

MAINTAINING CLASSROOM COMMUNITY IN A TIME OF SOCIAL DISTANCING

by

Darhen Rosanna Vokey Sing

B. A., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2015

B. Ed., Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2016

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, the thesis entitled:

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submitted by Darhen Sing in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
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in Literacy Education

Examining Committee:

Dr. Kedrick James, Language and Literacy Education, UBC

Supervisor

Dr. Derek Gladwin, Language and Literacy Education, UBC

Supervisory Committee Member

Dr. Kerry Renwick, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy, UBC

Supervisory Committee Member

Abstract

This study examines the impact of social distancing on the school community of a small sample of Canadian adolescent students in Grade 6 and 7 living in Vancouver, British Columbia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research questions included: 1) In what ways does social distancing influence classroom community? 2) How might conceptions of place change as school transitions into an online learning track? 3) In what ways might journaling maintain students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social/physical distancing? 4) How are students reacting to the ongoing changes, in terms of school-based, home-based, and remote learning? A qualitative case-study approach was used to explore these questions. A secondary autobiographical line of inquiry re-examined researcher journals using poetic inquiry. Research methodology and methods used to examine student journals included self-recorded interviews and teacher/researcher observations as a way to understand how social distancing has impacted classroom community and students' relationship to their learning places and spaces during this pandemic. The methods used included convenience sampling, self-recorded interviews, and textual analysis. Data was collected from two groups: from May - June 2020 and from September - November 2020. 44 documents collected in the Spring of 2020 and 39 collected in the Fall of 2020. Raw data totals include: 83 participant journal entries and 104 photographed researcher journal entries. Across both data sets, six major nodes emerged: community, relationships, shared-experiences, hope, COVID-19, and holding space for uncertainty. Findings indicate that the majority of students were resilient and social distancing measures became normalized over the course of the data collection period. Findings also found that social distancing measures impacted the classroom community of these Grade 6 and 7 students by putting constraints on their ability to interact and socialize. Data from students did not indicate

significant change in conceptions of place, however, researcher and teacher observations did include data that suggests that adults in the community began thinking differently about place. Data indicated that structured journaling, explicitly taught and modelled by the teacher, that included reflective and collaborative activities may have helped maintain students' sense of community.

Lay Summary

This study, titled “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing,” investigates how students are being impacted by social distancing measures put in place in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study explores how adolescent students thought about *place* as they learned from home and from school. It explored whether journaling could be used to maintain a sense of community during this time of social distancing. The key goals of this study were to find ways to support students through this pandemic, to keep them connected and engaged in school. It found that collaborative or group work, in person or remote, was essential for maintaining classroom community and allowing adolescents to stay connected and engaged in their learning. This research is intended to inform the work of teachers and members of the education community.

Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of the author, Darhen Sing. The data reported and discussed in Chapters 3- 7 was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate number H20-00852.

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List of Abbreviations

- ATL** An acronym used by the IB for “approaches to learning,” a phrase that refers to five skill clusters that are explicitly taught in the IB curriculum: thinking, social, communication, research, and self-management. ATLs feature prominently in reflections because it invites students to think metacognitively about how they learn within the context of what or where they learn.
- BOLT** An acronym that stands for the School’s Online Learning Track. It was created in the spring of 2020, largely during the school’s two week Spring Break from March 13th, 2020 - April 1st, 2020 in response to the social distancing measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- IB** The International Baccalaureate (IB) offers four high quality, challenging educational programmes to students aged 3 to 19. The IB programmes focus on fostering critical thinking and building problem-solving skills, while encouraging diversity, international mindedness, curiosity, and a healthy appetite for learning and excellence. An IB education provides students distinct advantages as they enter a world where asking the right questions is as important as discovering answers (International Baccalaureate, n.d.).
- The four IB programmes are: the Primary Years Programme (PYP) for ages 3-11; the Middle Years Programme (MYP) for ages 11-16; the Diploma Programme (DP) and the Career-related Programme (CP) for ages 16-19. See Appendix A for more details about the IB.

ISABC	Independent Schools Association of British Columbia
MYP	Middle Years Programme within the International Baccalaureate
WHO	World Health Organization

Glossary

Journaling	Journaling is the term I use to describe student journals. Journals were electronic, Google Documents in the Spring of 2020 when all schooling was conducted remotely, and journals for the Fall 2020 were physical paper notebooks. These documents are ungraded, and always invite students to reflect on a learning experience.
Learner Profile	The IB Learner Profile is another phrase that appears frequently in reflections and journals. As a holistic program that encompasses academic and social-emotional growth, the IB encourages students to actively develop key character traits to become a compassionate and engaged global citizen. IB learners aspire to be: inquirers, knowledgeable, thinkers, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, and reflective.
POD	The word “POD” is not an acronym, but the name of a distinct, relatively self-contained program at the School. When students transition from the Junior School building (JK-5) into the Senior School building (6-12) they spend Grades 6 and 7 in the POD program. The program is designed to support the social-emotional learning and executive functioning of adolescents as they transition from a primary/elementary learning environment to a secondary school environment. The POD students have one teacher for Math and Science and one teacher for Language & Literature and Individuals & Societies instead of four teachers, like the rest

of the Senior School. By spending double the time with these core teachers for a full 24-month program, they develop strong connections and trusting relationships with the POD teachers. The strength of these relationships is why I choose to study the Grade 6 and 7 students at the School. I wanted to see what the social distancing measures would do to these relationships and what effect any changes would have on their development.

Social
distancing

According to a World Health Organization publication, social distancing can be defined as “certain actions that are taken to slow down the spread of a highly contagious disease, including limiting large groups of people coming together” (Bender, 2020, p. 4). These actions included remaining 6 feet apart from others, wearing a mask, washing one’s hands and using hand sanitizer regularly, refraining from gathering in groups, etc.

Students /
participants

The terms “students” and “participants” are used interchangeably to refer to the Grade 6 and 7 pupils who were involved in the study.

Synchronous

“Synchronous” work implies that students are in the same space, virtual, physical or a mix of both, engaging in learning at the same time. Synchronous work happens during set class times. The antithesis of synchronous is “asynchronous” which implies that students engage with their learning remotely and independently.

The School

For confidentiality, the name of the school where this study takes place has been redacted from this file. It will be referred to as “the School.”

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge that the land on which I currently live, work, and play are the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. I respectfully acknowledge the territory which I call home as the ancestral homelands of the Beothuk, and the island of Newfoundland as the ancestral homelands of the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk. I would also like to recognize the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut and the Innu of Nitassinan, and their ancestors, as the original people of Labrador. I strive for respectful relationships with all the peoples of these provinces as I support my communities' search for collective healing and true reconciliation and honour this beautiful land together.

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Dedication

To kind, compassionate teachers and learners who ask questions and listen.

Chapter 1: Foundations

[My] Place[s]

*What is place?
Trees on a steep rocky slope,
bent and bowed from years of incessant wind,
gritty and glistening with a crust of crystallised salt spray?*

*What is place?
The clackity-clack of a pedal bike,
bouncing along the cobbled street by a pub,
bright faces ringed round a table and sigh of pages being turned one by one?*

*What is place?
Constant whoosh-whirr of cars passing,
people shouting, hammers drilling, sirens wailing,
pulse of a city ricocheting off high walls of chrome and glass?*

*What is place?
Earthy, wet, pine-clean air,
cupped in spongy green hollows 'twixt root and branch,
still and calm enough to hear the mountain's whispered sounds?*

What is place, if not feeling and senses and memory?

Introduction: COVID-19 and Education in British Columbia

In the middle of the 2019-2020 school year, a new virus called COVID-19 was declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization (Bender, 2020). “‘CO’ stands for corona, ‘VI’ for virus, and ‘D’ for disease... and is linked to the same family of viruses as Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and some types of common cold” (Bender, 2020, p. 2). The virus spreads through direct contact with the respiratory droplets of an infected person generated through coughing and sneezing (Bender, 2020). People can also become infected by touching surfaces contaminated with the virus and then touching their face (e.g., eyes, nose, mouth) (Bender, 2020).

To reduce the exponential spread of infection, or *flatten the curve* (Markel, 2020), and protect our healthcare systems from becoming overloaded with patients in respiratory distress, governments around the world suspended group gatherings to minimize this critical transmission vector (Bender, 2020). In British Columbia's educational context, this meant that social distancing measures were put into place through a series of public health orders (British Columbia Ministry of Health, 2020 March 16; British Columbia Ministry of Health, 2020 March 17). In March 2020, all face-to-face classroom or group instruction in the province, from early years education to university, was suspended indefinitely (Larson, 2020; BC Ministry of Education, 2021).

What is social distancing?

The term “social distance” was used in an academic publication in 1963 by anthropologist Edward Hall in a paper about *proxemics*; “the study of how man unconsciously structures microspace – the distance between men in the conduct of daily transactions, the organization of space” (Hall, 1963). Hall created a system of notation so that anthropologists could document social interactions and better understand how people from a variety of cultures subconsciously maintain spatial boundaries depending on a level of familiarity. His observations indicated that there are four zones subconsciously adhered to, depending on the relationship between people and environment they find themselves in: intimate distance (< 0.5 meter), which would include actions such as giving or receiving a hug; personal distance (~ 1 meter), family or good friends; social distance (2-3 meters), acquaintances and strangers; public distance (> 5 meters), such as during public gatherings or presentations (Szasz, 2020).

One of the basic principles outlined in the World Health Organization's publication titled “Key Messages and Actions for COVID-19 Prevention and Control in Schools” states that “schools should promote social distancing (a term applied to certain actions that are taken to slow

down the spread of a highly contagious disease, including limiting large groups of people coming together)” (Bender, 2020, p. 4).

The social distancing orders first put in place in March 2020 (British Columbia Ministry of Health, 2020 March 16; British Columbia Ministry of Health, 2020 March 17; Holliday, 2020) in response to the COVID-19 pandemic forced educators in British Columbia to consider something many educators take for granted - the importance of proximity during socialization on people’s well-being. Theories about community, social learning, experiential learning, and place-based education may intersect in a new way as a result of these social distancing measures. In applying social distancing in a school context, educators have an opportunity to inquire about how adolescent socialization - school community - is impacted by COVID-19 social distancing measures.

Defining Community

In this time of social distancing, maintaining community is essential for supporting the well-being of adolescents. This notion is the driving purpose behind this research study. How can we maintain community when we have to stay away from others to the point where our interactions with one another become strained? Before diving into an exploration about *maintaining community in a time of social distancing*, the term community must be defined.

Lyon & Driskell noted that “in the social sciences the most important concepts are often the most imprecise ... In fact, in the social sciences, there seems to be an inverse relationship between the importance of a concept and the precision with which it is defined” (Lyon & Driskell, 2012). Explaining community, defining amorphous entities that are dynamic and ever-changing, is a challenging task. Especially in attempting to define the community of a school - a

place where by default growth, learning, development, and change are integral parts of the community ethos.

