lead to accurate information. Emily acknowledged that students must be forthcoming with that

information, and that sometimes students will set the parent email as their own personal email "so when I think I could be emailing a parent, the kid sets it up so it goes right to them. It's like intercepting the mail in the mailbox, like I did when I was a kid."

Sub-theme 2: Relationships with students. Admittedly, for Emily, relationship building is easier to accomplish face-to-face. It seems the first challenge in building relationships with students is helping them see that online teachers are actual people. "A lot of them . . . depending on the kid or depending on the class, might not think you're a real person." To improve the personal feel of her course, Emily attempts to add personal voice, tone, and even humor into her student communication, but those are often "lost in words." The effect of this miscommunication can have harmful effects on students and "might cause them to shut down even further."

The relationships in online learning environments rely on communication technologies that are not commonly used between teachers and students in traditional learning environments. "It can be weird to call your teacher, or to have your teacher say, 'Hey, text me.' Nobody texts their teacher face-to-face, usually . . . So it's getting the kids to take that step over that line that might feel weird." Even when the teachers initiate a phone or text conversation, the communication depends on the students responding to the conversation request. "It's getting them to meet me halfway and say, 'Alright, I'll text you back,' or, 'I'll answer that phone call.' Because they don't call their teachers. They don't text their teachers. So it's a little weird until you break down that barrier."

This communications barrier requires students to reciprocate the actions of the teachers in order for professional relationships to be established. "I can reach out to you a hundred times,

but unless you actually reply or come to me, meet me halfway, we might not be able to ever make that connection."

Theme 3: Online Teaching

The concerns considered here are concerns that are present for many online educators and do not rise out of specific organizational structures, policies, or practices. They are concerns that may be shared by anyone who is engaged in online teaching, although these concerns may still vary according to personalities, cultures, or local government mandates.

Sub-theme 1: Teacher certification laws. One of the most significant concerns for Emily, one in which caused the most observable strain and worry, revolved around recent government laws regarding teacher certification in her home state. At the time of our conversation, the law was still new; it was unclear exactly how this new law would be interpreted in her school context. This uncertainty only aggravated her concern.

According to Emily, her state recently changed requirements for all teachers looking to receive a certification (i.e., a "provisional" license for new educators) or to progress to a higher certification (i.e., a "professional" license for practicing educators). "To progress from provisional to professional, three successful years of teaching need to be documented on the [Department of Education] website by a 'public district' or school you have worked for." This documentation occurs through teaching evaluations that are recorded in the state system. While these kinds of policies are frequently altered by state legislatures, this particular change was particularly relevant to Emily and other teachers at her online institution. "I do not work for a school; I work for a 503(c) non-profit company. So, I have no evaluations in there, and theoretically could eventually lose my teaching certificate." Any online institution that is similarly organized would face a similar threat.

The impact of this particular law is unequally felt by different teachers depending on their current certificate level and school positions. This law would be most poignant for new teachers who have a limited number of years until they are required to advance to a "professional" certificate, and for any teacher who has a "professional" certificate and wants to advance to a higher certificate, a possibility that is not currently required under state law. Additionally, the law will most likely impact full-time instructors who lack additional employment in traditional settings. "Most of our part-time instructors already teach face-to-face in a district. They would already have those rankings from their new employer, and it won't really affect them."

In addition to the impact on individual teachers, the online institution may also be negatively impacted by the new law. Currently, the organization only hires individuals with teaching certificates as instructors. Without offering their teachers a way to renew and progress their teacher licenses according to the state's requirements, the organization may be faced with the prospect of having employed teachers lose their licenses or be forced to hire teachers without teaching certificates to administer their courses. "The impact of this if we don't have teaching certificates, it takes a lot of clout away from the quality that we put in our classes."

The changes to the existing law do not take effect until 2018, so teachers have a little time to prepare. For Emily, this means rushing to progress her license to the "professional" level by taking a $2,000 class without the possibility of financial aid. While Emily is currently completing a master's degree in education, this course will not count towards her master's degree, nor is she able to receive funding for the class. Nevertheless, taking this course seems to her the best way to protect her teaching certificate and allow her to continue teaching online.

It is likely that these changing laws and policies will be interpreted to include reputable online institutions, but considerable concern and worry are likely to be produced amongst online

educators as law and policy is slow to recognize online learning. These concerns are likely to be repeated in many forms in the years to come.

Theme 4: Understand the Student Experience

This theme considers the instructor's relationship to students, how instructors conceive of the student experience in the online course, and how an instructor experiences concern for their students. For Emily, this theme is particularly poignant as her concerns for students generally frame a great deal of her concerns.

Sub-theme 1: Student characteristics. A learning environment that is more personalized and less structured requires students to possess certain characteristics to be successful. In Emily's experience, the lack of organizational skills in students is concerning. "Most 16 year olds . . . if they keep an agenda planner, don't pay attention to it." Not only does this lack of organizational skills affect the student's experience in the course, it also directly impacts teachers. "You get those kids that . . . finish and say, 'I'm ready to talk to you . . . I'm ready for my discussion.' 'Well, try to give me a 24 hour heads up.' And they're like, 'Well I can't wait tonight.' And it's, 'Well, okay that's fine, but be considerate of other people's schedules.'"

While some student characteristics are understandably frustrating to deal with, Emily's concerns in regards to her student's characteristics are largely empathetic. She realizes that for some students, the lack of interest or motivation in a certain subject is likely caused by a lack of support and encouragement structures. "Most of the time it's not because [students are] disinterested, it's because they've never had somebody behind them, or in the past, make it interesting. Or make them care." As a result, her job as an online teacher includes the role of a

"cheerleader," an encouraging figure to provide necessary support for students who may lack that support otherwise.

Emily has particular concern for the confidence of her students, a characteristic that is either delicate or missing altogether among many of her online students. "You can have a plate, and if you drop it, you can piece it back together. It can look whole, but it's still broken. And that's how I felt about kids' confidence. It was just shattered. We pieced it all back together, but it's not the same as if it was never broken to begin with. And it takes a lot more work to build a kid up than it does to break them down." Student's delicate confidence is a major reason why instructional practices and technology issues that may discourage students are such a major concern for Emily.

Sub-theme 2: Student movement through the course. How students begin, progress, and finish a course is a common concern for most online teachers, and Emily is no exception. This begins with getting students enrolled early and logged on to get started in the course, an endeavor that is not always an easy experience. "I have a handful of students right now who have never logged in to their class. We're in week eight. And there's only so much I can do." With a four-week enrollment period, this often means that students will begin the course at different times so setting an appropriate pace for students is challenging. "Depending on the course, I am caught between helping them get caught up, or encouraging them to use a different pacing guide that allows them to finish the course in 12 instead of 18 weeks."

This last year was especially challenging as a personal vacation early in the semester influenced the progression (or lack thereof) of her students in the course. In this case, a substitute teacher was assigned to her course, but still the absence of the teacher was felt by some students. "Sometimes kids, like the ones who start on day one and you already have that

relationship with them, they're hesitant to reach out to a sub. So they might choose not to work for that two weeks, or they might work slowly." While the numbers of students negatively affected by the teacher's absence was small, it still was a concern for Emily as she had to see where these students were and help them get caught back up.

Sub-theme 3: Limited opportunities to help students. The limited opportunities to help students was a pervasive concern in Emily's experience as an online teacher. Drawing on her experience as a traditional teacher Emily said, "sometimes face-to-face, you have a great personal connection with a kid that doesn't do a thing in your class." However, in online settings, "if that kid doesn't show up, I can't do much . . . I can reach out, you have to reply, you have to continue to work."

In an online setting, the physical separation of the teacher and students places the majority of the responsibility to engage on the student. All the teacher's supports, interventions, and efforts are wasted if students fail to log in, and sometimes "it's like pulling teeth" to get students to do that much. This engagement is especially important for the teacher to understand how and why students are struggling. "If I say 'Hey, are you stuck on this problem because you don't get it, or because you don't want to do it?' I have to get a response from the kid to get that answer. I can't guess." Opportunities to help students are limited if students choose not to log in to the course, respond to teacher communications, or are unwilling to discuss their difficulties with a teacher.

Theme 5: Changes in Concerns Through Experience

With four years of online teaching experience, Emily noticed a change in her concerns as she's gained more experience. This theme explores the changes in concerns as Emily gained

teaching experience. Of particular interest is the importance she placed on experience, and how experience aided in her development.

Sub-theme 1: Work-life balance. When asked about her concerns, Emily admitted to the difficulty of separating her personal life from her professional life. Working at home with no clear boundaries separating work from home can make online teachers particularly susceptible to this concern. Although Emily admitted to this concern, her explanation spoke of this concern in past tense, illustrating growth and development in this area. Speaking of her experience in her early teaching years she said, "I found myself being very accommodating to students, to the point now where I'd say, 'I'm not available after four unless you give me a heads up and make an appointment in the evenings.' So separating when I'm working from when I'm not. So that balance took about a year or two to really work out."

Sub-theme 2: Establishing routines. One of the biggest differences Emily witnessed in her concerns as she gained more experience was the development of routines. Routines can be especially important for online instructors while they work in an unstructured work environment to complete a long list of responsibilities and job expectations. The lack of established routines can often be difficult for new online teachers as they attempt to navigate an unfamiliar environment. "I didn't know what I was getting into, so I felt like I . . . I never had a routine because everything was changing."

While the work environment and job expectations did not necessarily change as Emily gained experience, her ability to establish work routines and anticipate change helped her to deal with these challenges. "I feel maybe now I [am] . . . always ready to expect change. If something's staying the same for too long, I should know it's going to change. But I don't think I was ready for that when I first began."

Jackie - Case Study

Jackie is currently in her second year of online teaching where she teaches science part-time at two online institutions. Her experience at different institutions is unique; each institution requires teachers to fulfill distinct responsibilities and operate under different conditions. One institution limits her ability to create content and uses her skills to primarily facilitate and assess student learning. Additionally, this institution is populated by students who are primarily taking the online courses as a part-time supplement to their courses at a traditional school. She is currently in her second year teaching at this online institution. Jackie's other online institution utilizes teachers as content designers and facilitators much like a traditional school. Additionally, the students in this online institution are full-time online students, many of whom have failed out of traditional school settings and are taking online courses as a sort of "last resort" effort at education. Jackie is currently in her first year of teaching at this online institution.

When Jackie began college, she majored in biology with the intention of working in the medical field. As a college teaching assistant, she discovered her love for working with students and helping them understand the material. After graduating with her degree in biology, Jackie realized she needed a graduate degree in order to do anything with her biology experience. She received a teaching fellowship and she decided to pursue a graduate degree in education. Her graduate degree was a two-year program focused on training teachers to work in at-risk schools. After only one semester of observing classrooms, Jackie became a full-time classroom teacher in an at-risk school, a position she continued throughout the remainder of her education and three additional years of her teaching career.

Both Jackie's graduate program and traditional teaching experienced helped her to develop teaching competencies specific to at-risk students. The focus of these experiences shaped Jackie's belief about the purpose of education and the responsibilities of teachers within the education system. "I think that a lot of the focus needs to be on skills, soft skills, teaching a student how to learn and making sure that they're ready to move onto the next chapter of their life." This stated purpose of teaching influences Jackie's concerns as she worked towards helping her online students develop important capacities.

Path to Online

When Jackie had her first child, she realized that it did not make sense financially to continue to teach in a traditional school setting. She assumed that her teaching salary would be just enough to cover her daycare costs. In addition to financial reasons for transitioning online, Jackie also wanted to move into a teaching situation where classroom management was not the primary teacher's responsibility, a situation that played out daily in her inner-city school.

The differences in Jackie's experience between these two online institutions are significant and were frequently addressed by Jackie during conversations about teaching concerns. Her role at two online institutions was helpful in better understanding what concerns may be tied to organizational influences and what concerns may be tied to more generic concerns in online teaching. Her position as a fairly new online teacher with limited traditional teaching experience was also instructive in understanding the impact of the online teaching environment on the development and progression of teacher's concerns.

Theme 1: Organizational Infrastructure

The sub-themes represented here are embedded in the institutional organization. These themes are largely out of the control of the instructor but within the control of the local

organization. While many of these concerns may apply to online teachers in other organizations, these themes are likely to vary across different organizations. For Jackie, her roles at two different online institutions framed a lot of these concerns as some concerns that were present in one institution were minimized or completely absent at another institution. Her perspective helped illustrate the influence organizations have in the development of concerns of teachers.

Sub-theme 1: No control over content. The concern of lacking the ability to control the content or the gradebook is unique to one institution. "I think my biggest concern with [the organization] would probably be not having any influence over the content." Jackie acknowledged her ability at this institution to create supplemental materials to help students learn, but admitted that "these are high school students. So if I tell them to watch something, or do something extra, the chances of them doing that, especially when I can't make it an actual graded assignment, are pretty slim."

Jackie's inability to change the content was particularly concerning because of her desire to emphasize skills in the curriculum instead of facts, a desire that was ingrained in her through her experience teaching in at-risk schools. "The classroom content, structure, assignments, and tests are already in place so you don't get a lot of control over what is emphasized or what is not." Assessments were typically focused on "specific facts," and students spent so much "time cramming material, selecting an answer on a multiple choice, and then immediately forgetting it again." In contrast, Jackie's course design as a traditional teacher emphasized skills over facts. "When I designed my own tests and quizzes I would typically focus more on problem solving and strategy." This focus on skills was important to Jackie as she viewed her role as a teacher to prepare her students for the "next chapter of their life," admitting that "not every student is going to be a scientist."

Sub-theme 2: Teacher roles. Jackie's concern with her role as a teacher was again unique to her position at one online institution. Her transition to online teaching was "hard," a fact that was aggravated by her limited roles. "The first few months teaching online I felt like my only role was to grade work and hope students read my feedback and learned from it." With the content set, grading became a big part of her responsibilities. Part of her concern with her role as an online teacher came from "not using as many of the skills" she developed as a teacher. "By skills, I meant the strategies you learn as a teacher to help students understand content . . . I can't look at the data, identify a weakness, and then teach a lesson specifically to address this deficit the way you would in a normal classroom."

In comparison with this institution, her role at her other institution includes instructional designer, a role Jackie appeared to appreciate. "It's a lot more like the traditional school where . . . I can kind of see what [to teach], I can change the gradebook as I need to . . . just a lot more where I get to pick and choose with it. So I kind of feel like I'm actually teaching instead of just facilitating." Her comment about "actually teaching" may suggest the possible devalued roles of teachers at some online institutions.

Sub-theme 3: Poor quality content. Jackie's concerns about course quality largely stemmed from disagreement about what should be emphasized in the courses. Jackie believed that the courses "[focus] too much on throwing facts at students and not enough time teaching them how to learn. So much of what is focused on in classrooms are minute facts that most students immediately forget and, if they ever need again, can easily look up online." Emphasizing the right content is especially challenging when an online institution is focused too much on credit recovery. "I think the biggest disadvantage that online schooling is giving them

right now is that a lot of times when you get into remediation, they try to dense down to do credit recovery."

Not only does condensing the material prove challenging for students who "didn't succeed in a regular classroom," but also seems to rob the content of its value to students. Jackie admitted that some online students do well with the curriculum due to an intrinsic interest in the subject, but concluded that the courses "could go a lot further" in assisting student in learning and engaging rigorously with the content. Comparing two of her courses, Jackie stated: "I would feel they could probably log in and if they really were committed they could probably do that course in three weeks and do just fine, whereas like my oceanography kids, they're putting in a lot of work, they're learning a lot of skills and they're getting a lot from it."

