An empty classroom. Source: Flickr

The Pandemic's Impact on the Future Classroom

Samuel Bauer

The COVID-19 pandemic forcibly revolutionized technology's integration in society. Grocery stores built apps for consumers to remotely order groceries, artists held drive-in concerts, and, most notably, gatherings became remote. For children, this often meant replacing their in-person schooling with Zoom classrooms. Teachers recreated lesson plans, invented effective teaching methods, and hoped that their students would succeed academically as if they were in person.

About 93% of households with children reported some form of online schooling during the COVID-19 pandemic. [1] Remote learning often took the form of digital lessons and assignments as well as paper content sent from the schools. However, affluent school districts were more likely to be utilizing digital resources than paper resources for remote learning. Of households with incomes of less than $50,000, 65.8% reported children using online resources for schooling, while those with an income of over $100,000, 85.8% reported children using online resources for schooling.

The inequality of remote learning impacted families and, specifically, school children. The pandemic

exposed this inequality but also exposed less visible issues within K-12 education. Mental health of students declined during the pandemic, and teachers had to adapt their support to their students in addition to their lessons.

A West Lafayette Community School Corporation school bus. Source: Journal & Courier

Sharita Ware

Mrs. Sharita Ware understands this unique challenge. Ware, a middle-school STEM teacher, is the 2022 Indiana Teacher of the Year. [2] The superintendent of the Tippecanoe School Corporation, Dr. Scott Hanback, said, "She is an exceptional teacher who has transformed the technology classroom and lab space into an engaging, inspiring workspace for students."

In a recent lecture at Purdue University, Mrs. Ware noted that "There are times where [I'm] cheering [my students] on because [I'm] thinking, 'Yes, just keep going,' especially when [I] hear about their home lives. [...] A lot of times, I feel more like a mother figure than I am a teacher." [3] As a teacher, Mrs. Ware is concerned about student's academic success. But as a mother figure, Mrs. Ware is concerned about the wellbeing of students.

Mental Health and Students

Unfortunately, students' wellbeing often suffered during the pandemic. In a British survey, 83% of students reported their mental health worsening. [4] Only 7% indicated their mental health improved. The surveyed students indicated that they worried for their family's personal health, school closures,

loss of routine, and loss of social connection. Some of those worried about school closures because they would lose contact with friends; others worried about having a place away from an abusive or otherwise dangerous home environment. The loss of routine, according to students, may remove healthy coping activities (e.g., marching band) from their lives. Those worried about the loss of social connection noted that the online interaction differed negatively than physical interaction with friends; they lacked faith with technology to support their social lives.

Many educators focused on the academic success of students and overlooked the mental health (and emotional or social) concerns of students. Students, school personnel, and parents who are school personnel indicated the most concern for, in order, "student health, [...] student academic development, school personnel health, and student mental health." [5] While ranking student mental health last does not indicate unimportance, one can note that the pandemic caused concerns that overshadowed student mental health, including student academic development.

Mrs. Ware did not fall into this trap. Instead, she took extra caution to care for her students' academic and personal wellbeing. Mrs. Ware extended this mindset under COVID-19, understanding that her students often have deleterious home lives that hinder academic and personal growth.

Teachers like Mrs. Ware have expended massive efforts in growing their children academically and personally, often as if they were their own children. As life is resembling pre-pandemic life, teachers

like Mrs. Ware should continue to incorporate the effective techniques learned for student support, academic and personal, into familiar, in-person classroom settings.

Notes

[1] Kevin McElrath, "Nearly 93% of Households With School-Age Children Report Some Form of Distance Learning During COVID-19," United States Census Bureau, August 26, 2020, https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2020/08/schooling-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.html.

[2] Holly Lawson, "Tippecanoe County Engineering and Technology Teacher Named 2022 Indiana Teacher of the Year," Indiana Department of Education, October 26, 2021, https://www.in.gov/doe/about/news/tippecanoe-county-engineering-and-technology-teacher-named-2022-indiana-teacher-of-the-year/.

[3] Purdue Honors College, Visiting Scholars Series with Sharita Ware, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xickdxuXW5U.

[4] YoungMinds, "Coronavirus: Impact on Young People with Mental Health Needs," March 30, 2020, https://www.youngminds.org.uk/media/xq2dnc0d/youngminds-coronavirus-report-march2020.pdf.

[5] Jacqueline R. Anderson, Jennifer L. Hughes, and Madhukar H. Trivedi, "School Personnel and Parents' Concerns Related to COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact Related to Schools," School Psychology Review 50, no. 4 (October 2, 2021): 519–29, https://doi.org/10.1080/2372966X.2020.1862626.