Early theories about community, such as Tönnies 1887 publication on *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society) define community as relationships rooted in the closeness, blood, proximity, and soil of a place (Tönnies 1887/2002). Communities were places people belonged to and places people were from - they were rooted in the ground of a small place (Tönnies 1887/2002). By this traditional definition, communities were entities people had long standing, deeply moored ties to and usually had finite geographic boundaries. The word *community* had connections to a specific place, space, and series of relationships.

Another group of theorists, Robert Park and his colleagues in Chicago, were some of the first American sociologists to define community.

The essential characteristics of a community, so conceived, are those of: (1) a population territory organized, (2) more or less completely rooted in the soil it occupies, (3) its individual units living in a relationship of mutual interdependence... (Park, 1936, p. 3).

Communities were places where “one’s life may be lived wholly within it” (Poplin, 1972, p. 6). However, since that particular line was written, communities, and our scholarly study of them, have evolved. Communities have become broader, more open and globalized, moving beyond the boundaries of that traditional definition. Lyon and Driskell note that a common theme in many definitions of community include “people in a specific area who share common ties and interact with one another ” (2012, p. 5).

Wood & Judikis’ definition of community provides an answer to the question about how we can maintain community when we are forced to be physically distant from one another. They

build their working definition of community by deepening the work of their predecessors, such as Arensberg & Kimball's "assumption that community should be viewed as a process involving social structure and cultural behaviour ...and individuals ... activities with each other and with the physical items in their environment" (1965, pp. 1-2). These scholars propose to define community not as a group of people rooted to a singular place or entity, but as a "*process*" (Wood & Judikis, 2002, p. 9, emphasis in original).

The focus on the *process* or the *how* is also the focus of another scholar. In an article that analyzes the place-making that occurs at a variety of spatial scales through collective action, Martin explores the complexity of defining community (2003). Citing eight other scholars, Martin discusses traditional understandings of community where the interests of a group of people have multiple intersections, binding them together. They then trouble this definition by pointing out that proximity is a common but not a necessary factor for community.

"Community"-based organizing is traditionally thought to rely not on territory per se, but upon identifying multiple issues of common interest—such as health or housing concerns, schools, or job conditions—among a group of people (Bailey 1974; Alinsky 1989; Davis 1991). Proximity fosters common experiences of problems and thus common interests, but location does not, in itself, make a community (Cox and Mair 1988; Alinsky 1989; Davis 1991). Yet many scholars have argued that place fosters a common identity, based on common experiences, interests, and values (Tuan 1974, 1977; Pred 1984; Purcell 1997, 1998; Jonas 1998). The question is not whether the local context structures common interests and goals, but *how* (Martin, 2003, p. 730, emphasis from original).

This final sentence where Martin emphasizes that understanding *how* interactions with people and connections to place are formed is an essential part of discussion in the literature on community. The *how*, the *process*, the interaction or engagement in communication or collaboration between two or more people is where community begins.

In the introduction of their book, *Conversation on Community Theory*, Wood & Judikis built their working definition of community on the theories of several scholars and educators (Berman, 1990; Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993; Selznick, 1992; Bellah, 1996). These foundational scholars proposed definitions of community that have themes in common, including: concepts of interdependence; collective responsibility; personal commitment; and individual differences (Wood & Judikis, 2002, p. 12). Using the work of scholars noted previously, Wood & Judikis identified six essential elements of community that must be present for community to be present:

1. a sense of common purpose(s) or interest(s) among members;
2. an assuming of mutual responsibility;
3. acknowledgement (at least among members) of interconnectedness;
4. mutual respect for individual differences;
5. mutual commitment to the well-being of each other; and
6. commitment by the members to the integrity and well-being of the group, that is, the community itself (Wood & Judikis, 2002, p. 12).

This working definition of community is the definition adopted for this study, titled, “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing.” This definition of community aligns with the School’s expectations of its community members, as outlined in a document called an “essential agreement” which is signed by students and parents at the start of each academic year.

Even the key concepts such as commitment, common purpose, responsibility, interconnectedness, and integrity are echoed in both documents

The School community's purpose is to educate and encourage its members to grow into the role of knowledgeable humans who have the skills to become active and engaged members of whichever community they become part of in the future. A key part of a strong learning community involves respect and while explaining their definition of community Wood & Judikis clarify what they mean by respect. They state that community members show respect to one another, not by agreeing with each other, but by valuing each other's opinions.

We may disagree with each other regularly but value the opportunity to consider each other's ideas and perspectives in relation to our own. That is, we value each other precisely because each of us represents challenges to each other's thinking, a kind of dialogical process that refines our worldviews (2002, p. 14).

The dialogical process mentioned above is education. Enabling dialogue and enabling education is why maintaining community during a time of social distancing is so important. Wood & Judikis refer to Yankelovich's (1999) book *The Magic of Dialogue* and align with his definition of dialogue, summarizing it as,

verbal interaction for the purpose of building (increasing) understanding between those engaged in the interaction. It is not debate, deliberation or simply conversation ... for dialogue to take place, the process must include participative equality, noncoercive (voluntary) exchanges, empathetic listening, and the surfacing of assumptions (Wood & Judikis, 2002, p. 24).

This definition assumes that dialogue for the purposes of learning or maintaining community cohesion needs some structure. Facilitating this type of verbal interaction is one-way educators

may strengthen community connections during this time of social distancing. Within the context of an IB world school teaching the British Columbia curriculum, this definition of dialogue fits squarely within the Approaches to Learning and Core Competencies surrounding communication, respectively.

The concept of community is one that presents challenges. It is a term that can mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this research study, Wood & Judikis six elements of community will be used as our working understanding of the concept. Their explanation of the concept moves away from a definition of place that is limited by physical boundaries and shifts it to focus, primarily, on the process of human interaction. By broadening their definition of community to encompass interaction between people and between people and their environments, community becomes a concept rooted in meaningful participation and engagement; relationships to people and places not necessarily tied to a physical location.

The challenge posed by COVID-19 is that communities must now be maintained in a way that transcends time, place, and space. If community members are isolated or working independently from one another, community members must understand how those social distancing measures are impacting them. If social distancing measures present a challenge to maintaining community, then they must find ways to be a community while apart.

Outline of this Thesis

This paper has been divided into seven main sections: Chapter 1 - Foundations; Chapter 2 - Review of the Literature; Chapter 3 - Pivot Through Pandemic; Chapter 4 - The Study; Chapter 5 - Results; Chapter 6 - Findings and Discussion; and Chapter 7 - Conclusion. The chapters follow the format of a typical Master of Arts thesis that begins by introducing the purpose of the research and situating it within the literature, explaining how the study was done, outlining the

data, explaining how data was analysed, and offering up an interpretation of the data in response to the research questions. However, this study did not unfold in a typical fashion. The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted this study and Chapter 3 outlines a series of pivots and adaptations that were made in education that had a direct impact on this study. To remain authentic, I include descriptions of those pivots, explain how they impacted my original thesis, and discuss how I adapted to those pivots in turn.

This section, Chapter 1, outlines the foundation, conceptual framework, and purpose of this thesis. It explains my position as teacher/researcher and it attempts to define three key concepts - social distancing, community, and place - and explains the parameters in which they apply to this study. It then outlines the first iteration of this thesis, called Thesis 1.0, that was interrupted by the pandemic. Finally, Chapter 1 describes the provisos approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) and the second iteration of this Thesis, 2.0, that emerged in the wake of the pandemic.

Chapter 2 is the literature review for this thesis. It reviews educational theorists rooted in critical social-cultural theory, place-based and experiential education. It also reviews theories of cognition, metacognition, motivation, and practical teaching pedagogy around writing and reflection.

Chapter 3, titled *Pivoting through Pandemic*, outlines the special circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic in British Columbia, Canada. It outlines the policies put in place by the Provincial Government and the School's response to those policies including the considerations that went into creating a remote program. Considerations about digital asynchronous learning, mental health, and trauma informed practice are highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter 4 outlines the research study itself. This chapter lays out the research questions, the methodology, the methods, ethical considerations, recruitment, data collection, and data analysis.

The data gathered during this research study is presented in Chapter 5, as are the initial coding procedures applied to the raw data which revealed six major themes within the data.

Chapter 6 is titled Findings and Discussion. It is separated into two sections that are closely linked. The Findings section gives a detailed analysis of the data that emerged in six major themes: community, relationships, shared experiences, holding space for uncertainty, hope, and change and resilience. It discusses references, and lack thereof, to COVID-19. The Findings Section also explicitly answers the research questions. The Discussion section includes rumination about possible implications of these Findings. It discusses implications for place-based and experiential education and it discusses our understanding of physical and virtual spaces. It also discusses the teacher perspective and some of the limitations of this study.

Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter of this thesis. It summarizes the Findings, reviews how those findings fit within educational scholarship, and reiterates possible implications of the data. It also suggests areas for further study.

Position as Teacher/Researcher/Artist

Figure 1. *Panorama of Torbay, December 2018.*



Inquiring into the impact of social and physical distancing on a community was not my original objective when setting out to do graduate work in early 2019. Originally, I wanted to

study students' relationships to their spaces and places. This interest is rooted in my own relationship with proximity and distance; the tenuous link between my connections to home, and my desire to explore. I am an intermediate/secondary English teacher, currently working at a school in the greater Vancouver area while pursuing a Masters of Arts at the University of British Columbia. My home is 7000 kilometres away. I grew up in the small coastal town of Torbay, 10 kilometers to the north of the provincial capital city of St. John's, Newfoundland, and earned my undergraduate degrees at the Memorial University of Newfoundland. I moved to England to teach Language and Literature and spent two years working and traveling throughout Europe. Then I moved to Vancouver, British Columbia to begin this graduate work because I was interested in grounding my teaching practice in experiential place-based pedagogies. I wanted to find ways to move my teaching practices beyond the paper, pencil, and four walls of an English class. Hopefully, by doing so I'll facilitate opportunities for my students to (re)connect with the wider world of their community through the practical application of skills and experiences that they learn.

This desire to explore connections to place stems from deep connections to my own places. My connections ground me, allow me to collaborate with others, and drive an incredible amount of creativity. The rugged coast of Newfoundland where I grew up inspires much of my creative work and draws on the connections to home I hold so dear. Poetry, music, and creative writing pieces of mine have been inspired by the stark landscapes, powerful ocean storms, vast open barrens, friendly faces, and colourful characters from old haunts. It even sparked a transcontinental project with my sister, Leah, titled *Salt Water Prose* where she and I collaborated on a book of poetry that we wrote from opposite ends of the country as a way to keep in touch - and to fend off the homesickness when it rears its ugly head. Many of the poems

were intended to be included in the first iteration of my Thesis, as part of an artistic exploration of place; however, the practice has become even more important to me while I am unable to travel home because of current pandemic restrictions. I drew heavily on my own journal entries while writing this thesis.