Sub-theme 4: Teacher isolation. Although traditional teachers face many similar challenges as online teachers, online can be particularly "frustrating" because "sometimes you feel a little bit more isolated in it." This sub-theme is placed under "Organizational Infrastructure" because this concern seems heavily influenced by the practices and organization of different online institutions. While one of her online institutions was organized similar to traditional schools with full-time employees and face-to-face meetings, Jackie's other online institutions was staffed primarily by part-time teachers, a fact that made it "harder for a teacher community" to be established and maintained.

Jackie admitted that it would not "make sense for [the organization] to have that kind of unity because of the way it's set up," but acknowledged areas where improvement could be made. "I think that one way to make it better would be to have at least have some kind of communication or a list set out so I know . . . 'Okay, these teachers are teaching the same course. Now I can reach out to them, get my questions answered.'" This lack of knowing "what other

teachers are there and what they're teaching" appeared to make this concern particularly poignant for Jackie.

Sub-theme 5: Asynchronous limited. One of Jackie's online institutions relies heavily on synchronous sessions with students, an affordance possible because of the full-time online status of its students. The other institution is largely a supplemental content provider, assisting students who are primarily taught full-time in a traditional school setting. As a result, this latter institution relies on asynchronous content to teach its students. The differences between the synchronous nature of one and the asynchronous nature of the other again bred new concerns for Jackie. "I find a lot of the soft skills I have a hard time teaching asynchronously . . . I can teach them more than I can asynchronously."

This concern was also closely connected to her concerns regarding her roles and control of the content. "Because it's asynchronous, I feel like a lot of my role with [the organization] is just, 'Did you get the content, how are you doing?'" Jackie suggested that even with scripted content, it would be helpful to "go through it with a student and talk about it and explain it more," but admitted feeling limited to "post[ing] videos and see if they watch it."

Theme 2: Teaching Task Concerns

These themes represented tasks that were not primarily concerned with the student experience or embedded in the organizational infrastructure. These concerns may be more global to online learning generally, or more local to the individual instructor. In particular, Jackie's concerns seemed to center on finding and maintaining the balance between work and personal life. It should be noted that at the time of her participation in the first interview, she was weeks away from giving birth to her second child. Her participation in the final email

interview occurred after the child was born. This context may provide additional insight into why this concern was so prevalent in her experience.

Sub-theme 1: Work/life balance. Creating a clear separation between work and home life was described by Jackie as "hardest thing about being an online teacher." The challenge for Jackie began with the lack physical boundaries separating her professional and personal life. While Jackie admitted that this is often a concern for traditional teachers as well, she noted it is more pronounced in online teaching. "I think that when you actually physically leave the classroom and you're driving home, it's like, okay, well my setting is different." Again, the lack of physical boundaries in online teaching blurs the line between work and home. "When you leave a brick-and-mortar classroom, you may have work that needs to be completed, but it is easier to understand that work is in addition to regular tasks." Even time poses no barriers on online teaching. "There aren't any school hours. So it's like I want to take care of that immediately and there's no step away from it." The boundaries that teachers might use to create a balance between work and school are largely irrelevant in online teaching.

This delicate balance between home and work impacted Jackie's personal responsibilities. "When you leave a brick-and-mortar classroom, you may have work that needs to be completed, but it is easier to understand that work is in addition to regular tasks." Now that her "computer is always there," her school work no longer appeared as a "foreign thing" introduced into her home environment. This ever-present nature of work seemed to have created a sense of urgency to complete her work even when it encroached into her personal life. "I might be in the middle of something and I get an email and I want to answer it immediately. And I want to log in and get it taken care of immediately." For Jackie, she admitted that she "always feel[s] that pressure."

Even with great effort, creating a schedule to delineate work from home was difficult, especially with a "toddler running around the house who seems to change this schedule every time I think we have found one that works." Still, Jackie saw the value of setting a schedule to help create a better separation between work and home. "I know the most important thing to setting up this balance is to find a schedule that works, but it seems like there are always things in life that impose on any schedule that is set."

Interestingly, institutional differences between synchronous and asynchronous online teaching seemed to magnify this concern. "With K-12 and live sessions, suddenly I have to be at my computer at these times to teach live, and so I'm still finding that balance. Whereas when I first started online teaching where I would have, you know, 50 to 80 students, I could just log in whenever I could." In fact, Jackie admitted that this work/life concern was not even present when her teaching was limited to asynchronous environments. "I think it's just a complete new concern with the K-12 system, versus at the U it was never a concern for me. It was just kind of, you know, I logged in when I could and I got everything done and it was no problem."

Theme 3: Student Experience

This theme considers the instructor's view of students, how instructors conceive of the student experience in the online course, and how an instructor experiences concern for their students. Jackie's concerns about her students were particularly influenced by her past teaching experiences in at-risk schools, and the importance of teaching students skills needed for them to be successful.

Sub-theme 1: Students lack skills. Jackie was quick to draw comparisons between the different student populations served by each of her online institutions. These population differences were significant in that they helped determine what skills students bring with them to

the online course. "[One institution] I work for . . . is an at-risk school. These are students who failed out of a regular school. They didn't do well and so now they're doing online education. So a lot of them don't have those skills and they need reinforcement. Whereas I find a lot of my [the organization] students, they have the skills." The lack of skills with some of these students caused Jackie to "pull more from [her] arsenal" to help her students be successful than when she was teaching in at-risk, urban traditional schools. Despite the population differences between schools, Jackie admitted that "they're just still teenagers who need that kind of guidance."

The difficulty in working with students who may be lacking important skills is that online learning often requires students to be more responsible for their own learning. This concern can be further impacted by course design, especially if the courses are particularly "dry" and leave it up to the students to "get it."

Sub-theme 2: Student characteristics. Closely related to students' skills are student characteristics. Jackie reported several unique student characteristics that expanded the concern she had for her students. "The majority of my students are second (or third!) chance students who have failed out of a traditional setting. Some of them were expelled or have children they have to take care of, a sick parent, or a full time job in order to support their household." In addition to difficult student situations, Jackie admitted that many students struggled with other challenges to learning. "I would say 75-80% of my students have an IEP or some other health care problem which makes it difficult to be in a traditional setting."

Considering how to reach these at-risk students required a considerable amount of planning. Here again, Jackie's experience in teaching at-risk students in a traditional school appeared useful. "If I just walk in and I'm like, 'Well, here's the information for the day,' they're not going to take anything from it . . . So it's kind of more of a process with at-risk students."

Sub-theme 3: Poor student attendance. Although "getting consistent attendance is always a problem in any kind of setting," Jackie acknowledged that student attendance "feels more unmanageable" in online settings. "If they're not logging in, if they're not there, it's really hard to reach out to them," Jackie admitted. Inconsistent student attendance created the feeling that "[teacher's] hands are tied more." Jackie described a situation with a particular student who was reputably hard-working and competent by her parents and mentors, but failed to log into the class. "When you run into situations like that, it's frustrating because it's like, well I don't know how much more I can do because there's only so much I can do from my end." Student attendance not only limits the learning students experience, but also the amount of help teachers can provide.

Sub-theme 4: Student learning. Jackie's concern about student learning centered on the compatibility of the course content with what students need to learn to be successful in life. Jackie reflected on her courses, "at the end of the day, is it really teaching them what they need to know?" Even if the course emphasized important principles, the design of the course activities and assessments may not be conducive to learning. "I have other classes where it's like they read, they watch a video, they answer questions, they take a test that's multiple choice, and they move on. And so it's like . . . 'how much are you just pulling from the reading? Are you actually getting anything?'"

The content retention of her students was also concerning to Jackie. "My students are spending so much time cramming material, selecting an answer on a multiple choice, and then immediately forgetting it again. I worry how this will translate to the world when they are done with school." Jackie's perspective clearly demonstrated her concern for the value and retention of knowledge that can assist her students beyond the scope of the course.

Theme 4: Concerns with Experience

This theme considers the possibility that concerns of online teachers can vary and develop as they gain teaching experience. For Jackie, these concerns were most prominent about relationships with students and the expectations she had for her position as an online teacher.

Sub-theme 1: Relationships with students. Jackie readily admitted that forming relationships with students was among her most serious concern when she first transitioned to online teaching. "When I first started, I was really concerned about being able to make connections with the students, build the same relationships that I had with face-to-face students." While she conceded that "you're not going to connect with every single student in a face-to-face class," her experience in a traditional setting seemed to be the standard to judge this concern by. With experience, Jackie reported that she had been able to "make the same amount of connections as you did" in a traditionally setting. In the later interview, Jackie went beyond her previous statement and reported that "I have found better success in reaching students than I had in a brick-and-mortar setting." She acknowledged that there are still some students who evade her reach, but has experienced "a lot of improvement in this area."

Sub-theme 2: Job expectations. As a first-year online teacher, Jackie described her experience as being "overwhelming," struggling to "get my bearings in my role as an online teacher." She described having "twice as much to learn" as she learned the content of courses she had never taught before and "finding the best skills and strategies to teach the content online." Confident in her teacher training and experience in traditional settings, Jackie was relieved to discover that "the same skills you always use as a teacher apply to an online setting." This perspective and confidence would be likely unachievable without some level of online teaching experience.

Jacob - Case Study

Jacob is currently in his fourth year of online teaching where he teaches a language course. Like many online teachers, Jacob began his teaching career as a face-to-face setting where he spent 12 years. He spent several years as a principle of a traditional school before his current full-time position as an administrator at a district office. Jacob's position is unique in this study. Not only has his four years of online teaching experience made him one of the more veteran participants, but he has also worked as a mentor for online students, a position used by many online institutions use to provide more direct (often face-to-face) support for students working to complete online courses.

The path to a career in education was anything but direct for Jacob, and his path to online teaching was even more unique. Jacob did not want to be a teacher initially but ended up studying international business and secondary education simultaneously. Despite having some positive teaching experiences, Jacob enjoyed the money he was making doing sales while still in college. Eventually, through the encouragement of his parents and family members (many of whom were teachers), and through the difficulties of life, Jacob's heart and priorities changed and decided to devote his life to serving, building, and supporting people through teaching.

Jacob experienced almost immediate success in teaching through his student teaching experience where he was nominated as student teacher of the year. While he described his teacher preparation program as less-than-stellar, Jacob's teaching internship gave him meaningful experiences with curriculum design, planning, differentiating instruction, and classroom management. His internship also introduced him to the realities of teaching, specifically meeting the needs of diverse students by differentiating and personalizing instruction. His cooperating teacher provided him with a vision of how the complex world of

teaching could be successfully navigated. The social support structures surrounding him as a traditional and online teacher would continue to play an important role in helping him develop competencies as a teacher and problem solve some of the challenges he would face.

Path to Online Teaching

Jacob's move into online learning was unconventional. As a student, Jacob had taken some hybrid courses in college and found them generally undesirable. When he first heard that his district was looking to hire online instructors for his subject area, he decided to apply for the position knowing that he was highly qualified. His motivation was unique; he wanted to prove that online learning was "hogwash" and that there was no way for students to effectively learn another language in an online setting. He was committed to giving online teaching and learning a fair shake, but he was emphatically decided that students could not effectively learn a language online. His perspective towards online learning changed when he almost immediately began to see results proving to him that students really were learning at a high level online, and considering that the flexibility of online learning gave students a greater opportunity to move at their own pace.

Admittedly, Jacob believes that teaching is a complex experience filled with uncertainties often unseen from the vantage point of a preservice educator. Teaching a diverse set of students in an environment filled with structure and limitations presents some unique concerns for teachers. While traditional and online teachers face many of the same concerns, the online environment appears to present some unique concerns as will be seen in Jacob's experience.

The following section will deal with the concerns of Jacob through his online learning experience. These concerns will be divided into five major themes, with each being further divided into sub-themes. Despite the presence of these concerns, it is important to note of

Jacob's acceptance of the challenge each concern introduces. In no way have these become excuses for him, but merely realities of teaching that need to be considered.

Theme 1: Organizational Infrastructure:

The themes represented here are embedded in the institutional organization. These themes are largely out of the control of the instructor but within the control of the local organization. While many of these concerns may apply to online teachers in other organizations, these themes are likely to vary across different organizations.

Sub-theme 1: Overloaded mentors. As a teacher and a former mentor, Jacob's perspective of the role of mentors is truly unique. He admits that for online learning to work well for students, it requires the backend efforts of the mentors. At this particular online institution, most mentors are teachers, counselors, or administrators at the student's traditional school. The responsibilities of the mentor are to encourage, support, and guide the student in their online learning experience and to administer credit for courses successfully completed.

Including mentors in an online learning experience is designed to prevent student isolation in an online learning environment. In practice, however, many of these mentors are assigned hundreds of students to "mentor" through this online experience. Additionally, since these mentors have additional roles and responsibilities at the school, they often lack the time they need to provide individual support to each student. Their workload encourages "monitoring" over "mentoring," with mentors becoming more like a "compliance officer" for the students instead an additional level of instructional support. This mentor arrangement can cause significant angst for online teachers as they depend on two-way communication with mentors to encourage student's online progress and also to understand potential personal situations that may impact the student's learning experience. Unresponsive or uninvolved mentors often leave

online teachers feeling unsupported and unable to provide the needed help to students in their classes.

Sub-theme 2: Limited teacher control. The lack of influence online teachers had on the content and organization of the course was mentioned repeatedly by Jacob. This organization provides online teachers with the curriculum (i.e., content, assessments, grading) so the online teachers can focus on administering and facilitating. The course is all set and released entirely to the students at the beginning of the course. Online teachers have the freedom to supplement the course's content with additional supports, activities, and assessments, but these supplemental materials are optional and have no bearing on the student's course grade.

As a veteran teacher of 12 years, Jacob has developed some preferences for how the course is organized, what content is taught, and how the grades are weighted and scored. While this concern represents a reality that Jacob largely accepts and works around, it causes problems when the course content and grading structure misaligns with his teaching and grading philosophy (see theme 2).

Sub-theme 3: Student ownership. While the online teacher at this institution is tasked with the traditional teaching responsibilities (i.e., delivering content, assessing learning, providing support), the ultimate responsibility for the student lies in with the mentors. This organization is not an accredited school but only a service provider. This means that school districts and individual schools contract out to this organization to provide online learning services to their students. Upon completion of the course, the student's school provides the grade and the credit for completing the online course.

Despite the hours of effort with individual students, Jacob admits that "they're not our students." Online teachers at this institution are limited in the direct supports it controls within

the learning experience. Online teachers provide instructional and support, but the grading and credit issuing is in the hands of the mentor teachers. Online teachers ultimately have no influence in this process.

Sub-theme 4: Student placement and mobility. Since there are no placement tests at this online institution, students are left to determine what type and level of course to take online. Jacob's online organization offers Spanish 1, 2, 3 and 4, and the organization assumes students have prerequisite competence before registering for a course. Since not all schools are adequately aligned to the state core, there is no guarantee that students will be positioned at the appropriate course level. The absence of placement tests for subjects like Spanish allow the possibility that students will be misplaced in a course above or below their appropriate level.

If it becomes clear that a student has been improperly placed in a particular course, the online environment lacks mobility to move students to a more appropriate course. Traditional schools are more capable of moving students around, but the service provider nature of this online institution lacks the same potential.

Theme 2: Mismatched Philosophy and Priority

The perspective towards teaching and learning, and the dedication of time and resources of different roles in the teaching and learning situation (students, mentors, etc.) is considered in this theme. The mismatch in philosophies and priorities between these roles presents a significant category of concerns for Jacob.

Sub-theme 1: Technology limitations. Jacob's philosophy towards teaching and learning could be considered a mastery approach which emphasizes the outcomes of the experience over the process. To borrow an analogy he used throughout the interviews, Jacob stated that the goal for all students is to arrive in Florida. For him, it does not matter what

method a student uses to get to Florida, or how long they take to reach their eventual destination. If a student arrives in Florida (achieves the outcomes), then that student has had a successful learning experience.