My deep connections to place are also very relevant to my professional development. I am keenly interested in seeking out or creating interdisciplinary and cross-curricular learning opportunities that are skills based and transferable. Curating engaging hands-on experiences that require collaborative and creative problem solving is an objective of my professional endeavours. I am interested in supporting my students as they build flexible thinking habits and resilience while also getting outside the formal classroom setting and connecting to our wider community. I am a firm believer that strong connections to place and the people in them - communities - are essential, especially in times of turmoil. I am interested in exploring how lack of connection to place has impacted community during this pandemic.

My personal journaling practice is one I've engaged with for over fifteen years. As a caveat, I don't write pages and pages every day, but I've consistently carried a notebook and reflected regularly from the age of twelve. The self-awareness I've gleaned from these notes has enabled me to understand the rhythms of my own mind and body which has been an especially useful tool when I went through a change and was diagnosed with depression and anxiety while doing this graduate work; but that is a story for another time. In short, because of my own powerful experience with the tool, I dove into the literature about reflection and journaling and made it a part of my teaching practice.

The Place - The Study Site

I distinctly remember the first time I came to the School for a job interview in January 2019. I took a bus from the hustle and bustle and noise of East Vancouver and, as the bus travelled along, the noise and light and traffic of the city gave way to increasingly tall trees with low limbs bowed with soft springy green moss. When I got off the bus and walked the last hundred yards to the School, the sun broke through and streamed between hundred-foot trees, streaking the morning mist with gold. That memory is vivid and bright. Coming to this place simply felt right. Stepping into this little oasis was like letting go of a breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding.

I was in awe of the beautiful space on the doorstep of the campus. As I spend more time at the School, I find myself constantly inspired to be innovative and challenge myself to apply the knowledge I've gained about teaching and education in engaging ways. I aspire to break down barriers between distinct subject areas and get students actively involved in their learning. As my literature review attests to, experiential learning and place-based pedagogies that intentionally consider social-emotional development are the realms of education that I am passionate about. At the School, I am fully supported in my exploration of these concepts.

The Space - The POD

I wanted to study the Grade 6 and 7 students because of the nature of the POD programme at the School. The word "POD" is not an acronym, but the name of a distinct, relatively self-contained program at the School. When students transition from the Junior School building (JK-5) into the Senior School building (6-12) they spend Grades 6 and 7 in the POD program. The program is designed to support the social-emotional learning and executive functioning - mental skills such as working memory, flexible thinking, and self-control - of

adolescents as they transition from a primary/elementary learning environment to a high school environment. By giving students twenty months to develop these executive functioning and social-emotional skills, students are better equipped for the transition to secondary and post-secondary education.

In their core subject areas, the POD students have one teacher for Math and Science and one teacher for Language & Literature and Individuals & Societies. By spending double the time with these core teachers for a full twenty-month program, they develop strong connections and trusting relationships with the POD teachers. The strength of these relationships is why I choose to study the Grade 6 and 7 students at the School. The community in that program is built and maintained with intention, providing a rich environment to study the impact of social distancing measures.

Thesis 1.0 - The Power of Place

The first iteration of this Master's Thesis focused on the combined impact of place-based education and journal writing on young people's ability to connect to their places and express it through language. I proposed to explore PBE and journaling using the following research questions:

1. In what ways might journaling as a form of place-based education benefit student learning?
2. How does changing the location of writing practice (in particular journaling) affect young writer's written products in comparison to classroom-based writing activities?
3. How do these changes in students' written products compare to their self-perception of the impacts of writing-in-place as expressed in personal interviews and reflections?

However, just as I was about to launch a study exploring the impact of place on a student's writing, the pandemic hit and the world pivoted (see Chapter 3 for details). While the

mode and method of education went through a rapid series of changes to adapt to the challenges presented by a global pandemic, the purpose and intentions of education remained the same: to help students grow awareness and compassion by building - and maintaining - connections to community. My research had to shift focus when I was faced with the obstacle of conducting research while observing strict social distancing measures and Thesis 2.0 emerged in the midst of that pivot.

Conceptual Framework

Where the first iteration of this thesis focused on exploring how the physical environment impacts students' learning, this second set of questions focused on how physical place, or lack thereof, impacts classroom community. Both sets of research questions from Thesis 1.0 and Thesis 2.0 propose to examine data through an experiential and place-based education lens. In terms of educational theory, they both take a constructivist socio-cultural approach. By using student journals as data this study presumes that reflective journaling is a learning tool that uses social-emotional regulation techniques and executive functioning strategies (outlined in Chapter 2) to authentically capture the students' experience of social distancing. The intention of this research study is to use the student voice to articulate how social distancing measures are impacting adolescents - humans who are at a stage in their development that is highly social. The student voice will be supported and troubled by teacher observations and complimented by a parallel practice of poetic inquiry.

Thesis 2.0 - Community

As I pivoted my graduate work in response to the constraints created by the pandemic, my learning community supported me in redrafting my research questions. Still with a focus on place, still using student journals to collect data, I decided to change the research questions to:

1. In what ways does social distancing influence classroom community?
2. How might conceptions of place change as school transitions into an online learning track?
3. In what ways might journaling maintain students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social/physical distancing?
4. How are students reacting to the ongoing changes, in terms of school-based, home-based, and remote learning?

With the reality of the onset of the public health restrictions, I would now examine what the social distancing measures would do to student relationships to place, space, and people. Using the research questions, I would examine what effect, if any, the impacts of social distancing would be reflected in their journaling.

Purpose

With these four research questions in mind, it is my hope that this study will generate new knowledge about the impact of social distancing on a small sample of Canadian adolescent students living in British Columbia during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim is to analyze primary source documents created by students, in the form of journal entries, analyze that data and present Findings about the students' experience of maintaining school community during this time of social distancing. It is my hope that this research will contribute to the canon of

educational scholarship and help inform decisions being made about education now and in years to come.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

For this particular research project there are several areas of literature that must be reviewed: a brief review of seminal educational scholarship; the role of experiential and place-based education in connection with reflective journaling; and journaling as a reflection tool, specifically with adolescents in a school setting, encompassing both academic and social-emotional development. Foundational educational literature reviewed in this chapter include on experiential learning, social learning, cognition, reflection, and the adolescent brain, journaling, and writing as/for learning. By exploring the literature in these lines of inquiry, this research project is made coherent.

Foundational Literature

There are a number of key educational scholars who lay the foundation for this thesis. Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory is a cornerstone of educational pedagogy. The subsequent scholarship of Schön (1992) and Kolb (1984) focused on the experiential learning cycle and professional reflection-in-action. Vygotsky's (1978) social learning theory is a key component of the constructivist stance adopted in this research and is complemented by Bandura's (1977) social learning theory about motivation. The work of Bandura (1977) on motivation and self-fulfilling prophecy and Dweck's (2012) scholarship on growth mindset both serve to underscore the importance of experiential learning and reflection. The experiential learning approach fosters a positive tone and an intentional focus on open-mindedness.

The following literature review outlines these educational theories and couples them with pedagogy from the English Language Arts subject area, with adolescent learners in mind, in order to present a firm theoretical foundation for this thesis.

Dewey and Kolb: Experiential Learning and Reflective Thinking

In the opening chapter of the seminal text titled *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*, philosopher and educational theorist Dewey explored the difference between thinking and thinking *well* (Dewey, 1933). He argues that reflective thinking is the defining quality of our humanness and the most valuable tool available for the betterment of humanity. Good quality reflective thinking is the precursor to conscious, intelligent, intentional action.

“Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence — a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome while each outcome, in turn, refers to its predecessors. The successive portions of a reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another” (Dewey, 1933, p. 4).

This form of critical thinking and the development of informed beliefs requires “careful and extensive study... purposeful widening of the area of observation... reasoning out the conclusions of alternative conceptions to see what would follow in one case or the other” (Dewey, 1933, p. 8). The highest level of reflective thinking or inquiry requires “an orderly chain of ideas... a controlling purpose and end... and personal examination, scrutiny, and inquiry” (Dewey, 1933, p. 8). Dewey surmises that “conscious and voluntary effort” (Dewey, 1933, p. 9) is needed to puzzle out ideas and probe a person’s preconceived notions of the world and that this level of thought is necessary to fully and firmly establish our beliefs. He states that

active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to

which it tends constitutes reflective thought (Dewey, 1933, p. 9, emphasis from original).

Dewey (1933) posits that reflective thinking involves making inferences to bridge the gap between what is known and what has yet to be known. According to him, to reflect is to acknowledge and explore the thing that gave pause and instigated thought in the first place. The visual metaphor of a *chain* or train of thought gives credence to the concept of reflective thought being an act of intentionally incorporating unknowns into a frame of reference, thereby becoming known. The danger with this process is that if a person's pre-existing frame of reference is skewed or erroneous then incoming information might also become twisted or misconstrued. One preventative measure a person can take to avoid this instance is to expose themselves to as many points of view and alternate frames of reference as possible, thus ensuring a comprehensive frame of reference (Dewey, 1933, Chapter 2).

The reflective process, as defined by Dewey, is bookended by two more-or-less static states called pre-reflection and post-reflection. Pre-reflection can be described as "a state of doubt, hesitation, perplexity, mental difficulty, in which thinking originates", and post reflection is "an act of searching, hunting, inquiring, to find material that will resolve the doubt, settle and dispose of the perplexity" (Dewey, 1933, p. 12). These conceptual and concluding states are linked by the nature of the problem and reflective thinkers must be able to protract and sustain their thinking to reach an adequate solution. Dewey (1933) examined the active thinking that occurs between these two states and outlined five phases:

- (1) suggestions, in which the mind leaps forward to a possible solution;
- (2) an intellectualization of the difficulty or perplexity that has been felt (directly experienced) into a problem to be solved, a question for which the answer must be sought;

- (3) the use of one suggestion after another as a leading idea, or hypothesis, to initiate and guide observation and other operations in collection of factual material;
- (4) the mental elaboration of the idea or supposition as an idea or supposition (reasoning, in the sense in which reasoning is a part, not the whole, of inference); and
- (5) testing the hypothesis by overt or imaginative action (p. 107).

These five phases are not fixed, and thinkers may work through these phases in a multitude of ways, often repeating or cycling through the phases in different orders and at different paces. To attain the maximum potential offered by thinking reflectively, each phase must be worked through with intention. The post-reflection resolution is, similarly, unfixed and open-ended. Conclusions might open up other questions or chains of thought. Reflections can always be revisited and revised as thinkers are presented with new information.