Since Jacob's assessment and grading practices mirror this belief in mastery learning, Jacob will often change or remove earlier grades if competency on the same principle is demonstrated on later assignments. These grading practices become a lengthy manual process for him as the LMS they use (Blackboard) is not set up for a mastery learning environment. Blackboard follows the traditional grading practices that much of education is still accustomed to. Jacob feels very strongly about the outcomes of the students, and views grades as potential symbols of weakness. Why should a student continue to be punished for past mistakes when they have clearly demonstrated competence in the desired outcomes? The mismatch between Jacob's mastery grading approach and the LMS represents one area of concern for Jacob.

Sub-theme 2: Mentor priorities. The large number of students assigned to a single mentor, along with their various other roles and responsibilities, forces many mentors to become more like "monitors." The resulting effect of this arrangement is that online teachers feel disconnected and out of harmony with the mentor teachers who are (in their minds) supposed to be providing support to each student. As Jacob explained, "[the mentor's] priority was not that student. When for us instructors, that student is our priority." In this situation, mentors typically are focused on student compliance to ensure that students complete the course instead of ensuring that the students feel supported and are having valuable learning experiences. Mentors are bombarded with emails about students when in actuality what they really want to know is when there's "a fire" with a particular student. The impact of this misalignment of priorities

between mentors and instructors appears to be a significant concern for instructors as they work to ensure the progress of individual students.

Sub-theme 3: Student priorities. With a strict focus on mastery learning, instructors experience significant concern when they witness students merely trying to "get through" the content and the course. For Jacob, this concern is clearly evidenced at course cutoff points when students submit dozens of assignments at once. The rush to complete assignments and the neglect of the instructor's feedback on past assignments shows that the student is focused on completion instead of on learning. Additionally, students waiting until the end to complete and submit assignments do not "allow enough time for turning around of assignments and re-teaching as needed for content mastery." This is especially apparent in Jacob's experience since his class is set up using a mastery approach and students progress as they submit assignments, receive feedback, and progress to more advanced ideas. The procrastination of assignments hinders the ability of students to achieve mastery, a significant concern for an instructor whose teaching and learning philosophy is heavily steeped in mastery learning.

Theme 3: Teaching Task Demands

These themes represent tasks that are not primarily concerned with the student experience or embedded in the organizational infrastructure. These concerns may be more global to online learning generally, or more local to the individual instructor.

Sub-theme 1: Time. The amount of time needed to be an effective online instructor, especially one that is focused on individual student progress and providing additional opportunities to master content, requires a significant amount of time. Jacob made no attempt to draw a comparison with traditional teaching in terms of time, but only mentioned that the time required by online teaching is significant. Furthermore, Jacob acknowledges that attributes of a

successful online teacher include time management and organization skills, implying that online teaching will tax the time resources of potential instructors. Much of his time is spent in determining students' progress and finding resources that can help student master the content.

The degree of concern that Jacob places on the element of time is not entirely clear. It appears that, like many of the other possible concerns, the time commitment to online teaching is merely a reality that he accepts without much of an emotional response. Still, it should be noted that time and time management seem to be a reality that affects his online teaching.

Sub-theme 2: Timely, quality feedback. Closely related to the element of time is the need to provide students with timely, quality feedback on their assignments. Whereas time was a stand-alone concern that dealt with the amount of time required by online teaching, this sub-theme represents the time needed to complete the specific task of providing feedback. It appears from Jacob's experience that his belief in mastery learning and commitment to the success of all students, that this concern may be more significant than the overall time required by online teaching.

The large workload near the course cut off points makes it difficult for online instructors to return student work in a timely matter. Additionally, the urgency to return student work makes it difficult to provide quality feedback to inform students of their mistakes and provide direction on how those mistakes can be corrected for future assignments. Jacob refers to this situation as a "grading marathon," but the concern with him does not appear to be the presence of the massive amounts of grading, but on his ability to provide quality feedback to students. Again, this concern seems to stem from his desire for his students to learn through assignments, and for his students to achieve mastery of the course content.

Theme 4: Student Relationships

The sub-themes represented in this theme represents concerns about the relationship between students and the instructor.

Sub-theme 1: Relationship building more difficult. The online teaching environment makes relationship building with students more challenging, according to Jacob. "The care and the affection, the sincerity in person are so much easier because the smile, the empathy can all be communicated by non-verbals." As a result, Jacob admits that he loses out on some of those personal relationships with kids although the relationships are not entirely lost in online teaching. Rather, the relationships he has with students have a more "instructional relational focus." From Jacob's perspective, it appears that this sub-theme is not a significant concern for Jacob.

Sub-theme 2: Student communication. Closely related to the sub-theme of relationships is the need for explicit communication. For Jacob, the art of communicating with students is very important in an online teaching environment. The absence of face-to-face interactions makes it difficult for teachers to communicate feelings that can build relationships with students. Online teaching requires a high degree of explicitness in communicating those feelings and in "building bridges" in the content. One example Jacob used was the need to review concepts in the curriculum with students. In a traditional setting, the need for a review would become apparent as a teacher engages a class discussion on a topic. In the absence of that discussion, online instructors need to build those bridge intentionally to provide students opportunities to review the curriculum.

Theme 5: Understanding the Student Experience

More specific than student relationships, this theme considers how instructors conceive of the student experience in the online course, and how an instructor experiences concern for their students.

Sub-theme 1: Student readiness. This sub-theme represents Jacob's concern for students' foundational knowledge upon entering into his online course. As a service provider, Jacob's organization relies on the student's traditional school to teach to the state core to ensure that they have the requisite skills for success in the online environment. This is particularly important in world language courses where comprehension of Spanish 1 concepts is required for success in Spanish 2.

From Jacob's experience, not all the students have a solid foundation in the concepts that are needed to be successful in his courses. This concern is compounded by infrastructure concerns mentioned earlier because Jacob does not have the ability to move students around to a more appropriate course level. This concern is slightly different from the infrastructure concern because it deals not only with the placement of students, but on the instructor's empathy towards the students as impacted by their readiness to learn. Jacob admits that students who are improperly placed in his course will need to spend more time on course concepts than students who enroll having mastered the prerequisite concepts.

Sub-theme 2: Student struggles. A major theme in Jacob's experience is his acknowledgement of the struggles of his online students and their dependence on the instructor for support. As previously mentioned, Jacob often compares learning in his course to a trip to Florida with many possible paths and methods of arriving at the destination. For many of his students, that trip is filled with detours and delays as students make mistakes and pay the price

for learning with their time, money, and resources. While he is clear in describing the struggle

for many students in the learning experience, Jacob also admits that this struggle will also require

more of him as the instructor. Part of his job as the instructor is to ensure that his students are

"working through the challenging concepts and taking their time/asking for help."

  Sub-theme 3: Student movement through the course. With all of the course content

released at once (see infrastructure concern about "Limited Teacher Control), the students are

free to proceed through the course as desired. The movement of students is sometimes

concerning to Jacob as students do not always progress linearly. Jacob explains that just like

people all eat their vegetables differently, students approach his course in much the same way.

Some students will skip harder assignments (like speaking assignments) and will do the easy

assignments first, or some may try and struggle through the course as designed. The challenge

for Jacob is when students progress to another assignment or unit without completing the

requisite skills needed for future assignments. Since learning builds upon prior learning,

students are disadvantaged as they proceed through a course without mastering earlier concepts.

  A related concern deals with the pace at which students proceed through the course.

Some students will proceed through the course at such a rapid pace (especially at the end of the

semester) that they will not take the time to consider the instructor's feedback on earlier

assignments. This presents a problem for students as they repeat the same mistakes they have

made on earlier assignments because they have not carefully considered the feedback that was

designed to inform and correct their learning.

A Wealth of Experience

This theme explores the possibility that concerns of instructors change as they gain teaching experience. Of particular interest is the importance the instructor places on experience, and how experience has aided in the instructor's development.

It would be difficult for an instructor with no prior teaching experience to take on both a content and pedagogical learning curve and be successful at thoroughly supporting the student. From Jacob's perspective, prior teaching experience becomes requisite knowledge that a teacher can draw upon to problem solve in online learning environments.

While the impact of experience on Jacob's concerns is not explicit, he admits that his experience has led to his development as a teacher. Jacob's experience has helped him to discern between controllable and uncontrollable factors in teaching. He understands now what are realities that must be accepted and worked around, and what are factors that he can change and influence. The difference between controllable and uncontrollable factors seems significant because accepting realities beyond his control appears to provide some degree of resolution to his concerns. Time and effort that could be spent on factors that will not change are devoted more completely to factors within his control.

Experience has also helped Jacob to anticipate challenges before they arise. The first time he taught an online course, he acknowledges challenges that took him by surprise. For example, he learned from his first semester that students needed more review than what was in the curriculum. In a traditional setting, these opportunities for review would arise more organically but the online setting requires teachers to be more deliberate about reviewing. With even a semester of experience, he was able to better anticipate some of the challenges students would face as they progressed through the content.

Jacob's wealth of experience has helped him to define concern in a more positive, constructive way. In every sense, Jacob is accepting of his concerns and challenges, and determined to help students be successful. The way that he defines concern, and the impact his concerns have on himself, his students, and his position, is likely different than teachers with less experience or different professional responsibilities.

A Focus on Student Experience

While Jacob's concerns were categorized into various themes and sub-themes, it could be conceived that Jacob's concerns only bear weight as they affect the student's learning experience. For example, the theme about overloaded mentors referred to many times throughout the interviews and the journal entries represent a significant concern because it reduced the individualized attention needed by the student and the ability for the online instructor to provide sufficient learning supports. Factors that do not directly influence the student experience seem to present very little concern for Jacob. In this way, it may be unfair to consider student concerns as an altogether separate theme due to their influence on nearly every other concern addressed. This inextricable relationship between concerns and students is noted and will be considered further in the experiences of other online teachers.

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Katie - Case Study

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Katie is currently in the middle of her second year of teaching at her online institution where she teaches language courses. Katie began her college experience pursuing a degree in veterinary medicine, but her plans quickly changed when she took a language course to fulfill a graduation requirement. It took only a month of class before she could say to her teachers, "I want your job." The cultural diversity and exposure to the outside world was a fascinating change from the rural, homogenous society she was accustomed to. After her second year

learning the language, she traveled abroad where her love for the culture and history of the country deepened.

Looking back on her path to education, Katie admitted to early experiences that pointed her to education. During her middle and high school years, Katie was often the person friends would turn to for help in understanding difficult concepts and principles. In this role, Katie became a tutor, a role she feels closely aligns to her work as an online teacher. With a set curriculum in place, Katie's responsibility was largely in identifying struggling students and providing effective supplemental material to help them understand the content more completely.

With her sights set on education, Katie worked to complete her degree in English teaching with a minor in language teaching. Upon graduation from her university's teaching program, Katie was given a full-year internship with both an English teacher and a language teacher. Following her yearlong internship, Katie moved abroad to teach English and to further immerse herself in the culture. After a year-and-a-half of teaching English internationally, Katie moved back to the United States and took a full-time teaching position at an inner-city school where she taught an ESL course. Her early teaching experiences were both challenging and rewarding; she struggled with the typical first-year teacher problems (i.e., classroom management, school politics), but thrived in engaging students with hands-on activities and projects. Interestingly, in her current online setting, the problems that challenged her in her traditional experience were largely irrelevant, and the rewarding experiences in her traditional settings were difficult to implement.

Path to Online Teaching

It is unclear what factors led Katie to quit her traditional teaching position and accept her current position as an online instructor two years ago, but the lack of feedback and support from

her administration in the traditional school were contributing factors. Katie's limited traditional and online teaching experience made her participation valuable to this study. Her case illustrated the variability of concerns in inexperienced teachers, as well as possible influence even a little teaching experience can have on teacher's concerns.

Theme 1: Organizational Infrastructure

The sub-themes represented here are embedded in the institutional organization. These themes are largely out of the control of the instructor but within the control of the local organization. While many of these concerns may apply to online teachers in other organizations, these themes are likely to vary across different organizations.

Sub-theme 1: Course quality. The content of the courses, including their functionality and relevance, is a significant concern for Katie. She noted conversations with coworkers in which they "agonized" over the current course situation, and hoped that the organization would work to improve the courses. "It hurts knowing that I have to use something that I don't think is the best."

A major factor affecting the course quality stemmed from outdated materials. "Our curriculum is getting to be 10 plus years old, so some of the things are outdated." For example, the changes to national currency made in recent years are slow to be identified in the courses. "Our curriculum that we're using in my company . . . it's sort of old now. It was made back in 2006, and there's been some changes."

The outdated or missing content in the curriculum encouraged Katie to design supplemental material students could use to develop content competency. "The curriculum does have some holes and some gaps and that's what we use the supplemental [materials] to try to

solve." As will be seen with later concerns, the amount and use of this teacher-created supplemental material is also concerning.

What complicates this concern further is the perceived impression of Katie on their organization and their lack of incentives to improve the courses. Katie's online company purchased the content from a content provider, leaving Katie's company to facilitate the courses. "We bought the curriculum from somewhere and we can't touch it unless we ask them, but they've already got their money, so they don't really have any incentive to go back and change it, is what the overall teacher understanding is at the moment." The perceived lack of incentive to improve the course is discouraging for Katie: "I've been talking with a lot of my coworkers about the lack of curriculum options . . . and how disappointed we are and how our companies are not monetarily motivated to make any changes to the curriculum."

Sub-theme 2: Lack of course control. Poor course quality is especially grievous when teachers are not empowered to make significant changes to the curriculum. For Katie, having a set curriculum was particularly concerning as a teacher when she recognized shortcomings in the curriculum and knew how to improve them. "And we could just make it so much better, and it would be so much less confusing, but it's very difficult to not be able to have that control." Lacking in control of the course, Emily is again tasked with designing supplemental materials. "I can't add to the curriculum and I can't add to assignments. I can just add extra things that [students] might be intrinsically motivated to do."

The lack of control Katie felt as a teacher appeared even more concerning as a first-year online teacher. "I felt like in a traditional setting, I knew everything that was going on because I was in control, whereas I felt very out of control in the first year." While this feeling of being

"out of control" was especially profound in her first year of online teaching, it is clear that this concern has not yet been resolved by Katie.

Sub-theme 3: Technology problems. With experience in two online institutions, Katie is able to compare technology practices across institutions. Katie described the LMS at her part-time institution as lacking an intuitive interface. "Grading, finding, everything . . . I still complain about it. I'd like click and wait and click, click, click . . . I don't like the system."

Perhaps her greatest concern regarding technology is the impact it has on communication with parents and students. Katie described a bad experience where the technology failed to provide her with the student information needed to act properly in a sensitive situation. "I had an issue where a student went in for an operation and I didn't know, and I upset the parent when I called . . . a happy, bubbly call, like, 'Hey, if you're still interested in taking [the class], please, give me a call back and I'd love to help you out.' And then the parent calls me back and is like, 'She's in an operation. She's in recovery.'" When she reported the situation to her boss, she learned that there was indeed a medical note on that student's record for her boss, but that note failed to appear for Katie. Unable to see important messages and information about student's personal situation led Katie to act insensitively in this difficult situation.

While this situation may not repeat itself frequently, online teaching that relies on frequent and successful communication and positive relationships between parents, students, and teachers, make any technology concern more aggravating.

Theme 2: Teaching Task

These themes represent tasks that are not primarily concerned with the student experience or embedded in the organizational infrastructure. These concerns may be more global to online learning generally, or more local to the individual instructor.

Sub-theme 1: Grading. In the absence of lesson planning and curriculum design tasks, Katie's efforts shifted to grading and assessing student work. Drawing from her experience as a traditional teacher, which she described as being very "hectic," Katie admitted that online can have similar moments of stress. "I still wake up sometimes on Monday and I'm like 'ahhh!', because the kids can work over the weekend and I'm swarmed." Not only does online learning remove time and place barriers for the teacher's work, it also removes these same barriers for students who can engage in the content and submit assignments at any time. These moments seem especially pertinent in her part-time teaching position where she has "three times the assignments to grade than my full-time job per student."

The end of the semester and in the days leading up to a school break for Katie are additional times when grading responsibilities become more time-consuming. "At the end of the semester, it's an interesting time. It's definitely different than any other time in the semester. So it usually consists of a lot of kids turning in a lot of things. So it's pretty grading-intensive, as well as like right before we go on a break."

Sub-theme 2: Resources not used. Lacking control of the content, Katie's efforts were focused on creating supplemental learning materials to shore up inadequacies in the curriculum and provide personalized supports for students. Designing these supplemental materials required a lot of time, and this became "very stressful when you put in a lot of work and the students don't even know that it exists," according to Katie. "Most of the time the student has not used the tools I have created. In order to help students succeed in my class, I have created many supplementary resources including assignment directions and examples, study guides, and even video tutorials."

A part of this concern stems from the difficulty of directing students and parents to the supplemental materials that have been created. Katie described a conversation she had with a coworker in which he related an example of this challenge. A "student was complaining that they were having a hard time on the test, and so he was like, 'Well did you look at the study guide?' And she's like, 'What do you mean?' . . . And so the student found all these resources and the parent was like, 'Why didn't you tell us about this?' And we put a link to them all in every single weekly update email, and it's like plastered everywhere. So I mean, this happens throughout the semester, and it's probably the biggest gripe that we have." As a result of these situations, Katie found herself constantly looking for ways to "better link my supplemental material with the course content lessons," a challenge complicated by lacking control of the curriculum.

Changes in job expectations in her full-time position also impacted this concern by requiring her to hold additional synchronous live sessions with students, although attendance at these optional sessions traditionally wanes through the semester. "After like a few weeks, three kids show up, two kids show up, no kids show up," but the company expectation increased these live sessions to make them more convenient for students. In a conversation with her supervisor, Katie related, "'I spent five hours co-teaching [live sessions] on Friday, but you also want me to do four hours of [live sessions] on Wednesday and Thursday for kids who aren't coming?'" It is important to note that future conversations with the supervisor allowed her to limit these required live sessions so she could devote her time to more productive activities.

Student's lack of interaction with the resources provided by Katie was discouraging. Although the following comment from Katie described specifically her concern regarding the absence of students at live sessions, her thoughts likely generalized to other efforts in support of

student learning. "I was like, 'Oh, I spent all this time and no one's here.' And then you just get sort of defeated the next week because you're like, 'why am I spending all this time on something that's required but no one's showing up, and it's not really benefitting anyone?'"

Theme 3: General Online Teaching

The concerns considered here are concerns that are present for many online educators and do not rise out of specific organizational structures, policies, or practices. They are concerns that may be shared by anyone who is engaged in online teaching, although these concerns may still vary according to personalities, cultures, or local government mandates.

Sub-theme 1: Social isolation. As a "warm" and "bubbly" individual who thrives on personal interactions, Katie reported often getting "cabin fever" while teaching online. The online medium appeared to create barriers that can sometimes limit connections with other people. "When you're in online, it's much harder to just connect, reach out, talk to people, because you aren't in the same physical space with them. And I sort of miss that physical interaction." Katie admitted humorously that this sense of isolation probably "makes [her] call [students] more" and "bother them."

In addition to missing interactions with students, Katie also missed important interactions with coworkers. "And even just talking with coworkers, because you always have this sense that maybe . . . there's more important things to do, but at certain points in time I'm like, 'No, I need a half an hour just to get this off my chest and talk with another teacher,' and then you worry, 'Oh, is this a good time to contact them?'" This separation between Katie, her students, and other teachers in the online environment appears significant.

Theme 4: Student Experience

This theme considers the instructor's relationship to students, how instructors conceive of the student experience in the online course, and how an instructor experiences concern for their students.

Sub-theme 1: Student characteristics. Katie is keenly aware of the many major challenges her students go through, challenges that make online learning a near necessity for some students. "A lot of them are just in very interesting situations that I might find sad or horrible, or just worrisome." Students in Katie's class include populations of homeschooled students with medical issues, students with learning disabilities, and students with social anxiety.

While the population of students in Katie's class brings with them a unique set of challenges, it is the characteristics of students that are most concerning. "I find that many students are worried about their grades and may not attempt an assignment due to the feeling that they will fail." Part of Katie's job, in these situations, was to help instill a growth mindset in students which is that they "will continue and keep learning . . . even if they don't do a good job, listen to . . . feedback" and take the opportunity to redo assignments as often as is needed.

Not only did feelings of failure permeate the student's experience, but some students may have struggled with the lack of structure that characterizes this particular online learning environment. "I have had some students who do not do well in an online setting, because there's not enough structure. They really like the structure in a traditional setting, being physically present, physically there, and interacting with people one-to-one, or with a group." Students who required more structure may struggle in an online class because ultimately the responsibility of learning is largely with the students. "They can feel like they have to do it all themselves. Which a lot of it is. They are responsible for their own learning, and that's tough." Katie found

that students often struggled in online learning if they lack confidence or a sense of responsibility to navigate their own learning experience.

Sub-theme 2: Student movement through the course. Katie's concerns for her students' movement and progress through her course began with the priorities of the students. "And I worry that they have so many other . . . demands on them that education is not the first." For some students, these demands may have kept them from simply logging into the course. "I think for some of them, showing up to school and logging on and internet issues are the biggest factor."

Not only did life demands keep students from logging in and progressing through the course, but Katie acknowledged that other courses may also have prevented students from working in her course. For some of these students, "they just figure Japanese was pretty easy and they're focusing on their main courses for online, especially if they're doing all online. So like getting through English, math, sciences, stuff like that. And then they're going to do Japanese at the end." Katie found this approach problematic for students, as it is best to learn a language "little by little daily, and to do it at once would be too overwhelming."

For many students, failure to log in consistently in the course resulted in a rush to complete the course at the end of the semester. For these students, Katie worried about the value of their learning experience in the course. "I also worried that students may not have time to look at feedback and learn from it, as would other on-track students who are under less of a time crunch."

Sub-theme 3: Student management. Managing student efforts and progress through the course was a concern Katie took very seriously. As a teacher who thrived on personal connections, Katie worried about her class numbers. "I'm worried about having too many! . . . I

definitely worry about my numbers, and not having enough time for everyone, and not being able to give everyone my best because I have so many responsibilities in so many different areas. I worry about my students a lot." The sheer numbers of students made it difficult for Katie to make the "personal connection" she felt was valuable in the learning environment.

Sub-theme 4: Student-content interaction. As an elective course, many students take Katie's class because of an interest in the language and culture of the country. However, this excitement can subside when students realize how difficult the content can be. "I find that a lot of kids are interested in [country] pop culture, such as anime or comics called Manga. And . . . they are very excited to take [the language] at the beginning, and then realize it's like five out of five difficulty for native English speakers to learn. And they either embrace that challenge, or they muggle through to get a grade, or they give up." Interest in the language or the culture alone does not make the content any easier, especially if students come to class without a background in the language. "I mean [the language] is really hard as it is, I think especially if you don't have any background. And so just the curriculum alone is a little overwhelming and you might not want to take on or go outside . . . that curriculum."

The inadequacy of the course content and the necessity of teacher-created supplemental material has previously been noted. While this supplemental material is important, Katie admitted that this material may also add to student's difficulty with the course content. "I feel like a lot of teachers who are just like, 'Well, it is what it is and we just have to make enough extra stuff,' but I feel like sometimes the extra stuff can overwhelm students." Even the best efforts and intentions of teachers to support student learning may be "a little overkill" as the material adds material to an already difficult content.

Sub-theme 5: Communication with students. The time and effort required by Katie to contact struggling students in particular is great. These efforts were especially critical in the weeks leading up to a break in school or the end of a semester. "Reaching out and keeping up contact with struggling students remains the focus for me. This is true especially during the weeks and days leading up to Thanksgiving break." The end of the semester deadlines provides at least a little hope that Katie will be able to spur students on to greater activity in the course. "Many of these students are ones I have been trying to contact all semester, but I hope that with the deadline of the course been a couple weeks away, I can get the procrastinators to move on their course." It is challenging for Katie when students failed to respond to efforts to interact.

Theme 5: Early Teaching Concerns

In only her second-year, Katie recognized significant changes to her concerns as an online teacher. This theme explores the possibility that concerns of instructors change as they gain teaching experience. Of particular interest is the importance the instructor places on experience, and how experience has aided in the instructor's development.

Sub-theme 1: Communication. Although Katie thrives on personal interaction, Katie admitted to being reserved in her communication with parents and students in her first year. "I struggled at first with, for some reason, just picking up the phone and calling students. It was just something that was really foreign to me." Part of her struggle in this regard originated from her experience in a traditional classroom. "I didn't really like to call parents, even, when I was in a traditional setting. I would only do it in extreme circumstances. So if someone did something really good or really bad, I would call both of them so that I'd feel good at the end of it." Her experience over the last year-and-a half before her interview had resolved this concern as she constantly used the phone or other online tools to interact with parents and students.

Sub-theme 2: Time and student management. The lack of structure in time and place introduced Katie to concerns as a first-year teacher that she has struggled to overcome. In particular, she was very accommodating to student demands even when those demands required sacrificing her own personal schedule and responsibilities. "I was like, 'Oh my gosh, let me help you!' Let me, you know, like take time out of my day even though I have like 10 other things to do right now at this moment."

Katie was enabled to manage her time and students more effective in part because of job expectations she developed. Without that experience, it was hard for her to judge how much time to devote to the various responsibilities she was given. "So the biggest thing was, the first year . . . figuring out what each assignment, along with the students, figuring out what they should have accomplished, what the expectations were." With a developing set of job and student expectations, Katie was able to improve her time and student management.

Leah - Case Study

Leah is currently in her second year of online science teaching, having started her teaching career near the completion of her master's in education. Although Leah has always wanted to teach, her parents and other relatives (some of whom are teachers) dissuaded her from majoring in education as an undergrad and she instead majored in general science. After struggling to find work in a science-related field, she decided to teach, the direction she was inclined to pursue in the first place. The local college offered a one-year online teaching certificate program for individuals interested in teaching. In conjunction with the graduate coursework, this online program also placed Leah in a local school which provided her with valuable learning experiences in a real-world educational context. The successful experiences in

her student teaching helped her to see how much she enjoyed teaching and fueled her desire to pursue a career in education.

It is important to note that Leah is also a member of a teacher development program within the online institution. This two-year program is designed to take beginning teachers and place them in online teaching settings to give them valuable teaching experience to make them more marketable for traditional teaching positions. This program was designed to benefit all participating parties: the institution benefitted from filling all of their teaching positions and hiring teachers at a reduced salary; the online teachers benefitted from gaining teaching experience that would prepare them for other teaching positions; and the home state of the institution would benefit from retaining teachers to fill teaching vacancies across the state. Leah's participation in this development program is important as it framed many of her concerns about online teaching.

With only one year of online teaching experience and no traditional teaching experience beyond her student teaching, Leah's position in this study is significant. Her limited teaching experience in traditional settings provides insight into how teaching experience influences the development of concerns in online settings. Furthermore, as a fairly new online teacher, her situation provides insight into how novice online teachers experience concerns that are similar to or different from more experienced online teachers.

Path to Online Teaching

The path to online teaching was more direct than many of the other participants. Near the end of her teaching certification program, Leah attended a teaching job fair to explore potential jobs with school districts around the state. The only successful interaction she had at that fair was with her future online teaching organization. They offered her an online teaching position in

June, and, although it was not her dream job, the urgency of her situation and the lack of other available jobs made the online teaching job prospect too appealing to pass up. After completing a fairly short online training program, Leah began her teaching career in the Fall of 2015 as an online teacher.

Leah's successful student teaching experience helped her to envision what a successful and meaningful career in teaching could look like. Her concerns in online teaching illustrate the influence of expectations, and the difficulties that can develop when expectations collide with the unanticipated realities of teaching. While the following themes are treated separately in this study, many of these themes are closely related to other themes in her experience.

Many of these concerns appear bold and assertive but it is important to note her positive experience while working as an online teacher with this particular institution. Leah repeatedly drew comparisons with other online teaching institutions and expressed appreciation that the structure of her company allowed her to experience more connections with her students. It is likely that a study that included the benefits or advantages of online teaching would pull out additional positive comments.

Theme 1: Organizational Infrastructure

The sub-themes represented here are embedded in the institutional organization. These themes are largely out of the control of the instructor but within the control of the local organization. While many of these concerns may apply to online teachers in other organizations, these themes are likely to vary across different organizations. For Leah, the majority of her concerns revolved around the new teacher development program she was involved in. It is likely that these particular concerns will not be present in teachers who do not share membership in this program.

Sub-theme 1: Organizational pressure. The "success metric" used by this online institution requires all teachers to have 80% of their students pass their classes with a 60% or better. It is unclear to Leah why this passing rate was established and so this metric appears especially cumbersome. "It's interesting, because [the organization] gets paid either way from the school districts, so I wonder why they're so concerned about pass rates other than trying to get more schools to enroll their kids." This pass rate expectation takes on additional weight as she anticipates disruptions in normal school routines. "I've already mentioned the pass rates that my company wishes us to achieve, so as we get closer to the holiday season, I know that student work will taper off."

This passing expectation places significant pressure on Leah and on the relationship she has with mentor teachers. "There's a drop date for kids where it doesn't affect us, and it doesn't affect them . . . But half the time mentors will sit there and say, 'Well, he needs this class.'" A mentor's desire to keep students enrolled in the course is often at odds with online instructors who view these "undocumented drop" students as threats to their teaching evaluations and ultimately to their job security. "If a student is not dropped from the course, but has no intention of working, he or she should be removed from the class by the mentor. Often, the mentors refuse to do this as the student has to be enrolled in a course, which means it negatively affects the instructors"

Beyond affecting job security, the organization's passing expectation influences the students' learning in the course. "[The passing expectation] worries me for reasons of my success, but also because of how it affects the success of the students in learning the content." "I sometimes feel pressure to just try to find a way to get a kid enough points to have sixty percent." That pressure often causes a dilemma between awarding points and grades and

assessing learning. "I obviously need enough of my kids to pass so I don't get written up, but I'm also kind of like I'd love to just say 'no, you know, like you've got to retake this or do it in your own school or whatever, but you don't understand biology.'"

Sub-theme 2: Program expectations. In Leah's case, the expectations of her teacher development program formed the base for some of her most powerful and influential concerns. Leah originally viewed this two-year program as a useful step in reaching her ultimate goal of becoming a full-time traditional teacher in the public schools. The "stated goal of the program as it was presented to us is to keep talented teachers in [the state] and get them in face-to-face classrooms. The way it's panning out right now isn't conducive to that." With that stated goal, the online institution Leah works for was tasked with helping online teachers gain experience and make connections with people in the school districts. These expectations have not been met in Leah's experience, and have given rise to serious concerns. "We've been here . . . you haven't been helping us actually build relationships with these schools like you said you would."

The stated expectation of the program also opened the possibility for full-time employment as an online teacher, but this, too, has not been realized. "So we knew it was a two-year program, but they kind of let us think that we could do part-time teaching afterward . . . But when we were [at a meeting] they basically said, 'No, we're not going to do that,' even though they kind of led us to think we might be able to." This unmet expectation has caused at least a little panic for Leah as her two-year program ends in the summer of 2017. "'So you've got a whole bunch of people you hired on to help like this, and now we're all just stuck.' I don't know. So I'm like, 'Am I even going to be teaching come summer? Because I need insurance. I need to work. I've got to find something.'"