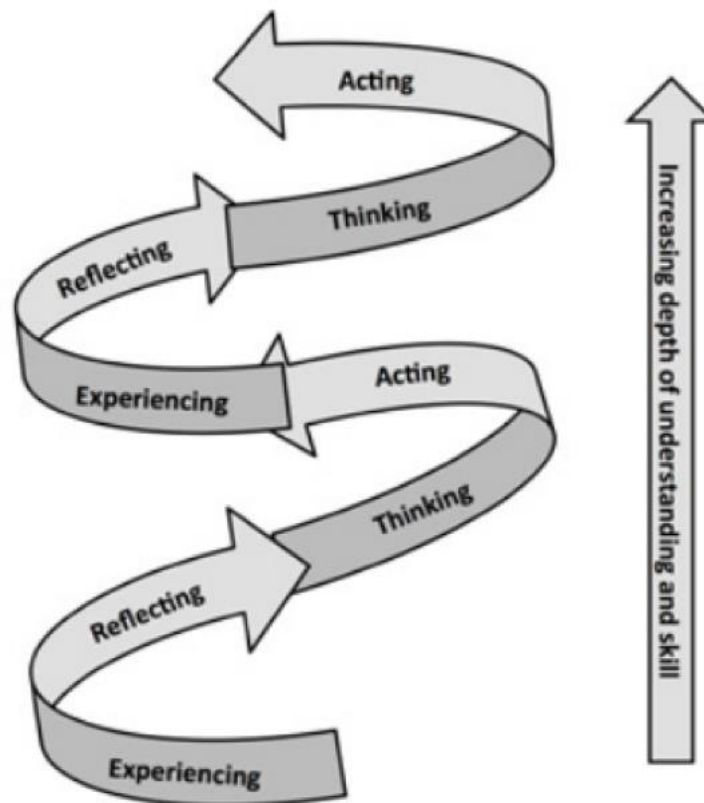
One misconception about reflective thinking is that people only reflect on the past. Thinking reflectively often involves a projection or prediction about future possibilities. This is one of the most valuable aspects of reflection, humans can internalize and incorporate new observations or concepts into their existing understanding of the world, internalize it, and then anticipate what may come next and prepare for upcoming opportunities (Dewey, 1933, pp. 117-118).

Kolb: The Experiential Learning Cycle

In the 1980s, Kolb (1984) developed Dewey's (1933) concept of experiential learning and proposed an Experiential Learning Cycle; a series of four, repeating phases of experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting. Kolb (1984) emphasized that learning is not linear, but cyclical; each time a learner experiences a phenomenon, their understanding and conceptualization of the experience deepens and their skills grow. However, the deepest learning occurs when

preconceived notions are troubled by a novel experience and learners are forced to incorporate new perspectives into their existing frameworks of understanding (Kolb & Kolb, 2018).

Figure 2. *The Learning Spiral* (Kolb & Kolb, 2018).



This process of experiential learning, facilitated by intentional reflective thinking, has been the focus of several other researchers (Steinaker & Bell, 1979; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985; Atkins & Murphy, 1993). Boud, Keough, and Walker, in particular, expanded the experiential learning cycle (1985). Their model includes phases where: learners identify an experience or exposure followed by the development of a need to resolve something, then reviewing or recollecting what occurred, checking in with their emotional state, the subsequent processing of knowledge and ideas (abstract conceptualization), and the eventual

resolution with possibility for action and transformation. The abstract conceptualization has four subsections labeled association, integration, validation, and appropriation of knowledge. The phases that involve an awareness of one's emotions and the propensity to act are notable developments.

One scholar, Eisner (1991) says "I came to believe that humans do not simply have experience; they have a hand in its creation, and the quality of the creation depends on the ways they employ their minds." He goes on to say that "perception is a cognitive event and ... construal, not discovery, is critical" (Eisner, 1991). This constructivist stance on experiential education offers practitioners opportunities to give students the space and time to be reflective and make meaning of their experiences.

Schön: Reflection-in-Action

Schön (1983) ruminated on reflective thinking in a professional context. One section of his book, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, described how professionals reflect-in-action. He postulated that complex information and concepts become *common sense* to professionals and frames the ways professionals communicate and apply their expertise. He presents the concept of professionalism as having a particular way of knowing and acting to problem solve within a specific field (Schön, 1983). A professional's frame of reference is an integral part of extended study and active engagement. Professionals become experts in their field by going through states of doubt and uncertainty over and over again. This contributes to a body of knowledge about many possible problems and the solutions that exist in their disciplines.

Vygotsky: relationship between cognition and oral or written expression

In his book *Mind in Society* Lev Vygotsky (1978) noted that there is a connection between speech and action, stating that “[children’s] speech and action are part of one and the same complex psychological function, directed toward the solution of the problem at hand...[they] solve practical tasks with the help of their speech, as well as their eyes, and hands” (p. 26). He argued that thoughts and actions can be shaped and moulded by the language used to articulate them and that that structure of those activities “may be changed or reshaped when children learn to use language in ways that allow them to go beyond previous experiences when planning future action” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 28). This transition from inner speech, to oral speech, to written speech is a natural progression in the development of communication. For children, learning about the process of writing includes formulating ideas then actively and intentionally communicating them. It is a process of deliberately using conventions and symbols to express ideas and to communicate meaning across time, space, and experience. The link between thought, expression of intentions and action in children, and the subsequent development from vocalization to writing of these intentions was further explored in a study by Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) (Bazerman, 2008, pp. 554-578).

Place-based Education

The term place-based education was coined by Laurie Lane-Zucker and Dr. John Elder during their work with The Orion Society (1998). In the introduction to David Sobel’s book, *Place-based education: Connecting classrooms & communities*, Lane-Zucker explains place-based education as:

“the pedagogy of community, the reintegration of the individual into her homeground and the restoration of the essential links between a person and her place. Place-based

education challenges the meaning of education by asking seemingly simple questions: Where am I? What is the nature of this place? What sustains this community? It often employs a process of re-storying, whereby students are asked to respond creatively to stories of their homeground so that, in time, they are able to position themselves, imaginatively and actually, within the continuum of nature and culture in that place. They become a part of the community, rather than a passive observer of it” (Lane-Zucker in Sobel, 2005, p. 5, emphasis mine).

This concept of a place-based education is not new. In fact, before institutionalized, formal education all learning was place-based (Gruenwald & Smith, 2008). Knapp (2008) expressed similar sentiments:

“Today the field of place-based education has established itself a paper trail of thousands of pages in its young life as an educational movement. This doesn’t mean that place-based education has never before been tried in schools and other educational institutions. In fact, the idea of learning from the local surroundings predates the formation of formal schooling...From the late 1800s to the present time, several movements in schools have promoted the educational use of local areas as integral parts of the curriculum...” (Knapp, 2008, p. 6).

If learners can feel a personal connection between their curriculum and their lives then it may generate more interest, increase engagement in learning activities and, eventually, shift their attitudes towards reading in a positive direction (Dewey, 1933; Bandura, 1977; Dweck, 2012).

There is evidence that a meaningful community curriculum (Knapp, 2001; Smith, 2002a, 2002b; Starnes, 2000), using local materials and engaging in meaningful community projects, would support students who would usually be disconnected. Place-based education will help all

students find deeper purpose and motivation to become active participants in their education, and by extension, their world.

Experiential learning, as described earlier in this Chapter, is an essential component of place-based education. In a place-based education program, students inquire into the world around them and are encouraged to pay attention to their surroundings. There is a substantial body of literature on place-based education and the ways in which education can be re-contextualized and made meaningful for students (Greenwood, 2013; Smith & Sobel, 2014; Sobel, 2005; Molyneux & Tyler, 2014). Place-based education can also allow learners the opportunity to engage in critical social justice dialogues and participate in an important critique of imperialism and colonization in countries that displaced first nations peoples (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004).

Experiential, hands on education, is often done in settings that utilize local resources. For example, there is a program called the [BEETLES Project](#) (Better Environmental Education, Teaching, Learning & Expertise Sharing) which creates resources for outdoor education that are in the public domain (“Meet the BEETLES,” 2021). The program is run out of the Lawrence Hall of Science at the University of California at Berkeley and the resources posted on their website can be modified by teachers to support student learning in their local contexts (“Meet the BEELTES,” 2021). Teachers at the School and peer schools in Vancouver use the programs offered on the BEETLES website regularly.

In a place-based education program, students inquire into the world around them and are encouraged to pay attention to their surroundings. Using programming such as the BEETLES lessons, students are guided through programs that encourage them to forge connections to their spaces by investing time and energy in understanding their place within and in connection with

that space. In short, “students accomplish some of their most profound learning when they are most closely connected with places ... place-based education helps students better contextualize their experiences and solve real-world problems affecting their own communities” (Deringer, 2017, p. 334).

A Note on Place-based Education and Community

There is some tension between place-based education philosophies and the working definition of community offered by Wood & Judikis (2002). Place-based pedagogy grounds teaching and learning in a person’s physical space. It endeavours to build connections between students and their local surroundings. This is at odds with Woods & Judikis’ definition of community where communities do not necessarily rely on a physical place to flourish. This relationship between these two concepts are discussed further in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Dweck and Bandura: The Importance of Mindset

Carol Dweck, psychology professor at Stanford whose research examines self-conceptions, asserts that “growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts” (Dweck, 2012, p. 16). Her mindset theory involves developing a habit of responding to challenging situations with positive and open-ended language, cultivating resilience and perseverance. As a teacher, this means teaching students to stay positive and keep trying while working through challenging or uncomfortable situations. This development of resilience is especially important for hesitant or reluctant readers. Typically, these students lack motivation or associate reading with negative experiences. Developing a

growth mindset would benefit students by ensuring they persevere long and hard enough to develop the skills they are lacking and create positive experiences to carry them forward.

Bandura (1997) posited that a child's ability and beliefs can predict their achievement. In practice, this means that a child's beliefs about how well they can accomplish a task are directly connected to the activities they choose to engage in, the effort they expend in those activities and their resilience to challenges. If a young person believes they can accomplish a task they are more likely to try. Conversely, if they do not believe they are capable or will be successful they will try to avoid the task. Journaling, therefore, cannot be not viewed as an isolated event, but as a sustained practice developed over time that may revisit similar ideas again and again. As such, cultivating consistency and endurance in learners is necessary to ensure that journaling, and the reflection it facilitates, is productive.

A Short Note about Adolescent Brains

A brief comment about adolescent brains is relevant for this research study because understanding how the brains of Grade 6 and 7 students work has been an important part of the POD program from its inception. Granted, this is not a study about neurological development so this side note is brief and intended to connect experiential learning to journaling and explain why this tool is useful for adolescents.

Journaling can be a useful tool for adolescent learning because of the unique factors involved during this period of psychological development. Adolescents are primarily concerned with developing peer relationships, exploring identity, and learning to self-regulate (UNICEF, 2017) in a time of rapid change with frequent opportunities to become dysregulated (Carrington, 2019). It is a time when learning can be paradoxical and turbulent, and there are more instances of risk-taking. Adolescents are moving out of childhood, testing boundaries, but do not yet have

the capacity to fully comprehend the impact of certain choices or actions because they lack the learning and understanding gained through experience (Reyna & Dougherty, 2012).

Giving adolescents time and space to reflect on novel experiences in journaling sessions can encourage them to recollect their experiences and consolidate meaning by articulating observations and noting what worked and what did not in a particular moment of success or dysregulation.

A Brief Caveat

Before continuing this literature review, I must include a brief caveat. This study uses journaling to capture data, therefore, the bulk of the writing herein focuses on that mode of learning. While it is the focus, let it be said that text-based interventions are not the sole avenue to learning. The context in which this study took place - the POD program - highly values a balanced approach to learning. Our approach is multifaceted and includes a variety of methods and strategies, specifically designed for adolescent brains, that lead to understanding. It is an approach that includes a great deal of play (Golinkoff, Hirsh-Pasek, & Singer, 2006). Making time for unstructured, sustained play is vitally important for students in the POD and while it isn't discussed in detail here, let its absence not indicate that it is less valuable.

Connections Between Writing and Thinking

Research published in the 1970s indicated that unstructured writing, or expressive writing, could foster learning (Britton, 1970; Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975). Zimmerman & Reisemberg (1997) defined writing as a cognitive, purpose driven activity that requires adept management of: (a) the writing environment; (b) the constraints imposed by the writing topic; (c) the intentions of the writer(s), and (d) the processes, knowledge, and skills

involved in composing. According to Britton, the act of specifying thoughts in language transforms otherwise tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge by “shaping [those thoughts] at the point of utterance” (1982). Britton went on to explain that the influence of writing on thought occurs during the process, or act, of expression.

The cognitive processes, the act of consolidating thought into coherent expression, is an act wherein students synthesize new knowledge through the writing process itself. Several reviews conducted in the early 2000s examine literature on writing-to-learn and the evidence for claims that writing facilitates learning (Bangert-Drowns, Hurley, & Wilkinson, 2004; Bazerman et. al., 2005; Newell, 2006). All of these studies noted either positive or null effects on learning.

The Hayes and Flower (1980) cognitive model of writing frames text production as a sequential four step process. Within text production, the writer *proposes* ideas, *translates* them into conceptual thought, *transcribes* them into text or speech, and can then *revise* the expression of a linguistic message (see also Chenoweth & Hayes, 2001; Berninger & Swanson, 1994). The first three roles of proposer, translator, and transcriber are the roles students take on when they write in their journals, while suspending the voice of the reviser. The educator must develop a *trust* with the students whereby they accept that their journals will be read and feedback given but not quantified. The purpose is to engage in a dialogue with them and prompt deeper reflection, but their journals are a place where they can begin exploring initial ideas and make mistakes. Their journals are a space of/for making comments and questions where they are encouraged to let go of their critical eye and to enjoy the process of inquiry without fear of judgement. If there is too much unproductive revision or goal direction during writing, it can interfere with learning (Galbraith, 1992; Galbraith and Baaijen, 2018).

All learning is experiential and reflective (Moon 2004). Students experience something new, whether through the medium of a lecture, book or hands on practical exercise, and then reflect on that experience. These processes happen on a continuum and that the degree of learning is directly dependent on the degree of conscious or active engagement in the experience and in the reflection. The word *study* means to devote time and attention to acquiring knowledge. To spend time in contemplation is to think of things; to make connections between lived experiences, to infer meaning, to extend thinking beyond lived experiences and make predictions or suppositions about future possibilities. Moon says that “a person who is reflective seems to be someone who is comfortable and successfully engages in the mental activity of reflection and would make decisions that are well considered (Moon, 2004, p. 5). The fact that the human mind can suppose and postulate in order to make decisions is an extraordinary thing. That we can take lived experiences, learn from them, and then think beyond them is awe inspiring.

What is Journaling?

Dewey (1933) and Schön (1978) described reflective thinking, largely, as a habit of mind. Vygotsky (1978) proposed that language use is a key aspect of thinking. Kolb (1984) noted that experience and reflection on experience is a key aspect of learning. Bandura (1977) and Dweck (2012) noted that motivation and mindset are also complicating factors of learning, especially with adolescents. There are also scholars, such as Britton (1982; 1996), and Zimmerman & Reiser (1997) who extend this thinking and suggest committing reflections to paper can expand the depth and breadth of reflective thinking. These arguments articulate how the act of writing out one’s thoughts forces learners to convert their inner, conceptual thinking into something coherent, tangible, and lasting. By committing thoughts to paper, specifically thoughts that encapsulate steps from a place of doubt towards a place of understanding (Dewey, 1933, p.

12), learners can meditate on and revisit ideas over an extended period of time. By writing down steps taken while thinking, people can examine ideas closely and identify weak logic or trace the evolution and development of thought over time. This is the basis of the value placed on the print society - words and ideas clearly and coherently committed to paper are fixed and defined in the moment of writing.

Committing ideas to paper also facilitates reflective discourse between two people. As such, reflective thinking has also been used as an educational tool in the form of a dialogic reflective journal - where a learner and a knowledgeable mentor can have a dialogue meant to challenge and deepen the learner's thinking (Yankelovich, 1999; Burns, 2020). This tool can be used to guide learners through a more meaningful process of thinking reflectively about a particular problem or concept. When implemented with intention, reflective learning journals can encourage learners to spend time ruminating on a problem and ensure learners go through all five phases of reflection outlined by Dewey (1933).

Journaling as a learning tool has been used in a variety of educational contexts. It has been used in the field of nursing education (Epp, 2008), social work education (Horton, Gibson, & Curington, 2021), occupational therapy (Waterhouse & Santini, 2012), and alternate language education (Mueller, 2020). In schools, it is a tool used with increasing regularity across subject areas such as Math (Sloop, 2019), Science (Smith & Mader, 2014), Music (Bakken, 2020), and English and Social Studies (de los Ríos, 2020). For example, Mueller found that “nature journaling is a particularly meaningful tool for integrating place-based environmental education into English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes” (Mueller, 2020, p. 2). It is also noteworthy that Mueller's work, in addition to other examples listed above – Bakken (2020); and

Sloop (2019) – are recent dissertations, indicating that the trend of journaling for and as learning in a variety of disciplines is getting more attention in the sphere of educational research.

Researchers Miller, Scott, and McTigue (2018) conducted a systematic review of writing in the secondary-level disciplines where the researchers screened over 3000 articles. Data revealed four primary themes: elements of explicit strategy and inquiry-based instruction; the impact of prewriting models; the role of metacognition and journaling; and the writing-related implications for content-area assessment. Journaling was identified in 11.6% of studies and “were the subject of multiple studies; thus, these implications are strongly supported by high-quality empirical studies and can be confidently recommended for classroom implementation” (Miller, Scott & McTigue, 2018, p. 110).

Using journals as data sources also has precedence. From a social-sciences perspective, historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg studied the journals of adolescent girls penned from 1830 to the late 90’s to understand how girls' attitudes towards their bodies have changed over time in the context of changing societal values (1998). In the field of scientific research around climate change, journals have also featured prominently. A recent study used ancient Chinese diaries to reconstruct records of climate history, enabling scientists to understand what has changed over hundreds of years in a particular area (Chen, Fang, & He, 2020).

The rationale for using journals as a learning tool stems from a student-centered pedagogical foundation. Journaling creates opportunities for students to reflect on specific lessons learned in their academic subject areas, on their skill development, and on their social-emotional growth. Reflection is a key part of the IB program and students are aware of the protocols surrounding journal writing, often using them to practice being purposefully creative and/or critically reflective. The intention of journaling is to cultivate strong, positive connections

over time which include establishing connections to, and within, our own experiences.

Sometimes these are connections that form the basis of relationships between people, sometimes they are connections that yoke new information into an existing framework or understanding of the world (Kolb, 2015; Moon, 2004). We are connection seeking creatures, hard-wired to seek them. People adapt in the most incredible ways, developing a very broad range of strategies, to make connections and, in theory, these connections allow students to become more resilient and manage the stress experienced during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Summary of Literature Review

The literature review of foundational educational scholarship outlined key pedagogical theories that serve as cornerstones for this research study. On the basis of the literature published by Dewey (1933; 1948), Vygotsky (1978), Kolb (1984), Dweck (2012), and Bandura (1977), the following study takes a social constructivist stance and argues that, experiential learning rooted in relationships with people and place, with a positive growth mindset, are essential elements of successful educational programming - especially for adolescents. The importance of skills-focused education with explicit teaching of metacognitive strategies for success is highlighted in the studies. In this context, research participants are adolescents who are learning to self-regulate and develop their individual cognitive skills and ability to socialize effectively.

Journaling is a tool used in a variety of contexts to develop reflective practice and deepen understanding of experience and process. The literature review draws conclusions from research conducted in a wide range of educational and professional development settings. The studies explored in the literature review set a precedent for using handwritten or typed journals as a useful educational and research tool because of the close connection between written expression and cognition.

Chapter 3: Pivot through Pandemic (a.k.a. Don't Panic)

Pivot

Initially, as education went remote, educators and administrators at the School tried to make time to teach technology skills and allow students (and teachers) to adjust to their virtual learning environment. This choice was rooted in literature concerning the planning of distance or remote courses (Conrad, 2002; Kenny, 2002). Stokes (1999) suggested that pre-teaching students how to use the technology required would proactively encourage engagement in learning activities. This small kernel of knowledge was invaluable in the Spring of 2020. Teaching staff made time in the last week of school before Spring Break to show the students at the School how to use Google Meet to join a remote classroom. This short lesson only lasted for fifteen minutes, however, it gave teachers and students a sense of control and preparedness. If things did go remote, our community knew we had a virtual space where we could connect to one another.

On Friday, March 13th, 2020, I left the School to start my two-week Spring Break and took my usual hour-and-fifteen-minute commute on a bus, a Seabus, and a Skytrain home from work. I distinctly remember being uncomfortable on the Skytrain - it was far emptier than usual for a Friday evening and the people that were travelling looked tense and stayed far away from other passengers. When I got home and turned on the TV, all I heard on the news that evening were stories about the new COVID-19 virus. The frequency of announcements about COVID-19 increased daily as updates were rapidly released one after another. The tone of these press releases and news stories over that week emphasized the seriousness of the situation.