Sub-theme 3: Teacher-organization relationship. These unmet expectations between Leah and her program have resulted in a tenuous relationship between her and her organization. "It honestly seems like the company is done spending time and resources on our group, as one person put it. The department in charge of getting us into classrooms to see different teaching styles wanted nothing to do with us. That's a huge blow."

Despite this difficult relationship, the organization continues to ask for additional services from these online teachers, a request Leah struggles with. "But they want us to recruit. I'm not going to go recruit people for like my replacements." While Leah continues to work for her students, extra tasks are difficult to manage. "I still take care of my students, but I'm not really focused on improving the courses anymore. Because it didn't benefit them, and I'm basically doing it for no money. They have no desire to keep me."

Perhaps the biggest challenges in establishing a positive relationship with the organization is having an unclear communication protocol to disclose teacher concerns. "We were kind of lost as to who to go to to effect actual change." Even when concerns were addressed to various figures in the organization, it appeared unclear if change was even possible. "We didn't really know who to go to about certain things, because our boss . . . I don't know how much power she had to change some of the stuff."

Theme 2: Philosophy, Perspective, and Priorities

The perspective towards teaching and learning, and the dedication of time and resources of different roles in the teaching and learning situation (e.g., students, mentors) is considered in this theme. Additionally, this theme also considers the perspective on the larger political and education context, a source of significant concerns for Leah.

Sub-theme 1: Career uncertainty. Leah's concerns about her career in education begins with worries about the larger educational context. "Now that we have a changing mindset about education, different from what I thought it was changing to, I am concerned about there being a place for me in this new era of public education." These worries seem to be triggered by recent political appointments in federal offices, a move that she described as "really discouraging." Even in traditional settings, Leah admits this frustration exists: "I am concerned about keeping my own job. And that's, I think any teacher has that concern the way things kind of go nowadays."

Leah's career uncertainty carries into worries about her local teaching context. "I don't dislike [online teaching] to be fair. I just know there's no future at my company, so I've got to be realistic." Part of her concern about her local context regards the long-term viability of her organization, a curious concern that should be explored further. "I like the way my work is set up, but I don't know that that model is going to stick around. And I think my company's a bit unique in the way it is."

The accumulation of her career uncertainty has led her to confront the possibility of leaving the education field entirely. "I spent all summer trying to find openings. I found a few, put out ads, didn't get anything back. So that panic is definitely there. So I guess my big concern is really just where am I going to be? Like I wanted to teach but . . . I might end up going to work for like an insurance company." The realization of leaving teaching presented feelings of disappointment and even a little remorse. "[Teaching] is still what I want to do, but I don't know if there's a future there. Which is really sad, because I spent a lot of money to go do it. But it's really what I always thought I'd be doing even when everyone told me not to. And they were probably right."

Sub-theme 2: Online teaching devalued. Even with limited experience, Leah was able to discern the lack of value people place on online education. For her, the perceived devaluing of online teaching by traditional administrators (and potential employers) was most difficult. "I'm not getting experience that it seems principals want." This concern seemed to be magnified by the experiences of other online teachers as they pursued teaching jobs in traditional settings but were passed over in light of their online teaching experience. "One of my coworkers . . . was actually applying for a job over the summer, and the only reason they rejected her was because she hadn't been teaching in a classroom for two years."

One of the changes Leah recommended to her organization to assist teachers in her program in findings full-time work was to allow them to sub in traditional classrooms one day a week. This suggestion was formed because of a perception that she had that subbing in traditional settings would more likely lead to full-time employment than teaching online. "A lot of us that have been applying for jobs are getting passed over for people who have just been long-term subbing. So I think a lot of principals and people hiring for districts are more concerned about classroom management, and they look at our resume and might not even call us . . . because they think we don't have any experience with that."

While devaluing of online teaching by administrators presents serious concerns to Leah, she is also aware of students' negative attitude toward online learning. Regarding her efforts with students, Leah notes: "I can try sending messages, I can try . . . to contact them, but they don't . . . see me. They don't see it as a real class."

Theme 3: Teaching Task Demands

These themes represent tasks that are not primarily concerned with the student experience or embedded in the organizational infrastructure. These concerns may be more global to online learning generally, or more local to the individual instructor.

Sub-theme 1: Compensation factors. As a beginning teacher, Leah is keenly aware of compensation concerns. Concerns about money and benefits are common in conversations with teachers, but Leah's situation proved so challenging that she started a second job to make extra money. "I took a [pharmacy] tech job again just for extra money . . . No one goes into teaching for the money, but I need some extra money . . . And I might end up working with an insurance company because, I mean, I've got the experience."

Part of the challenge regarding compensation includes increases in insurance costs without corresponding salary increases. "In one of our last meetings, we learned a few things. That our insurance was probably going up 20%, and that the people in my particular position within the company are not eligible for a raise to counteract that."

Theme 4: Understanding the Student Experience

This theme considers the instructor's relationship to students, how instructors conceive of the student experience in the online course, and how an instructor experiences concern for their students.

Sub-theme 1: Relationship building difficult. Leah acknowledges that relationships with students vary in online settings. "But you can get really nice relationships with kids, and you can just have like a nonexistent, 'All right, you got your grade,' relationship. So that's pretty tough online." While this fact is not necessarily unique to online settings, Leah admits that online teaching limits her ability to be personal with her students.

Leah does not specify all the reasons why online settings makes relationship building more difficult, but she admits that some of the responsibility lies in the students and their desires. "Some kids just don't really care to be at all in any type of kind of 'relationship' with me, because they're just online. They're just there to get a grade. They don't care."

Sub-theme 2: Opportunities to help limited. The physical separation of teacher and students appears to limit Leah's perceived ability to help students. Drawing on her experience in student teaching in a traditional setting, Leah admits that traditional teachers can "give [students] a little bit more push on things." In online settings, a teacher's influence depends on whether or not students are active at logging in. "If this kid won't respond, won't log in, if the mentor has tried to do something, it's kind of like . . . I want to help, but I'm not near this person, I can't . . . if he's not opening emails, it's just tough."

This perceived limitation Leah has with her students can be discouraging. "Often times, especially the ones who need the help the most, they never log on . . . I can try sending messages, I can try . . . any way to contact them, but they don't see me . . . I don't want those kids to fall by the wayside, but I mean I'm in a position where I just have limited ability to help them." The temptation presented through these difficult experiences is to give up on a particular unresponsive student. "Like online it's just, I try, but there's just a point where it's like, 'Is it worth my time anymore?' Because I don't see them. I don't know."

Sub-theme 3: Student movement through the course. The pacing and progress of students through the course is common for many online teachers at this institution, and Leah is no exception. At the beginning of the class, Leah often experienced concerns about students who failed to start class on time. "I also have students who have been enrolled that haven't really

begun working on the course content." In some extreme cases, these students won't begin a class until two or three months into the semester.

Inconsistent movement through the course is also a concern for Leah. Some students will begin working diligently but will abruptly stop progressing partway through the course. "These kids were working the first few weeks and they've really dropped off, and I've got to send about thirty emails out today, like, 'Not working. What's going on?'"

Whether students begin the course late, or engage inconsistently in the course, the result is often a rush of student activity at the end of the grade period. "I will have a large amount of work coming in that was done in a rush. Students will be trying to complete the course in about a week or two rather than at the set out pace." These last minute efforts limit the value of teacher's feedback, and ultimately affect their learning in the course.

Theme 6: Early Teaching Concerns with Experience

Even with limited online teaching experience, Leah is able to recognize the change in her concerns as she's gained experience. This theme explores the possibility that concerns of instructors change as they gain teaching experience. Of particular interest is the importance the instructor places on experience, and how experience has aided in the instructor's development.

Sub-theme 1: Establishing job expectations. For Leah, a big element of her development as an online teacher revolved around establishing job expectations. Some of those expectations are for herself and her own time management. "I think some of it was just kind of managing how to keep on top of grading. Because when I first got in, I was . . . I mean, just assignments come in and it's like, 'Well how much time do we need to spend on each of these?'"

Leah's experience also helped her to develop realistic expectations of her students. "It was having basic expectations . . . a baseline for what kids could do with the assignment and

what might be too much or too little." Establishing those expectations helped Leah resolve some of her early concerns as an online teacher.

APPENDIX B: Cost

The cost for this study was limited to gift cards given to teacher participants. For their participation in the interviews, teachers were given a $40 gift card. Additionally, teachers received an additional $5 for every journal entry completed (a total of seven entries) bringing the maximum cost per teacher to $75. Since some teachers did not complete all of the journal entries, the total cost for all seven teachers was $490.

	Interviews			Journal Entries						
Name	Interview 1	Interview 2	Sept.	Oct. A	Oct. B	Nov. A	Nov. B	Dec. A	Dec. B	Total
Abby	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	$70
Athena	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y	$65
Emily	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	$75
Jackie	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y					$55
Jacob	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	$75
Katie	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	$75
Leah	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	$75
							Total Compensation			$490

APPENDIX C: Expanded Data Analysis Methodology

Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts and completed journal entries. This widely-used method is particularly useful in understanding how participants perceive and make sense of the personal and social situations they experience. This method is also helpful when an exploration of meaning and experience is sought in contrast to testing a proposed hypothesis.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis occurs over a series of steps. The first step occurs when the researcher reads the text holistically to gain a clear understanding of the text as a whole. For the current study, each transcript was read and reviewed until the researcher had a close familiarity with the participant, the context, and some general ideas that emerged. In some parts of the text that were more complex, the interview audio or video was reviewed to understand the tone, emphasis, or non-verbal expressions of communication.

The second step in the interpretative phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to create preliminary interpretations of the text through initial annotations. In the current study, as the lead researcher became more comfortable with the method, the initial annotations began with the first readings of the text. This "merging" of the first two steps of interpretative phenomenological analysis is recognized as reality for researcher as they gain more methodological practice (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). During this initial noting step, the researcher analyzes the text closely and creates relevant descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments when needed. Descriptive comments are "keywords, phrases, or explanations" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 84) of collected data (i.e., interview transcripts, journal entries). These comments were extracted from the original transcript and placed in another column for further analysis. Linguistic comments focused on the presentation of ideas through language. Specifically, the

tone, word choice, pronoun use, repetition, and other language elements were analyzed to better understand the participant's meaning. These linguistic comments were placed in an additional column along with the associated text for further analysis. Conceptual comments are interpretative notes created by the researcher which "may often take an interrogative form" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 88). In this current study, these comments were generally in the form of questions about the underlying meaning of a participant's response, or a challenge to the stated meaning of the participant's comments. These conceptual comments were often open-ended and unresolved and lead the researcher to step back and view a particular idea holistically within the larger context of the participant's experience. Like descriptive and linguistic comments, these conceptual comments, too, were placed in an additional column for further analysis.

The third step of the analysis occurred by placing the text aside and focusing on the comments created in the previous step. The lead researcher reviewed each comment for accuracy, and developed a concise, meaningful statement, or theme, that represented each comment. This process was useful as it provided the researcher an opportunity to review the newly developed themes with the initial text to ensure accuracy. This step of theme creation provided the basic data that converged in the remaining analysis. An example of work completed for the previously described steps is found in Table 1.

Table 1

Detailed Example of Second and Third Steps of the Data Analysis Process

Emerging Themes	Original transcript	Exploratory Comments
Little direct influence	I: Things that concern me? The fact that we have such little influence with what happens in the direct supports. For instance, at their home school because the	Have such little influence with what happens in the direct supports (pretty quick response like he's thought about this before; main concern here; *what does he mean by "direct supports" Is it grades and credit like he mentions?*)
No student ownership	kids, they're not our students, right? They're headed by us in that specific area but they are, they have a mentor teacher who are	They're not our students (*Again, the use of pronouns is "our" instead of "my"; thinking of the collective group of online teachers*)
No ultimate responsibility	ultimately responsible for issuing the credit and the grades and all those things, you know. So it's the	Mentor teacher is ultimately responsible (He acts like he would prefer to have this responsibility)
Uncontrollable variables	lack of control of some of the variables that concern me because you can have a student and work with them but you don't have that	Lack of control of the variables (what are these variables? Is he referring to the grades and credit he mentions previously? Earlier in the interview, he doesn't seem to care about those things much) You can have a student and work with them
Poor backend support	backend support from the mentor at their home school, it just doesn't work.	If you don't have that backend support from mentor, it doesn't work (acknowledges the importance of others to be successful, things out of his control are what bothers him)
	T: So are there any other things that again are concerning to you as a teacher?	
Improve management	I: No, just continuing to improve the management of things. Just the regular teacher things, you know,	No other concerns; just the continuing to improve management of things (pretty quick to discount other major concerns)
Regular teacher things Time Functioning at your best	time, your ability to continue to operate and function at your very best.	Just regular teacher things: time, functioning at your very best (*I think time and functioning are independent of "regular teacher things"; what does he mean by "regular teacher things?"*)

Once all of the text had been analyzed and themes developed, we copied all of the themes into a new document and searched for connections. The combining or clustering of themes resulted in sub-ordinate themes, or higher-order organizing themes representative of more general phenomena (see Figure 1). Smith et al. (2009) suggested several approaches on how to create these superordinate themes utilized as part of this study.

```
1. What are online teachers concerned about?
    a. Social Support Structures
        i.   Overloaded mentors - 56
                1. Too many students for mentors - 54, 56
    b. Organizational Infrastructure
        i.   Limited Teacher Control
                1. Content, Grading, and Procedure
                        a. Can't change curriculum - 22, 49, 78
                                i.   Different content organization preferred - 22
                                ii.  Preset courses - 25
                        b. Little control of grading - 47
                        c. Content all released - 80
        ii.  No Student Ownership
                1. Little direct influence - 21
                2. No student ownership - 21
                3. No ultimate responsibility - 21
        iii. Student Placement and Mobility
                1. No placement tests - 78
                2. No student mobility - 26
                        a. Unmet instructor expectations - 26
                        b. Schools not aligned to core - 26
        iv.  Holiday disruptions - 80
                1. Students out for break - 36
    c. Mismatched Philosophy and Priorities
        i.   Technology Limitations
                1. Not set up for mastery-based grading - 39
                2. Philosophy and technology mismatch - 46
                3. Manual work with technology - 47
```