Another vivid memory I have of that week is of walking through mounds of fresh produce at the grocery store and then staring at bare shelves in the non-perishable food aisles at several local grocery stores while doing my weekly shop - an unnerving experience, to say the

least. During that Spring Break, the whole world went through a monumental shift, and the School followed suit, creating protocols and procedures to keep its community safe by creating a remote learning program called the School's Online Learning Track - or BOLT. This was no small task.

BOLT, Explained

The School's Online Learning Track used the school's pre-pandemic Learning Management Software, Google Classroom, as a platform for remote learning in the Senior School, Grades 6-12. Students and teachers at the School were able to maintain some normalcy because they were already accustomed to accessing resources and assignments through this portal. This was quite lucky for us and gave us a virtual space to continue connecting.

For the POD students, we constructed new, reduced schedules to help manage their workload and screen time. Synchronous lessons and meetings were scheduled in the mornings and independent work blocks or support sessions were scheduled in the afternoons. Each "class" had a specific Google Meet hyperlink embedded in the schedule to support students' executive functioning - students had a one-stop-shop where they could look at their timetable and click on the link to that particular class. The School structured their timetables and designated specific hours for them to do "in-class" synchronous activities where they would often have class discussions and group activities with one another before departing to complete independent work in asynchronous work blocks. The time spent on Google Meet video class for "classes" was reduced by half compared to the time they would have in face-to-face sessions pre-pandemic and there were screen-free breaks built into the schedule. Each student would meet in a small group once a week to have a wellness check-in and social activity with one of their teachers and the whole class would meet each morning for 20 minutes to go over the shape of the day.

Figure 3. Grade 7 BOLT Timetable, Spring 2020.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30 8:50	8:45 - 9:00 Whole POD Morning Meeting LINK	8:50 - 9:00 Grade 7 Black Advisor LINK	8:30 - 8:50 Junior School Assembly Senior School Assembly	8:50 - 9:00 Grade 7 Black Advisor LINK	8:50 - 9:00 Grade 7 Black Advisor LINK
9:00 9:45	Lang & Lit LINK	Math LINK	Independent work block See Google Classrooms for information	Lang & Lit LINK	Math LINK
9:45 10:00	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)
10:00 10:45	Independent work block See Google Classrooms for information	10:00 Small Grade Group Meetings/Check-ins Group 1 with Teacher 1 Group 2 with Ms Sing Group 3 with Teacher 2 Group 4 with Teacher 4	Independent work block See Google Classrooms for information	Science LINK	Art LINK
10:45 11:00	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)
11:00 11:45	French (11.20) LINK Support Block LINK	Independent work block See Google classrooms for information	I & S Link	Independent work block See Google Classrooms for information	Independent work block French Help & Support Drop-in LINK
11:45 12:00	Break (screen-free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)	Break (screen free)
12:00 12:45	PE Check-in & Set-Up Week LINK	Music LINK	Design LINK	Independent work block PE Help & Support Drop-in LINK	Independent work block Tech/Design Help & Support Drop-in LINK
12:45 2:00	Lunch (screen free)	Lunch (screen free)	Lunch (screen free)	Lunch (screen free)	Lunch (screen free)
2:00 3:00	POD Help & Support Drop-in LINK	POD Help & Support Drop-in LINK	No Class or Meetings (Teachers are in meetings)	POD Help & Support Drop-in LINK	Independent work block See Google Classrooms for information

A Shift in Focus

My research focus to date had been on the power of place-based education and, with this pivot, I re-evaluated the importance and definition of place. This was an essential shift for me; With this novel opportunity and the unique circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, I adapted my research questions from a place-based education lens to one that focused more heavily on community connections. Once the school had BOLT in place, the study would examine the impact that social and physical distancing might have on a student's sense of community and if it would be reflected in their journal entries. The adapted research questions for Thesis 2.0 became:

1. In what ways does social distancing influence classroom community?
2. How might conceptions of place change as school transitions into an online learning track?
3. In what ways might journaling maintain students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social/physical distancing?
4. How are students reacting to the ongoing changes, in terms of school-based, home-based, and remote learning?

Trauma Informed Pedagogy During the Pivot

During this global pandemic, where the world has been encouraged to practice social distancing, many educators worked hard to support families and ensure that their students were well. As such, the School created BOLT with trauma informed pedagogy. As stated in *An Independent Report on Approaches to Distance Learning During COVID19 School Closures*, written to inform the work of Education International and UNESCO, “‘Maslow before Bloom’ must be our mission. First and foremost, we must ensure that our students are safe and have their

basic needs met” (Doucet, Netolick, Timmers, and Tuscano, 2020, p. 21). This phrase references and ranks theories of two psychologists: Maslow’s (1943) Hierarchy of Needs and Bloom’s (1956) Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. As the School pivoted through pandemic with a trauma-informed mindset, this phrase was repeated over and over by my school administration. It reminded us that a child’s well-being must come before any academic goals.

Actions by educators to promote wellness must include encouraging social distancing practices but also finding ways to give the young people we teach opportunities to connect. Teachers must find ways to provide consistency, purpose, and a sense of normalcy while the world navigates this novel scenario. New information and guidelines were published daily and, at all levels of government and leadership, people were working hard to gather data, curate knowledge, and share information to support the public health guidelines and directives and keep our communities well.

When education shifted to remote learning in the Spring of 2020, considering the vulnerable state of students at that time, I intentionally put student wellbeing at the forefront of my priorities. With this in mind, I used Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943) and applied it to the online learning environment, as proposed by Karen Milheim (2012, p. 161) who modified theory for a pre-pandemic online learning scenario.

Milheim maintained Maslow’s original intentions, dictating that each level must be attained before a person could progress towards self-actualization. For instance, at the base level, a student needs to have their basic needs met in order to engage in online learning - they must be fed, watered, and have access to physical implements such as a computer and internet access. The second level to Milheim’s hierarchy of needs also mirrors Maslow’s intention, saying that “the original model proposed by Maslow (1943), *safety* referred to shelter, including a sense of

familiarity and comfort. According to him, without safety, people feel anxious and uncertain” (Milheim, 2012).

Table 1. *The five levels of Maslow's model and respective pedagogical prescriptions for online learning (based on Maslow, 1943, p. 165; cited from Milheim, 2012).*

Maslow's Five Levels	Major Tenets	Pedagogical Prescription for Online Learning
Level 5: Self-actualization	Achieving potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learner guided • Humanistic • Assistive tools to foster sense of self
Level 4: Self-esteem	Acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course preparation • Responsive feedback • Assessment • Inclusive climate
Level 3: Relationships	Belonging to a group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration • Instructor presence • Personalized feedback • Community of learning • Technological communication tools
Level 2: Safety	Safe home environment, comfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-course preparation • Consistent formatting and design • Clear requirements
Level 1: Physiological	Food, shelter, health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Books • Software • Computer access • Checklists

The dramatic shift in the daily lives of young people on a global scale had experts drawing from publications such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees’ (UNHCR) Emergency Handbook. While this current situation is different from the needs of a refugee, there are parallels including the fact that “students are thrust into a vastly different world than the one they knew” (Doucet et al., 2020, p. 2). I would argue that experiencing something so unsettling, such as social distancing measures that required students to learn remotely even while

in a very familiar space - their homes - created a unique experience of cognitive dissonance and distress. In emergencies, the first priority is to provide immediate physical and social emotional support; “*Normalcy* by schooling, schedule, procedures” (Doucet et al., 2020, p. 2, *emphasis mine*) and other such measures are what give students some sense of control and stability during a period where things are rapidly changing. “Education provides a sense of continuity when everything else is in flux, providing a stable, safe and supervised routine that is attentive to academic and psychosocial needs” (Doucet et al., 2020, p. 2).

A key step in the UNHCR’s Emergency Handbook is “to establish child friendly spaces in association with the refugee community is key and that this space should be inclusive, physically safe, participatory and supportive environment” (Doucet et al., 2020, p. 3). Our students have been working from home; spaces that are, in theory, safe environments where they are able to maintain social distancing. Students are engaging in remote learning and their teachers are striving to incorporate elements of a Universally Designed Curriculum (UDC) (Rose & Meyer, 2002) to ensure that students of all types and abilities can access and find success with their schoolwork. While applying this UDC in our school teachers at the School also ascertained that “distance learning doesn’t have to mirror learning as it normally does in school. In fact, it shouldn’t” (Doucet et al., 2020, p. 6).

The pedagogy, diverse and age appropriate, will vary depending on environment and technology access. It does not need to be only online and, in looking at the question of inequity, can’t be carried out by just any teacher. Numerous studies support the belief that *we don’t want students staring at screens for hours on end*, which means that teachers approached teaching through a pandemic, via BOLT, through a distance-learning lens (Doucet et al., 2020, p. 4, *emphasis mine*).

This pivot, this rotation, this shift of the education system that teachers and administrators orchestrated in the face of a global pandemic is a feat that cannot be understated or underappreciated (hence why this thesis is dedicated, in part, to the teaching community). We pivoted for one reason - for the wellbeing of our community. We pivoted to keep our students and staff safe, their families safe, and the vulnerable people in our communities safe. It was an undertaking that required sacrifice, patience, resilience, and a positive outlook from the whole community.

Creating and Maintaining Community in a Virtual Space During Pandemica

While building BOLT and as the School pivoted to remote learning, educators at the School made time to teach technology skills and allow students (and teachers) to adjust to their virtual learning environment. Being in the same virtual space, however, was not automatically conducive to community - this is one of the big conundrums that prompted my research questions. Creating opportunities for students to develop relationships with one another and with the instructor through dialogue and collaborative activities is a challenging task (Milheim, 2012, p. 162), and will vary with each new virtual learning environment. Many different factors came into play, including students enjoying or despising being “put on the spot” and speaking during a Google Meet. Factors such as wireless internet connectivity, glitches and problems with people’s technology, challenges with microphones or video feeds, all had a significant impact on the quality of interactions and student’s ability to engage in collaboration. Palloff & Pratt (2005) stated that,

In the online environment, collaboration can be seen as the cornerstone of the educational experience. Just about everything that students engage in online, from

participation on a discussion board to working in small groups, can be viewed as collaborative (p. 334).

Just like a traditional classroom, it is important to attend and participate in online classes. Helping students achieve a suitable degree of presence (Danaher, Hickey, Brown, & Conway, 2007; Hrastinski, 2009) where they are actively engaged in their online lessons is an important consideration for teachers - especially when some learning occurs synchronously and some learning occurs asynchronously. Synchronous learning is when the whole learning group, face-to-face or virtual, completes the same tasks at the same time. Asynchronous learning means that learning group members do not have to complete learning at the same time. Regardless of whether learning activities are synchronous or asynchronous, research suggests that quick instructor response time to questions and postings is one way to promote presence (Baker, 2003; Richardson & Swan, 2003). This individualized communication positively affects student perceptions of their learning experience and individually customized feedback, as opposed to general feedback to the entire class, leaves students more satisfied overall (Gallien & Oomen-Early, 2008). Feedback from peers and classmates is another instrumental way to foster presence and encourage collaboration in an online classroom:

Collaborative interactions are an essential element of any pedagogy which assumes that good learning is collaborative and that understanding comes through modelling, participation in, and reaction to the behaviors and thoughts of others (Pawan, Paulus, Yalcin, & Chang, 2003, p. 119).

In turn, the lack of presence, or sense of community among students quite often has a negative effect. It might leave some students feeling isolated or even excluded from the online community and learning process (Sadera, Robertson, Song, & Midon, 2009). Students must

know what they are expected to do in order to build a sense of community with their peers. The instructor plays a pivotal role in encouraging students to take part through monitoring patterns of participation (Vonderwell & Zachariah, 2005) and setting goals and expectations for online presence. Palloff & Pratt (2005) suggest that the instructor participate as an equal member of the learning community, allowing students to become experts in their own learning.

By facilitating a community where students are expected to interact and taught how to do so appropriately, students get feedback from a variety of sources. Learning how to give and receive meaningful feedback is a communication skill, best taught explicitly at the start of a course. Formative feedback has been shown to be a relevant and useful teaching practice (Furnborough & Truman, 2009) that informs learning and instruction.

Pandemic Policy: Provincial Health Officer and the Ministry of Education (BC)

In the introduction of this thesis, “social distance” was defined as “the study of how man unconsciously structures microspace – the distance between men in the conduct of daily transactions, the organization of space” (Hall, 1963). As we pivoted through pandemic, the term social distancing took on a new meaning with denotations about preventing the spread of disease. The Macmillan Dictionary now defines it as “measures that can help to slow the spread of an infectious disease by avoiding close contact between people” (Macmillan, 2020).

Public Health Guidelines and Orders were regularly issued by the Office of the Public Health Officer of British Columbia during the COVID-19 pandemic (British Columbia Ministry of Health, 2021, July 19). The BC Ministry of Education also released publications founded on these Public Health Orders and Guidelines, titled “COVID-19 safe schools” on the BC Provincial Government (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021). The language of these Public Health Orders included social distancing measures that varied according to the British Columbia

Center for Disease Control acquired about infection and hospitalization rates (Provincial Health Services Authority, 2021).

When the disease was deemed to be more contained and controlled in a way that our healthcare system could manage, BC residents were less restricted. When infection rates increased and data indicated that the healthcare would be overwhelmed, restrictions increased. This 5 Stage system, Stage 1 having no social distancing measures and Stage 5 having the most restrictive measures, indicated social circles appropriate for different stages of the pandemic. When restrictions were at their tightest, people in BC were advised to socialize with people in their immediate households. When restrictions were moderate, people were advised to limit their contact to a select few people.

In educational settings, social distancing measures encouraged learners to be organized into learning groups. “A learning group is a group of students and staff who remain together throughout a school term (e.g. a school quarter, semester or year) and who primarily interact with each other (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021, April 16, p. 9). At the School, Grades 6 and 7 comprised one learning group. They had a separate schedule from the rest of the Senior School, including different breaks and a separate lunch time. The Spring 2020 group engaged in BOLT during Stage 4 and the Fall 2020 group came to school during Stage 2.

Table 2. Table from Provincial COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings (BC Ministry of Education, 2021, April 16, p. 7).

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5
Learning Group Size Elementary: N/A Middle: N/A Secondary: N/A	Learning Group Size Elementary: 60 Middle: 60 Secondary: 120	Learning Group Size Elementary: 30 Middle: 30 Secondary: 60	Learning Group Size Elementary: 30 Middle: 30 Secondary: 30	Learning Group Size Elementary: 0 Middle: 0 Secondary: 0
DENSITY TARGETS: Not applicable	DENSITY TARGETS: Not applicable	DENSITY TARGETS: 50% for all schools	DENSITY TARGETS: 25% for all schools	DENSITY TARGETS: 0% for all schools
IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION Full-time all students, all grades	IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION Full-time instruction for all students for the maximum instructional time possible within cohort limits. Self-directed learning supplements in-class instruction, if required.	IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION Full-time instruction for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● children of essential service workers¹ ● students with disabilities/diverse abilities ● students who require additional supports In-class instruction for all other students for the maximum time possible within cohort limits. Self-directed and remote learning supplements in-class instruction.	IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION Full-time instruction for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● children of essential service workers¹ ● students with disabilities/diverse abilities ● students who require additional supports Remote learning for all other students	IN-CLASS INSTRUCTION : Suspend in-class for all students

Chapter 4: The Study

The aim of this study is to describe the methodology used to investigate how social distancing has impacted classroom community and students' relationship to their learning places and spaces during this pandemic.

This chapter begins with the study context and purpose, and then details the methodological approach and methods employed to answer the research questions. The latter half of the chapter outlines the ethical considerations, participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Research Questions

This study, titled “Maintaining Community in a Time of social distancing through Journaling,” uses qualitative methods to explore the impact journaling has on students' sense of community during a time of social distancing. It began in the Spring of 2020 when I gathered data about the impact of social distancing measures on Grade 6 and 7 students' perceptions of classroom community at the School Preparatory School. The main focus of this study was to explore how journaling can help students feel safe and connected, supporting their social-emotional well-being, as educators adapt and pivot to keep our whole community safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

To reiterate, the research questions are:

1. In what ways does social distancing influence classroom community?
2. How might conceptions of place change as school transitions into an online learning track?
3. In what ways might journaling maintain students' sense of school-as-community during a

time of social/physical distancing?

4. How are students reacting to the ongoing changes, in terms of school-based, home-based, and remote learning?

A qualitative case-study approach was employed to explore these questions. The research methods were used to examine student journals, self-recorded interviews, and teacher/researcher observations as a way to understand how social distancing has impacted classroom community and students' relationship to their learning places and spaces during this pandemic. The methods used included convenience sampling, self-recorded interviews, and textual analysis.

The Study Site

As noted earlier, the School is a small school nestled into the foothills of the North Shore Mountains. It is a private school with unique demographics and the findings extrapolated from the data represent a small portion of the total population of adolescent students in British Columbia.

Methods

I chose to explore how social-distance impacted community using qualitative methods because I wanted to dive deep into a small localized sample and amplify the adolescent perspective of this experience. Another line of inquiry in this qualitative exploration is the autobiographical nature of the findings from my own journal entries which are distinct from the student journals. Understanding community, as articulated by Wood & Judikis, involves understanding the process of community (2002, p. 9). Qualitative methods allow researchers to examine processes of community from a variety of angles including patterns in the data, similar experiences, epistemologies, or practices from the perspective of research participants.

A key decision made when developing my methods was the choice to use student journals to collect data. I selected this method of data collection because I wanted to document student's thinking about the impact of COVID-19. As noted by Miller, Scott, and McTigue (2018) in their review of the literature, journals are the most prevalent tool used to assess metacognitive strategies. An earlier study by Bangert-Drowns et al. (2004) of over forty school writing programs revealed that writing to learn interventions are most impactful when their design intentionally facilitates students' metacognition and reflection. Several other studies have highlighted the importance of ensuring that journal prompts used to elicit conscious use of metacognitive strategies are crafted with sound pedagogical reasoning and intention (Conner 2007; Glogger et al. 2009; Hübner et al. 2010; Wong et al. 2002).

Journaling, or reflective writing, is a regular part of my teaching practice, therefore using journals as data was a natural choice for this research project. There was no drastic shift in my teaching style or in the student's weekly routines when I decided to use student journals as a tool in my graduate work. In my practice, I establish journals as a safe space (Carrington, 2019) for students to reflect on a variety of topics as the need arises throughout the school year. At least once a week students reflect on current events - either an event that happened in our immediate community or in the wider global community. These journals are learning tools that are not subject to grading directly. However, the products created from journal entries are part of student coursework. For example, students might make observations in their journals of their surroundings during a walk in a local park. At a later date, they may be prompted to do a piece of creative writing, set in a forest, and are advised to use those observations to create a vivid and detailed description of the setting.

Another consideration while designing and implementing the methods for this study include the differences in place and space between the Spring 2020 session and the Fall 2020 session. In the Spring, our classroom was a virtual space. Contact time became brief scheduled Google Meetings (video-conferences) where we would explain tasks synchronously and make space for questions. Students were often expected to be independent and complete the tasks asynchronously. In the Fall, upon returning to campus, Journaling occurred once a week, in class where students would complete their tasks synchronously while sharing the same space.

My coworkers in the POD, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2, were instrumental in this study. They engaged in some journaling of their own throughout this study. Their support for this journaling program and their keen observations were shared at the end of the data-collection phase during informal semi-structured interviews. They are discussed in greater detail in the Discussion section of this thesis with the sub-heading “Teacher Perspective”.

In summary, this study seeks to explore the experience of adolescents during the unprecedented circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. It sought to foster and explore perceptions of community connectedness during a time of social distancing by using journaling as a medium. I then analyzed the data through a lens of place-based education to explore the relationships between community connection, isolation, and the ways those experiences are expressed.