Figure 1. Organizational theme structure for Jacob.
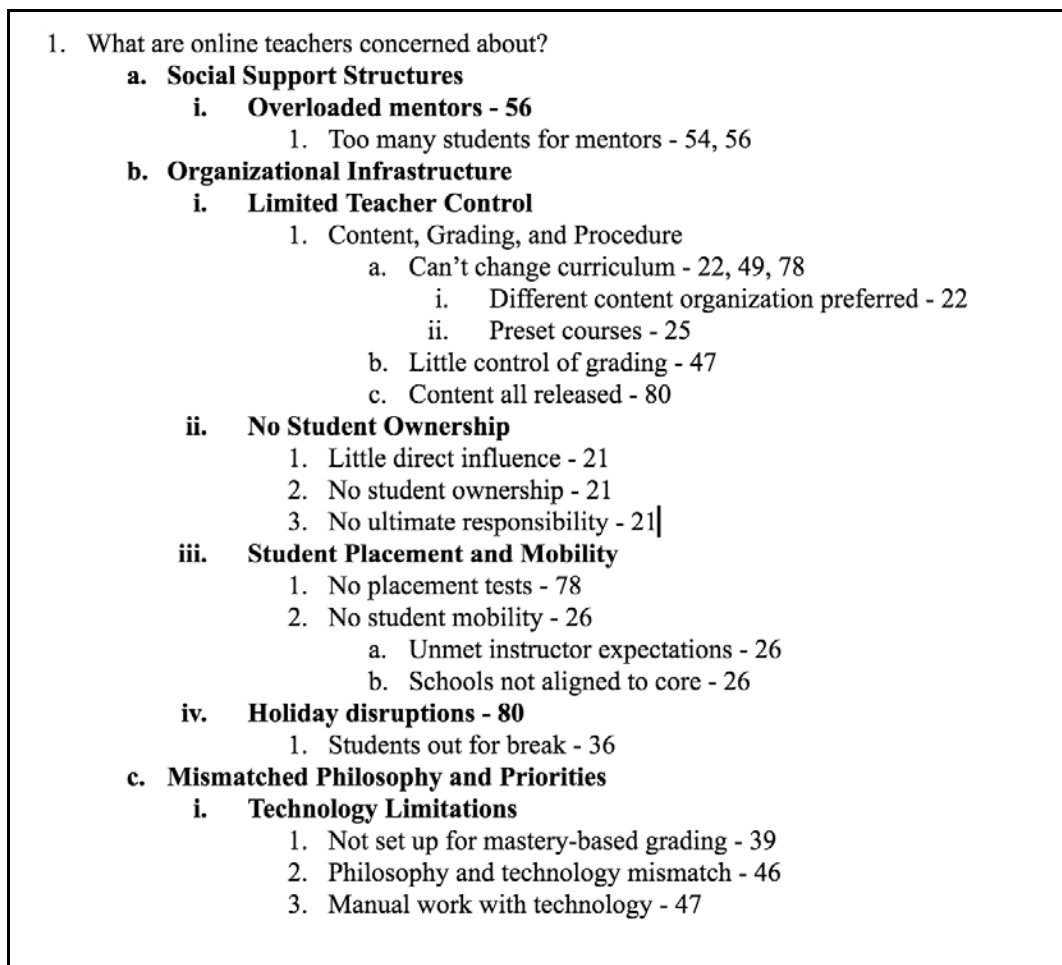
In particular, the process of abstraction, subsumption, and numeration were most useful. In abstraction, themes that appear closely related to each other are grouped together and given a new name representing the newly-formed superordinate theme. Often times, an emergent theme from the analysis became the superordinate theme, and other emergent themes fell under this

new cluster. This process is called subsumption. Finally, numeration is the process of considering the frequency in which a theme occurs. While no effort was made to quantify the emergent themes from participants, recurring themes were useful in determining the significance of some themes. Finally, once all the themes and superordinate were organized, superordinate themes were named and linked to specific evidence from the text (see Table 2). This study used the same modified interpretative phenomenological analysis method to analyze interview transcripts and completed journal entries. This step of organizing themes into superordinate themes became the starting point for writing up the findings as certain themes emerged as dominant in the experience of participants, or dropped due to sufficient support.

Table 2

Table of Themes with Specific Data from the Text

Themes/Superordinate Themes	Page Number	Key Statements
Overloaded Mentors	54,56	"You're set up to be a monitor" "You are one of 70 kids"
Limited Teacher Control	21,25,47,78,80	"We can't entirely change the curriculum" "Every course is structured" 'The weighting of points, everything's all pretty set" "We don't have any control over the content we teach" "The entire course content released at once"
Student Ownership	21	"We have such little influence with what happens in direct supports" "They're not our students" "They have a mentor teacher who are ultimately responsible"

Since multiple participants were considered in this study, each participant was analyzed individually before they were considered collectively, and individual case studies were written

after each analysis. Evidence to support pre-existing themes were sought with each subsequent participant, while remaining open to the emergence of possible new themes. The combined analyses of each participant resulted in a master table of themes and subordinate themes for the entire group (see Table 3). Utilizing the same methods used for individual cases, this master table of themes was analyzed to determine superordinate themes representative of the participant group.

Table 3

Example Master Table of Themes

Themes/Sub-themes	Jacob	Leah	Jackie	Emily	Katie	Abby	Athena	Tot.
Organizational Infrastructure	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y	6
Overloaded Mentors	Y						Y	2
Limited teacher control	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y	5
Limited teacher roles			Y					1
Poor quality courses		Y	Y	Y	Y			4

Note: Teachers in red represent online teachers with less than three years of online teaching experience; teachers in blue represent online teachers with three years or more of online teaching experience.

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APPENDIX D: Instruments – Interview Protocol

Semi-Structured Interview Questions*

First Interview
A.   Background (prior to teaching experience in any setting)
      a.   Can you describe for me what you feel is the purpose of education?
         Prompts: Role of teachers/students

      b.   Talk to me about what led you into the teaching profession.
         Prompts: pre-teaching experience, personal attributes/characteristics, outlook on profession, teachers in family/friends

      c.   Describe your experience with your teacher preparation program.
         Prompts: student teaching/practicum, course work, effectiveness

      d.   How do you feel the program was able to prepare you for a career as a teacher?
         Prompts: concerns/confidence, expectations of profession, view of teaching, development of skills/attitudes

B.   Experiences in Teaching (classroom and online)
      a.   How you describe yourself as a teacher?
         Prompts: personality, characteristics, behaviors, values

      b.   What was it like to teach in a traditional classroom (if applicable)?
         Prompts: responsibilities, relationships with admin/students/others, survival, concerns/challenges, successes

      c.   Describe for me some particularly memorable experiences (good or bad) teaching in this setting (if applicable).

      d.   Describe your transition to moving to online teaching.
         Prompts: motivations, perceived benefits/advantages, concerns/fears

      e.   Tell me what it is like to be an online teacher.
         Prompts: responsibilities, relationships with admin/students/others, survival, typical day

      f.   Describe for me some particularly memorable experiences (good or bad) teaching in this setting.

      g.   How do you view yourself differently as a traditional or online teacher?
         Prompts: role, purpose, self-identity

      h.   How do your students view you differently as an online teacher?

C.   Concerns with Online Teaching
        a.   When thinking about school, what do you think about?
             Prompts: concerns, duties, students, values

        b.   What are you concerned about as a teacher? (elaborate on this one)
             Prompts: self, task, student/impact

        c.   Describe some recent situations where you felt challenged as a teacher.

        d.   How are the concerns you're experiencing now different from the concerns you have experienced earlier in your teaching?

        e.   How do you imagine your teaching future?
             Prompts: concerns about future, longevity in profession

Second Interview

A.   Experiences in Teaching
        a.   Describe for me some particularly memorable experiences (good or bad) you've had teaching recently.

        b.   How have your responsibilities and tasks changed since we last spoke?

B.   Concerns with Online Teaching
        a.   When thinking about school, what do you think about?
             Prompts: concerns, duties, students, values

        b.   What are you concerned about as a teacher? (elaborate on this one)
             Prompts: self, task, student/impact

        c.   Describe some recent situations where you felt challenged as a teacher.

        d.   How are the concerns you're experiencing now different from the concerns you expressed during our first conversation?

        e.   How do you imagine your teaching future?
             Prompts: concerns about future, longevity in profession

D.   Making Meaning Out of Concerns
        a.   For interviewer: Pull out relevant quotes from the previous interview and journal entries and ask reflective questions such as:

            i.   What did you mean when you said...

          ii.   Can you tell me more about...[experience or concern]?

      iii.   How has your attitude about…[experience or concern] changed?

   b. For the interview: Allow the participant to reflect on their overall experience with concerns in teaching by asking questions such as:

      i.   What have you learned about yourself as you've participated in these interviews and completed the journal entries?

      ii.   How would you describe your development as a teacher over the course of this semester?

      iii.   How have the concerns you've had in your teaching changed as you've gained teaching experience?

      iv.   What support would you find helpful to you at this stage in your teaching career?

*Based on proposed interview protocol by Smith and Osborn (2003)

APPENDIX E: Instruments – Journal Entries

In answering the following questions, please be as detailed and complete as possible. Thanks!

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Regarding your position as an instructor, what are you most concerned about right now?

2. In 2-3 paragraphs, describe in as much detail as possible a recent situation(s) related to this concern.

APPENDIX F: Peer Debriefing

The following is a documented email conversation after the peer was given access to the research documents and analysis. The headings below represent topics discussed in this conversation.

Beware of Cause and Effect Statements

Melissa - Because Dr. Williams did this to me: when you talk about experience "influencing" concerns, it's kind of a cloudy cause and effect statement. Do you think your data supports that type of conclusion? Perhaps changing concerns aren't as much a result of the individual experience as they are of the changing practices of the online school. Most online schools are pretty new--programs and policies are likely to be changing a lot while they try to figure things out. Changes in concerns may have to do more with where the organization (and the field) is than the individual. Does that make sense?

Tadd - Great point here about cause and effect. I should definitely be leery of establishing cause-and-effect relationships, but I also want to go beyond merely describing if the data allows. Any suggestions on how to tackle this better? I think this statement is interesting: "Perhaps changing concerns aren't as much a result of the individual experience as they are of the changing practices of the online school." That's what I'm trying to figure out. How much does experience play into the concerns of teachers, and how much do other factors weigh on it (policies, the field, the organization). I hope this study will give me an idea.

Melissa - I know what you mean about wanting to go beyond description. My example about "changing concerns as a result of changing practices of the online school" was just one possible validity threat when you are making a causal statement. I don't think you can really make causal claims without some control of the variables (I'm not even much of a believer of

retroactive quasi methods, though I think they give us interesting information). But then, many others are more liberal on this front. I'm not saying you can't outline what you see as influences of different variables, just be careful with causal language. I don't really know the solution, though--lately I've just tried to stick to more description and less cause/effect. Easier said than done. I feel your pain.

Possible to Over-analyze

Melissa - Your analysis of Jacob was very detailed and interesting. While I was looking over some of your comments in the right column, I wondered if you were maybe over-analyzing some of his words. With my thesis I struggled interviewing teachers with very different backgrounds from mine because their speech patterns were so different. Some of the phrases he uses (like on p. 8 of your analysis: "total change of heart" "wrong thing") may be more common to his speech and so don't quite carry as much weight as you're giving them. Or I could be totally wrong. It also might help to listen to the audio again to see if it seems like he emphasizes those words (maybe you already did this).

Tadd - I thought you might say something about over-analyzing. One of the tricky things about this is learning a new qualitative methodology and following the rules of the game for that. This method really provides a deep analysis and it overlays some of the researcher's interpretation into the analysis (hence the "interpretative" part of IPA). They even mention in the book bout the method that it may feel like you're taking it too far. So, yeah, my analysis isn't merely a reflection of their experience but includes a little of my interpretation of that experience in light of my overall interactions with him and even other individuals in the study. Does that make sense? I agree that I've over-analyzed many parts, but I think I'm trying to cut back on that a little with the other participants.

Melissa - Yea--it's always interesting trying to follow different methods. I think that's fine, just make sure when you write your thesis that you provide good sources and philosophical support for your methods. Actually, I don't think your "over-analyzing" showed up much in your writing. I was more concerned that it prevented you from seeing the big picture (yes, that's the narrative in me). And it will definitely be hard to do that much detail on each participant. Did the methodology talk about what sample size is appropriate for that method and what kind of findings it leads to? Does it say it can support semi-causal (my word) claims or is it focused on description? You might be mixing paradigms a little, which I think is fine as long as you can justify it.

Need to Review Audio Again

Melissa - Along with that, you spent lots of time going over little details which is excellent. I hate to say you should do more work...but have you gone back and listened to the whole interview again? That'd probably be good to do...maybe after you have analyzed a few other participants. Sometimes I get stuck in details and miss the big picture.

Tadd - Going over the data again would be a good thing to do and I think I will do it a little later in the process. I think this will be especially meaningful as I bring all the cases together and form some conclusions and recommendations to make sure it's supported by the data. I'm finding that I need to be realistic about what I can and can't do with this study. It probably took me about 20 hours to analyze this data and write it up. I'm on my second participant and I've put about 6 hours into her, but I'm almost done with the analysis part so I'm getting more efficient. I'm trying to find a balance between being thorough and careful with the data and being efficient and realistic with my time. Did you have any challenge with that?

Melissa - Yes!! That was really hard for me. I actually didn't end up analyzing all my interviews in the same way and shifted focus partway through analyzing. I found many interesting things that were slightly off topic (like you have). I had to decide which aspect I was going to focus on for my thesis and narrow my analysis to just that. After forming some tentative themes based on about 5 or 6 participants, I focused on finding evidence for and against my themes as I analyzed the rest. The last few weeks I've started going back and doing some writing about other findings.

Prevalence of Student-Centered Concerns

Melissa - As far as your themes about Jacob go- what I was struck by when I looked over his interview is how many of these concerns really are student centered. For example, the "organization infrastructure" themes boil down to how he thinks the organizational elements affects the students. This also matches some of the experiences he shared when he said he wanted to become a teacher--helping kids see themselves differently when he was a soccer coach, etc. Then when he uses the "we" language so much- it seems he thinks of everything he does as working with people, particularly with students. I would maybe emphasize that more.

Tadd - This is why I think it would be so great to have two people look at this. I think the impact on students frames most, if not all, of his concerns. I separated them in his analysis but I agree, I think it's probably all about the students for him. I think I'll add something at the end about it. As I start doing some cross-case analysis, I'll see if there's some better ways to organize the data. Having analyzed most of a second participant, I don't think her focus is as centered on the students as Jacob.

Difference Between Code and Theme

Melissa - One other nit-picky thing. When you write your methods section you may need to work on defining the difference between "code" and "theme". I wasn't sure at first--it helped when I looked at your actual analysis.

Tadd - Agreed here. I use these terms almost interchangeably. I'm honestly not sure what the difference is myself so it's unlikely that anyone else will know what I mean when I use these terms. Thanks!

APPENDIX G: Research Schedule

The data collection occurred from September to December 2016. The first journal entry was solicited near the beginning of the school year (mid September), continuing bi-monthly, and concluded near the time of winter break (mid December). The first interview was conducted in the middle of October after the teachers had become settled in the new school year, and the final interview was conducted in the middle of December. One teacher completed her second interview in February via email due to intervening life experiences.

While the first interview data was reviewed in preparation for the second interview, the data analysis process occurred between January and March of 2017. The following table provides the proposed and actual timeline of research activities.

	Aug.	Sep.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.	Jan.	Feb.	March	April
Writing the findings (Proposed)						■	■	■	
Writing the findings (Actual)						▢	▢	▢	▢
Analysis of data (Proposed)				■	■	■			
Analysis of data (Actual)					▢	▢	▢	▢	
Interview data collection (Proposed)			■		■				
Interview data collection (Actual)			▢				▢		
Journal data collection (Proposed)		■	■	■	■				
Journal data collection (Actual)		▢	▢	▢	▢				
Participant Recruitment (Proposed)	■	■							
Participant Recruitment (Actual)		▢							
IRB (Proposed)	■	■							
IRB (Actual)	▢	▢							

Proposed	■	**Actual**	▢

APPENDIX H: Review of Literature

The growth of online education in the United States is changing the course of education by increasing education access for students in new markets (Appana, 2008; Dykman & Davis, 2008), providing a flexible learning environment for working or nontraditional students (Appana, 2008), creating opportunities for lifelong learning and training (Dykman & Davis, 2008), offering the opportunity for credit recovery (Dawley, 2011; Picciano, Seaman, Shea, & Swan, 2012), meeting the needs of diverse groups of students (Picciano, et at., 2012), and improving student learning and satisfaction outcomes (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, & Straut, 2016; Dawley, Rice, & Hinck, 2010; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010). Recent reports have found a continuing increase in distance education enrollments over the last 13 years, a significant result in light of an overall decrease in higher education enrollments (Allen et al., 2016). In fact, some estimate growth in online education to account for three-quarters of all enrollment increases in higher education in the United States (Haynie, 2015).

While online learning and teaching in higher education is now bordering on mainstream, online education in K-12 settings is also experiencing its own upward growth. In 2014, 2.2 million K-12 students (Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, & Watson, 2015) were enrolled in online and blended environments, but the rapid growth of online education has likely rendered this statistic outdated upon publication (Wicks, 2010). While this number of online students may only represent a small fraction of the 54.7 million K-12 students, the percentage of school districts implementing online learning is well into the majority. During the 2013-2014 school year, a reported 75% of all U.S. school districts offered online or blended learning courses, a 50% increase from the 2009-2010 school year (Connections Academy, 2016). At the state level, all 50 states and the District of Columbia have established at least some level of online opportunities

for K-12 students (Barbour, Archambault, & DiPietro, 2013; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012; Watson et al., 2011).

The current legislative movement surrounding online education is further evidence of the growth of online education in K-12 settings. While most states have yet to fully formalize policies regarding student enrollments, funding structures, and online teacher training (Kenyon, 2007; Wicks, 2010), the momentum is slowing building as states are confronted with the reality of a strong online education presence within their traditional educational systems. At least five states (Arkansas, Alabama, Florida, Michigan, and Virginia) currently require K-12 students to take at least one online course prior to graduation (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016). Florida, one of the leaders of online education, requires all schools to provide online learning opportunities to their students (Gemin et al., 2015). Regarding the training and development of online teachers, two states currently offer online teaching endorsements while Wisconsin requires teachers to have 30 hours of professional development prior to teaching in online settings (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). Despite these examples, legislative movement is currently being outpaced by the growth of K-12 education (Kenyon, 2007). To date, only four states require training for online teachers (Zweig, Stafford, Clements, & Pazzaglia, 2015). The dramatic growth of K-12 online education is forcing state legislatures and school districts to consider the role online education will play in the larger landscape of K-12 education.

As more and more students are served partially or exclusively by online schools, research on teaching and learning in these environments is struggling to keep pace with the practice of online learning (Archambault, & Kennedy, 2014). In particular, the growth and development of teachers within their online experience, is still a new, largely unexplored territory in this burgeoning field of research. While the presence of an effective teacher is largely considered to

be a major factor in a successful learning experience in any setting (Wicks, 2010), relatively little is known about the lived experience of these important individuals.

While the experience of teachers in online settings is multifaceted and complex, the present study will seek to illuminate how online teachers experience concern in their teaching positions. We begin by defining concerns in this context and describe how teacher concerns can provide useful information for developing teacher education programs and professional development opportunities. After defining what is meant by concerns, we explore the deep body of research about how teachers experience concern in traditional teaching contexts. We then examine broad categorizations of teacher concerns, and consider the possibility that concerns change as teachers gain additional teaching experience. Finally, we explore current research on the differences between traditional and online teachers, and how those differences may reveal concerns unique to online teachers.

Defining Concerns

Considering concerns of teachers is critical in understanding their experience and development as educators (Fuller, Parsons, & Watkins, 1974). Mok (2005) defined concerns as "feelings, thoughts, attitudes, and reactions" (p. 55) to situations and changes in the teaching environment. Van den Berg and Vandenberghe (as cited in Mok, 2005) added that these emotional reactions illuminate instances where teachers are faced with new or pre-existing situations or changes in which they feel insecure or incompetent to act. Fuller (1970) notes that these concerns can develop after initial attempts to accomplish a goal have been unsuccessful, or even through the anticipated failure to accomplish a goal. For the purposes of our present study, concerns are the emotional (feelings, thoughts, and attitudes) reactions of online teachers towards actual or anticipated events or experiences associated with their teaching.

If concerns reveal the teacher's perceived areas of incompetence (Mok, 2005), then unveiling these concerns provides profitable information that can be used to design and prepare training and support interventions. For Fuller (1970), discerning concerns of teachers is vital in designing relevant curriculum for preservice educators. For her, relevance is obtained by matching the teacher's concerns about teaching with supportive structures designed to overcome those concerns. An education program that achieves relevance in this way avoids the tendency some programs have to answer "questions students are not asking" (Fuller, 1969, p. 208). Research spanning over 40 years continues to encourage the development of preservice educational programs and inservice teacher trainings that are more responsive to concerns of teachers in order to assist teachers in their growing sense of independence (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993), help teachers develop a realistic view of teaching within the learning context (Kagan, 1992), and to promote greater teacher retention (Cooper & He, 2012).

Concerns of Traditional Teachers

How teachers experience concerns in traditional learning environments is not a new area of research. Countless studies have attempted to identify teacher's concerns in hopes of developing more effective educational programs, professional development opportunities, and to solve current teacher phenomenon including teacher resistance and attrition. Additionally, concerns of teachers are closely related to teaching behaviors; a change in a teacher's concern is likely to influence his or her classroom practices (Wendt, Bain, & Jackson, 1980).

The exploration of concerns of traditional teachers is benefitted by a categorization of concerns developed by Frances Fuller in the late 1960s and early 1970s. For her, teacher concerns fell into three main categories: self or survival concerns, teaching situation concerns,

and pupil concerns (Fuller & Bown, 1975). An additional category will be added to represent the latent concerns of teachers.

        Traditional teachers' concerns with self or survival. Self or survival concerns are concerns are primarily evoked by the early process of transitioning from a student to a teacher (Fuller & Bown, 1975). These concerns are largely internal experiences that are influenced by the external social and educational context of the teacher. These concerns typically revolve around a teacher's general self-efficacy (Gilles, Cramer, & Hwang, 2001), maintaining class control (Gilles et al., 2001; Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; Veenman, 1984), and being evaluated by students, peers, parents, and administrators (Fuller, 1970; Fuller & Bown, 1975; Marso & Pigge, 1989; Veenman, 1984).

        In a study examining the hopes and concerns of student interns, Conway and Clark (2003) found that student interns experienced self concerns about classroom management, student safety, university requirements and expectations, and their relationship with the cooperating teacher and other professionals (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993). These self concerns lessened in frequency yet persisted throughout the school year. The internal self-image of teachers, including their progression in becoming teachers, seemed to be another common concern experienced by many teachers during their student teaching and early career teaching positions (Cooper & He, 2012). Additional concerns regarding the self-survival concerns of teachers included balancing authority and facilitator roles in the classroom (Cooper & He, 2012), establishing relationships with students (Cooper & He, 2012; Guillaume & Rudney, 1993), defining an appropriate work/life balance (Gilles et al., 2001), and reconciling their ideal views of teaching with reality (Cooper & He, 2012; Swennen, Jorg, & Korthagen, 2004).

Traditional teachers' concerns with the teaching situation. A teacher manifests teaching situation concerns when he or she exhibits concern about their instructional context and its associated activities. These concerns include a lack of quality instructional materials, large class sizes (Veenman, 1984), additional non-instructional duties (Swennen et al., 2004), and other environmental factors (Fuller & Bown, 1975). Some of these concerns deal directly with the teacher's instruction (i.e., student assessment) while others may be tangential to the immediate teaching situation (i.e., non-instructional responsibilities).

A survey given to 82 new teachers about concerns of teaching revealed that 32% of their concerns fell under the category of teaching concerns (Gilles et al., 2001). Of particular concern for most teachers was time management, curriculum planning, and the use of effective instructional strategies. Other significant teaching concerns include assessing student work (Veenman, 1984), inadequate teaching equipment (Veenman, 1984), curriculum pacing (Certo, 2006; Gilles et al., 2001), and establishing relationships with parents (Veenman, 1984).

Traditional teachers' concerns with pupils. Pupil concerns consider the needs and experiences of students. Teachers who experience pupil concerns recognize the individual needs of their students, value fairness and impartiality, and desire to make curriculum accessible for students (Fuller & Bown, 1975). It is considered optimal for a teacher to move beyond self and teaching concerns to a position where they become more concerned for their students' needs, learning, and experiences (Conway & Clark, 2003; Fuller & Bown, 1975). Concerns about the experiences of students includes motivating students to learn (Swennen et al., 2004; Veenman, 1984), using teaching material that will be benefit the lives of the students (Fuller, 1970), and adapting instruction to specific needs (Swennen et al., 2004; Veenman, 1984).

Traditional teachers' latent concerns. If concerns are defined the emotional reactions to real or anticipated events, it may be possible that teachers experience general concerns that may be unspecifiable. In their study, Keavney and Sinclair (1978) equated concerns with anxiety, and found that teachers commonly experienced "free floating anxiety" (p. 274) that had no verbal or behavioral expression. While the synonymity of "concerns" and "anxiety" is debatable, the interaction between the two concepts is surely related to some degree. It may be possible for teachers to experience concerns towards a real or anticipated event that they either have not become consciously aware of or are unable to adequately express.

Development and progression of concerns. Much of the literature since the 1970s about teacher concerns is largely based on the work of Frances Fuller. Her work resulted in a conceptualized concerns-based model that not only categorizes concerns by self or survival, teaching, and pupil concerns, but also suggests that teachers exhibit "regularities in their concern" (Fuller, 1970, p. 16) based on teaching experience. These regularities illustrate a pattern along a self-other continuum, with self concerns (e.g., self survival, evaluation) at one end of the continuum and concerns about students (e.g., impact, needs) at the other end (Fuller, 1970; Fuller & Bown, 1975). Teachers must adequately resolve immature concerns before they can develop concerns about student impact.

Fuller's concerns-based model described three stages along the concerns continuum (Fuller & Bown, 1975). It is possible, according to Fuller, for preservice educators to develop concerns prior to any teaching experience, but these concerns likely arise from the anecdotal stories they may have heard from others (Fuller, 1969).

The first stage of the concerns-based model, or the stage of survival, is a period of "great stress" (p. 38) characterized by an intense concern with class control, content mastery, and the

evaluations and perceptions of administrators and supervisors (Fuller, 1975). This stage is largely focused on what is often termed "self concerns." Teachers in the second stage of Fuller's concerns-based model of teacher development experience fewer personal concerns and begin to develop concerns regarding the task of teaching. This task-oriented stage focuses on teacher's concerns related to teaching performance, challenges in the teaching situation, and demands placed on teachers.

In the final stage of the concerns-based model, teachers begin to focus on concerns related to the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of their students. While teachers may have concern about students prior to this stage, the intense emotional and physical demands of teaching may cause teachers to set these student concerns aside until earlier concerns can be resolved (Fuller & Bown, 1975). Concerns about student impact, relevance of material to the students, and about teacher growth and improvement, seem to characterize teachers at this stage. Simply put, Fuller's three-stage model of development can be described as a gradual movement outward from concerns about self to concerns about students (Conway & Clark, 2003).

While the concerns-based model postulated by Fuller has been repeatedly applied, educational research is undecided on the existence of discrete, sequential stages of concerns. The popularity of Fuller's model of concern, even in today's research, is likely due to its simplistic nature and the congruent personal experience among teachers and teacher educators (Conway & Clark, 2003). Beyond this anecdotal evidence, numerous studies have empirically applied this model in various contexts and have verified the existence of these stages of concerns (Kagan, 1992).

More commonly, however, research on the existence of the concerns-based model has been inconsistent, offering confirmation of some of Fuller's ideas while contradicting others.

Many researchers have presented alternatives or extensions to Fuller's model to better account for these inconsistencies. In a longitudinal study following teachers over a seven-year period of time, Adams (1982) confirmed Fuller's findings suggesting the decrease of self and concern tasks with additional teaching experience. In contrast to Fuller, however, Adams found that teachers across all experience levels manifested frequent concerns regarding student impact, a finding commonly supported by others (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999; Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; Marso & Pigge, 1989; Pigge & Marso, 1997).

Interestingly, research suggests that although impact concerns may remain constant across experience levels, a teacher's concern about student impact may vary according to a teacher's gender, college GPA (Pigge & Marso, 1997), the degree of a teacher's self-efficacy (Ghaith & Shaaban, 1999), and school level (elementary or secondary) (Adam, 1982; Marso & Pigge, 1989) among other factors. Perhaps the reason for the inconsistency of Fuller's concerns-based model lies in its failure to account for powerful factors not inherent in the teaching situation, or factors beyond the years of teaching experience. The presence or absence of personal, program, and context factors may strongly influence the development and resolution of teacher's concerns (Guillaume & Rudney, 1993; Hollingsworth, 1989).

The concerns of traditional teachers vary widely but can be usefully categorized as self, task, and pupil concerns (Swennen et al., 2004). Fuller's concerns-based model, theorizing that the nature of concerns change with additional teaching experience, has met with mixed results as numerous studies have attempted to confirm or discredit her findings. Regardless, considering the development of concerns remains a potentially powerful method to understand the needs of teachers and to inform more relevant and effective learning and training opportunities.

Concerns of Online Teachers

Popular opinion towards online education seems to suggest that learning in traditional and online settings is essentially synonymous (Chien & Brandenburg, 2006), and that successful teaching in one setting easily transitions into successful teaching in the other (Dessoff, 2009; Watson et al., 2011). While it is true that online and traditional teaching share a similar pedagogical knowledge base with one another (Corry, Ianacone, & Stella, 2014; Stewart, 2011), research suggests that key differences exist between online and traditional teaching. While the research in traditional teaching settings may provide a useful starting point for online teaching practices (Corry et al., 2014), the differences between these two settings renders research in one setting inadequate to fully inform the practices in the other setting. The differences between traditional and online teaching give rise to concerns that may not be experienced by traditional teachers, or may be experienced by the two types of teachers at different levels. For example, how to effectively integrate technology in the classroom may be a shared concern for both traditional and online teachers, but the online teacher's technology-dependent environment may cause an online teacher to experience this concern to a greater degree.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University (n.d.) suggests that pedagogy, operational factors, and student characteristics represent the main categories of differences between traditional and online teaching environments. These categories of differences, along with a category describing the teacher paradigm, describe the structure that will be followed as we consider the experiences of online teachers. The differences between these two teaching environments are significant, and can illuminate possible concerns experienced by online teachers.

Pedagogical differences in traditional and online teaching. Pedagogy, as defined here, refers to the activities and practices associated with teaching. While traditional and online teaching may share some common effective pedagogical practices (Corry et al., 2014; Stewart, 2011), teaching in an online environment requires a different set of pedagogies in order to be effective (Chien & Brandenburg, 2006; Corry et al., 2014; Kenyon, 2007; Lowes, 2005; Stewart, 2011). Fostering relationships with students (Dawley et al., 2010; Lowes, 2005) and engaging students in a virtual learning environment seemed to be particularly challenging for many online teachers (Zweig, 2015). In addition to effectively engaging students, teachers also struggled to help students take responsibility for their own learning (Stewart, 2011; Zweig, 2015).

Studies have suggested additional pedagogical struggles faced uniquely by online teachers as they attempt to adapt traditional classroom practices to an online environment. These concerns seemed to occur more commonly among courses that had a hands-on or performance component (e.g., science, drama; Lowes, 2005). In the absence of synchronous demonstrations typical in some traditional courses, teachers and students find it difficult to adequately demonstrate principles contained in their content areas (Chien & Brandenburg, 2006). This ability greatly improved with the advance of technology, but this concern may still persist for some. Additionally, teachers in traditional learning environments rely on informal evaluations of students (e.g., facial expressions, body language, questions, etc.) to reveal the level of understanding and the engagement of students, but these informal cues are less apparent or even non-existent in many online learning environments (Kenyon, 2007; Lowes, 2005). In the absence of such cues, teachers may find it difficult to know the ongoing position of their students towards learning goals and outcomes.

A surprising detail about online teaching represents an additional operational difference between online and traditional teaching. Stewart (2011) found that of the many important duties of online teachers, a surprising number of online teachers mentioned the need to work closely with parents. While this may be true of traditional teachers as well, the degree of importance of this responsibility seemed to be emphasized for online teachers.

Most online teachers begin their professional teaching careers as traditional classroom teachers. In a report about the status of online K-12 education, only 12% of online teachers had no prior teaching experience prior to online teaching (Dawley et al., 2010). In her paper about the "trans-classroom teacher," or teacher who operates simultaneously in two environments, Lowes (2005) found that no teacher in her study migrated a course completely from a traditional setting to an online setting. Each teacher engaged in a careful examination of the curriculum, teaching strategies, and course content prior to including it in the online course. The result of the reexamination was a course that appeared very different from the traditional version (Hemschik, 2008). Findings such as these suggest that the pedagogical difference between traditional and online teaching are significant, and that research is needed to fully understand the implications of these differences.

Operational differences between traditional and online teaching. Operational differences between traditional and online teaching considers the structure of the learning environment and other factors external to the learning situation. It is well-established in the literature that online teachers largely suffer from a lack of training prior to beginning their teaching positions (Dawley et al., 2010; Kennedy, 2012; Palloff & Pratt, 2001). Most training in online teaching is typically not administered in teacher education programs (Dawley et al., 2010; Archambault & Kennedy, 2014), but instead by the hiring institutions. Several studies have

noted that training for online teachers is often done on-the-job and concurrently with their teaching responsibilities (Hemschik, 2008; Stewart, 2011; Zweig, 2015). While this just-in-time instruction could be timely for some teachers, the training may in fact be just-too-late for others. Several teacher preparation programs have recently developed authentic online learning experiences akin to traditional student teaching, but Kennedy and Archambault (2012) found that only 1.3% of teacher education programs provided any sort of field experience in online teaching. Training of online teachers is often too late and too separated from authentic practice.

In a study conducted by Palloff & Pratt (2001) about online teacher, they found that online teachers ranked poor compensation (McAlister, Rivera, & Hallam, 2001; Palloff & Pratt, 2002) and a lack of time (Palloff & Pratt, 2001) to design courses among some of the most frequent concerns. True, poor compensation is a concern for traditional teachers as well, but compensation concerns seem to be compounded by the time required to complete additional activities associated with online teaching. Research suggests that teaching online may require as much as two or three times the amount of time to teach similar courses in traditional face-to-face settings (Chien & Brandenburg, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 2001). A major concern for some online teachers, therefore, is balancing their time between interacting with students and fulfilling other responsibilities beyond the actual teaching situation (Chien & Brandenburg, 2006). The concerns of compensation and time are situational and varied across different school contexts with some schools providing teachers more support or by outsourcing course design activities to other individuals or third-party vendors; however, the compensation for online teachers is likely to present at least some level of concern for many online teachers, especially in light of the additional time required to teach in online settings.

Student differences in traditional and online classrooms. Student differences in traditional and online settings represents an additional category of distinction between traditional and online teachers. The growth of online education can be explained, at least in part, by the access to educational services to those who are not typically served, or who are underserved, by traditional learning environments. The types of students commonly served by online schools is constantly expanding but currently includes at-risk students, migrant youth, incarcerated students, sick or homebound students, and elite athletes and performers, among many other groups (Wicks, 2010). Indeed, the flexibility offered by the very structure of online programs attracts students for whom traditional schools are impractical, inconvenient, or even impossible in certain situations (Stewart, 2011).

The boundaries of online schools inclusively capture students who are geographically dispersed (Johns Hopkins University, n.d.). Not only does this diaspora of students present possible difficulties regarding time (especially for synchronous online activities), but the content of instruction may need to be changed to recognize a more general classroom culture. For example, using familiar, local contextual examples may be an effective practice of traditional teachers when teaching a difficult concept, but using these local examples in an online setting may prove at best, unhelpful, and at worst, harmful to the learning of a dispersed student population.

Kenyon (2007) categorized the types of students who are typically attracted to online learning programs into two groups: "first resort" (p. 23) students who deliberately seek out online learning as a first choice because of their clear academic goals or extracurricular pursuits, and "last resort" (p. 23) students who have commonly been underserved or who underachieved in traditional schools and look to online schools as a last chance option for their education.

While this dichotomous categorization likely oversimplifies the characteristics and motives of online students, the possible diversity of students attending a particular online course could present significant concerns for teachers. Thus, the online teacher must be prepared to effectively manage a culturally, linguistically, and geographically diverse student population in an online space (Gemin et al., 2015; Hemschik, 2008; Palloff & Pratt, 2001). The wider diversity of students potentially found in an online classroom could have a significant impact on the concerns of online teachers.

   Differences in online teacher paradigms. One final category of differences between traditional and online teaching is the teacher's paradigms towards learning. This categorization considers the concerns facing the teacher that arise from a change in paradigms that seems to be nearly universally experienced by online teachers. It is generally acknowledged that teaching in an online setting requires the teachers to transition from the sage who directs all learning, to a guide who acts more as a facilitator (Hemschik, 2008; Palloff & Pratt, 2001). As such, a teacher's role in the learning situation tends to shift from the direct provider of information to a facilitator of learning experiences. Evidence for this shift in roles and perspectives of a teacher can be seen by the frequent reference to "learners" instead of "students" in online environments. This reference subtly acknowledges the "increased emphasis on the self motivation, diligence, and personal responsibility placed upon the student for his or her own learning in the guide-side model" (Dykman & Davis, 2008, p. 12). The implications of this shift in perspectives regarding the teacher role may also require a potential movement away from behaviorist and cognitivist teaching strategies (common in traditional classrooms) to a more constructivist approach to learning (Hemschik, 2008). The change in teacher roles and the accompanying paradigm shift towards constructivist learning may present significant challenges to online teachers.

Conclusion

From what we have seen, the ever-growing body of research has revealed significant differences between traditional and online teachers. These differences, categorized here by differences in pedagogy, operations, student diversity, and teacher paradigms, represent potential concerns for teachers in online settings. Research suggests that pedagogical differences in teaching may introduce teachers to teaching and learning situations that they may or may not be trained to recognize or properly negotiate. Operationally speaking, the lack of training for the majority of online teachers, and additional factors external to the teaching situation, may make it difficult for some online teachers to effectively fulfil their teaching duties. The cultural, linguistic, and geographic diversity of students, resulting from the increased access to and the promised benefits of online learning, could introduce the online teacher to challenges associated with educating such a heterogeneous group of students. Finally, the perspective of the teacher, including his or her role in the online teaching situation, presents an additional concern that may be experienced by online teachers.

While these concerns may not be completely unique to online teachers, the degree to which traditional teachers experience these same concerns is likely to vary. Because the teaching of traditional and online teachers differs in key areas, we cannot expect that the research in traditional teaching can fully inform the practices in online teaching. Furthermore, we cannot assume that traditional teacher education programs and previous traditional teaching experience can adequately prepare online teachers to perform effectively in an online classroom. Further research is needed to help teachers prepare for the challenges that will be uniquely theirs as an online teacher.

While much is already known about possible challenges of online teaching, our present study will consider how they experience concern in their teaching. We will define concerns as the emotional (feelings, thoughts, and attitudes) reactions of online teachers towards an actual or anticipated events or experiences associated with their teaching. As such, we will seek not only experiences in their teaching, but also how these experiences illustrate concern, and what impact these concerns have on their teaching. We will also consider the possibility that the concerns of online teachers change and develop over time with added teaching experience, and that the concerns experienced by teachers are heavily affected by the institutional context in which they teach. A deep inquiry into the concerns of these online teachers can produce understanding that can profitably inform teacher education programs and teacher professional development opportunities.

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APPENDIX I: Subjectivities Statement

I began my professional career as an educator and only recently developed a research component to my professional activities. The last six years of my life has been overwhelmingly dominated by all things education; how to teach, learn, engage, manage, and even survive the rigors of teaching. The value I saw in education and the relationships I formed with students and faculty made teaching enjoyable and invigorating. At the same time, I considered myself a troubled teacher; paralyzed by concerns originating from within and without my local teaching context, and struggling with my own professional development. The realities of teaching, common to many in the profession, also weighed heavily on my mind as I considered the viability of teaching as a long-term profession.

I left public school teaching and entered into graduate school in the fall of 2015, still very much interested in K-12 education and teaching generally. My ambitions at that time were to improve public education not only for students, but also for teachers. In my mind, I thought that if teachers were empowered to make decisions for their own students, and if contextual factors influencing their experience with teaching could be carefully improved (e.g., class sizes, school responsibilities, salary), the altruistic motivations that led teachers into education would allow teachers to focus appropriately on student learning. As a graduate student, I hoped to find a way to improve student learning, but to do so by improving the teacher's experience.

In this study about the experience on online teachers, my focus is still on the teacher in the learning context. My experience as a teacher may appear to some as a confounding bias in my research. True, my experience in education has directed me to focus on the teacher's experience, but my experience has not blinded me to the significant experiences of others (e.g., students, parents, administrators). If there are any biases that I have brought with me from my

experience as a teacher, it is that I now assume that most teacher's deal with real concerns towards their teaching, their students, and their personal functioning within the teaching context, and that the concerns of teachers are worthy of considering and alleviating (if possible).

My interest in online teaching is a more recent development and one with which I have limited experience. My content field of instructional design includes the expanding field of online learning, including online K-12 education. My interest in online K-12 education was piqued as I considered merging my experience and love of public education with a new and exciting field of online learning. Despite my experience in traditional teaching, my experience in teaching in an online setting is limited to a single course (taught concurrent with this study). My experience in this teaching situation could also be a biasing factor in this research, influencing the assumptions, research design, and analysis of data. It may be impossible to completely eliminate the effects of my experience from my study, but by including several trustworthiness checks (e.g., triangulation, reflexive journal, peer debriefing), I hope I have minimized the influence of my experiences and subjectivities in my research.

APPENDIX J: Trustworthiness Statement

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) work on qualitative research provided the basis for trustworthiness checks for this study. Multiple trustworthiness checks were implemented to establish the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this research.

The process of triangulation was used to better establish the credibility of the research findings. Specifically, multiple online K-12 teacher participants were invited to reveal their experiences with online teaching. These participants were chosen from a single institution to see how their experience differed from other participants. Two data collection methods, interviews and journal entries, were used to to triangulate research findings. The multiple sources of data collected on repeated occasions aided in capturing an accurate understanding of their teaching experience.

Member checking was built into the interview protocol for this research. During the second interview, concerns from the initial interview and completed journal entries were presented to the participants allowing them to refute, elaborate on, or clarify earlier statements. Once the data from each participant was analyzed, a case study was written and sent to the participant for their evaluation. In this study, only two participants responded and largely confirmed the information presented in the case.

As data analysis began, negative case analysis was applied to check the emerging conclusions with the data. As patterns and themes emerged from the data and conclusions emerged, the data was searched extensively to find contradictory cases that challenged the credibility. When found, these negative cases forced me to modify the conclusions to include each case.

The confirmability of this study was established by making my work transparent. These efforts allowed others to follow my decisions, rationale, assumptions, and actions from the initiation of the research to its conclusion. Throughout the research experience, I kept a reflexive journal where I documented thoughts about my interviews, emerging ideas and themes from the data, and notes from my meetings with my advisor. Additionally, I also documented the decisions I made through the research experience, attempting provide rationale for my processes so that my work would be transparent to the outside observer.

My reflexive journal was even more beneficial in establishing research trustworthiness by subjecting it to the critique and scrutiny of another. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to this review process as peer debriefing. Through this process, a disinterested peer who is disconnected from the research study and the participant context questions the methods, assumptions, and conclusions of the study. The peer ought to be familiar with both the research methodology and area of study, and their relationship with the researcher should allow for critiques to be credibly considered. The purpose of this strategy is to expose biases and judgments that may interfere with good research practices and credible conclusions. When I completed the analysis and report from the first case, I sent the case and data analysis documents to a peer for her to critique my work. The insight and questions she had for me kept me honest and forced me to make some clarifications. Our email discussion can be found in Appendix F.

These methods for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability provide insight into my experiences as a researcher in hopes of overcoming some of the limitations imposed by researcher subjectivity.

APPENDIX K: Thesis Conclusion

The purpose of this exploratory study was to understand concerns of K-12 teachers as they engaged in online teaching. Decades of research in traditional education settings have revealed concerns of teachers, and some researchers have concluded that these concerns develop in a predictable pattern as teachers gain experience. They argue that discerning these patterns of concerns is useful in informing effective teacher education programs and professional development opportunities. While the research on this important topic is deep in traditional settings, concerns of online teachers, and the possible progression of these concerns, is just beginning.

Methodology Benefits

To understand concerns of online teachers, I used an interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology to analyze interview transcripts and journal entries from seven online K-12 teachers from a single institution. This methodology kept me close to the participants' own experience; nearly each step in the process took me back into the transcripts and journal entries to ensure that I had represented the experience accurately and my conclusions were adequately represented by the data. The depth of analysis I achieved from pouring over the participant experiences gave me confidence that the conclusions I made were both insightful and supported.

While interpretative phenomenological analysis gave me a clear picture of the participant's experience in online teaching, its idiographic focus on specific contexts and participants made generalizable conclusions improper. This method was appropriate for this exploratory study into the cases at a single institution, but other research methods could be implemented with a similar research focus to produce more generalizable conclusions. Perhaps

by casting a wider net of participants and online contexts using a different methodology, more general themes and patterns would emerge that would also be informative.

Contributions to the Research

This study has contributed to a body of research that currently offers very little insight into the lived experience of online K-12 teachers. My research found that online teachers experience personal (concerns regarding their experience), instructional (concerns about the teaching environment), and relational (concerns about others in the teaching environment) concerns, and that these categories of concerns interface to create new categories of overlapping concerns (responsibility, experience, and interaction). Within these categories, teachers experienced a variety of concerns, and very few patterns could be found within the sample of participants, suggesting that the experiences of online teaching were complex and highly individualized. Despite the irregularities of concern, these online teachers almost uniformly experienced a high level of concern for students and their learning, a fact that early research in traditional settings suggests is unlikely among beginning teachers.

In addition to illuminating the broad and varied concerns of online teachers, this study showed the impact of external factors (organizational, political, and educational) on the development of teacher's concerns. The impact of these external factors is documented in the research in traditional settings, but very little is understood about the impact of these factors in online environments. The growth spurt of online education is sure to bring growing pains as institutions experiment with different organizational models, state governments consider new or improved legislation regarding online education, and teacher education programs design curriculum that better incorporates online learning. Changes in these areas deeply affect teachers

who administer online courses, and their experience should be sought and planned for when changes in these areas are suggested.

Future Research

It may be that the variation in personal, instructional, and relational concerns (along with their intersecting categories) and the diversity of external factors and personal characteristics may make it difficult to accurately determine regularities of concerns among online teachers. Despite this difficulty, however, additional research should be explored that could elaborate on the work presented here. Therefore, this research on concerns of online teachers represents merely the starting point in understanding the experiences of online teachers.

Although some concerns were shared by multiple online teachers, not all teachers experienced these concerns to the same degree. For example, some teachers deplored the lack of curriculum control and described it as one of their greatest challenges, while other teachers viewed this concern with much less disdain. Future research could consider the dispositions and characteristics of online teachers that allow them to persist and succeed in spite of felt concerns. This proposed research, along with related research of teacher competencies and teacher readiness, could help evaluate teachers for hiring and advancement decisions as well as inform teacher education and professional development experiences.

While this study provided an exposition of teacher concerns, little is known about the short-term and long-term impacts of those concerns on teachers. How is job satisfaction influenced by concerns? What are the most influential factors in persuading online teachers to remain or leave online teaching? Do online teachers follow similar or different attrition patterns that characterize K-12 traditional education? In contrast to online education where very little is known about these questions, traditional education offers a breadth of research into the common

factors that encourage teachers to leave or remain in the teaching profession. Research on these topics in online education would be informative for both online and traditional education settings.

Conclusion

This investigation into concerns of online K-12 teachers represents a significant initiation point into further research centered on the experiences of teachers. The rapid growth of online education has produced a large body of accompanying research, but more attention needs to be given to the experience of online teachers as they engage in the teaching process. Using a variety of research designs, future research can consider the teacher's experience more thoroughly, leading to better organizational designs to improve the experience and performance of online teachers.