Documentation of the Process: My Journals

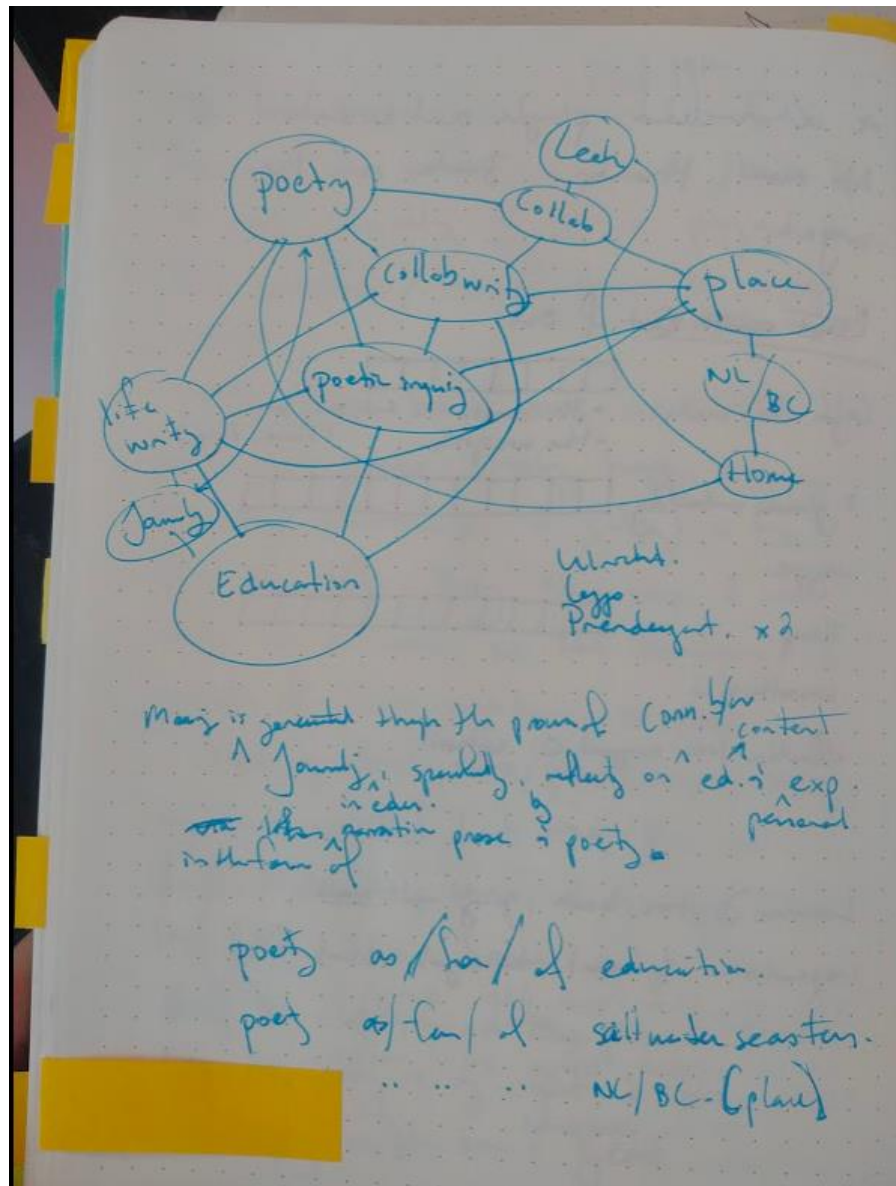
During the thirty months of this graduate program I’ve recorded observations and ideas in a handful of notebooks. These personal journals are an integral part of my research process and constitute a practice of journaling about my learning as a graduate student and as a teacher-

researcher. I have kept a personal journal for the past fifteen years and the notes I've taken during my graduate studies have been priceless.

In these journals are notes about readings, photos, mind maps, lists of ideas, tangential thoughts that have spiraled away from the central theme of this research and are currently suspended between pages and did not make it into this thesis but may become more fully developed in future projects. My journals are distinct and separate from the data collected from my participants. In these journals are the notes I took during university courses and while completing coursework for my graduate degree. The notes in my journals helped me develop theoretical foundation of my work and to interpret the data

Also, in those journals is the evidence of my processing - clarification of understanding through narration and creative writing in the form of poetry. Throughout this thesis there are pieces of poetry and visual representations of my thinking that helped me deepen my understanding.

Figure 4. Screenshot of Personal Journal. 2019, October 26.



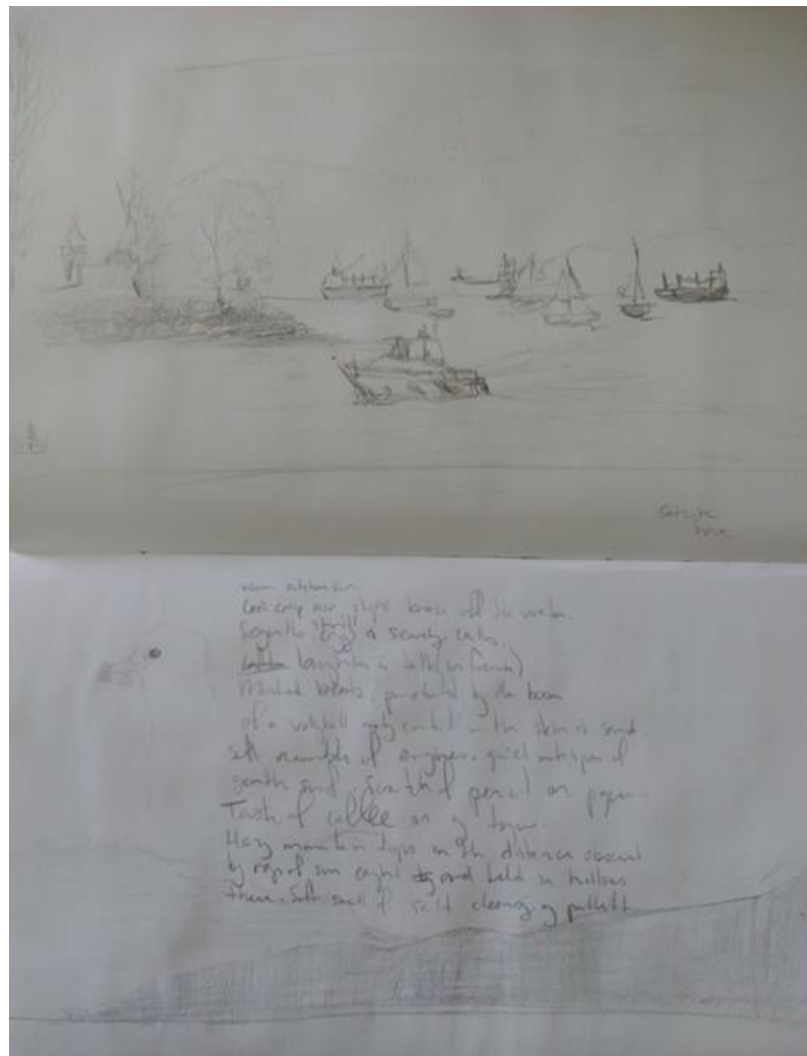
These journal entries contributed to the development of this thesis, emerging as an important second line of inquiry that supplemented my exploration of the research questions. This resulted in an ethnography that used a/r/tography as a parallel practice, or living inquiry, which enabled critical self-reflection of my role as artist/teacher/researcher. As described by one of my UBC professors, Irwin, and her colleague,

[l]iving inquiry is a life commitment to the arts and education through acts of inquiry. These acts are theoretical, practical and artful ways of creating meaning through recursive, reflective, responsive yet resistant forms of engagement. A/r/tography is a methodology of embodiment, of continuous engagement with the world: one that interrogates yet celebrates meaning. A/r/tography is a living practice, a life creating experience examining our personal, political and/or professional lives. It uses a fluid orientation within the contiguous relationships described earlier. Its rigour comes from its continuous reflective and reflexive stance to engagement, analysis and learning (Irwin & Springgay, p. xxix).

This living inquiry, my journaling practice, strengthened my connection to the data and clarified my understanding of those connections. Data from my personal journals and participant journals provided inspiration for several poems. These distillations of the participants' experience of journaling during the COVID-19 pandemic are represented in several poems inserted throughout this thesis.

When I journal, I focus on *place* and the feelings certain places elicit. I often include impressions of moments, brief and fleeting, that I try to capture by pinning them to paper with the point of a pen so that I can revisit the moments and remember them later - maybe even develop the fragments into a longer piece. My notebooks are covered in short sentences, lists, notes and unfinished sentences captured on paper for later rediscovery, such as the image below.

Figure 5. Screenshot of Personal Journal, 2019, October 9.



The word *intangible* appears frequently when I attempt to explain why I wanted to incorporate poetry into my research. Poetry appeals to the senses and to the emotions of an audience and helps to capture impressions or ideas that are difficult to quantify; the *aha!* moments of teaching where something on the cusp of a student's learning edge becomes *known*. One scholar, Prendergast, said that the power of poetry "is to synthesize experience in a direct and affective way" (Prendergast, 2009, p. 545). Poetry encapsulates concepts that are vitally important for a thorough understanding of a research pursuit. To explore the intangible, I believe one must employ a method that exists outside the rigid frameworks of academic writing. Poetry

often breaks the accepted rules of language and literature; therefore, it can capture concepts in their abstract, incomplete forms.

This unintentional ethnographic aspect of the study. The photos I took of the effects of the pandemic and journal entries written as it unfolded in Vancouver, BC, will forever be intriguing primary source documents about the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of the ethnography/autoethnography are discussed in Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion.

Ethical Considerations

This section outlines the recruitment process for the study. It includes an explanation of what was done to limit researcher bias and an explanation of the research process for final ethics approval.

Ethical Approval

Official authorization was obtained from the University of British Columbia's Research Ethics Board (BREB) for approval (H20-00852) to carry out data collection. The ethical guidelines were followed in developing the applications to guarantee participants' rights and privacy. In accordance with BREB procedures, all participants received a "assent or consent to participate in the research" letter (see Appendix B through E2 – letters of assent/consent). To maintain privacy consideration was taken to ensure that the participation of respondents was voluntary. Participants' confidentiality and anonymity was addressed through the use of pseudonyms in this report. In the study, all of the participants were volunteers, and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

Recruitment

After being granted ethics approval from both the University of British Columbia Behavioral Research Ethics Board (BREB), participants were gathered, in part, through convenience sampling from the school where I work. According to the SAGE Handbook of social-science research methods, convenience sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling where members of the population have an unknown and unequal probability of being selected (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Futing Liao, 2004). Also called accidental sampling, this is when a researcher uses readily available sample units. In this instance, my samples were selected from the students at my place of employment - students with whom I shared a bubble.

This research attempts to understand the impact of social distancing on classroom community, whether or not journaling can maintain students' sense of community during this time of social distancing, and how students are reacting to the ongoing changes in terms of in person or remote learning by examining the phenomenon within the context that it occurs (Yin, 1984). As such, observation and data collection, conducted remotely and in person, becomes a critical means of collecting data (Bailey, 1996). Convenience sampling in this instance was necessary because pandemic restrictions precluded me from recruiting participants outside of my immediate cohort. Convenience sampling was the safest possible way to obtain information (Mason, 2002) especially while public health orders were in effect during the pandemic.

Recruitment of Spring 2020 Sample

The first group of participants were seven Grade 7 students from my Language and Literature classes in the 2019-2020 school year. To mitigate conflict of interest, I had a third-party representative invite student to participate and hold that information until their marks were submitted at the end of the year as per BREB standard (BREB number: H20-00852; see

Appendix F for details). Another member of faculty from the School's Junior School, Teacher 3, filled this role. She was the ideal third-party because she did not interact with the participants on a daily basis and would not teach them in future years.

During an Advisor class, all 21 Grade 6 and 30 Grade 7 students were invited to participate in the study; Script in Appendix B was read to both Grade 6 and 7 classes and students were given a week to return the Student Assent form in Appendix B to the third-party representative, Teacher 3. Their parents were also invited to a virtual information session where the Script in Appendix C was read to them. Parties keen to support their children's participation completed the consent form in Appendix C and returned it to Teacher 3. Clarification in an alternate language (specifically Mandarin) was offered.

Recruitment of Fall 2020 Sample

The second group of participants were recruited from 20 Grade 6 and 21 Grade 7 students who were in the POD in the 2020-2021 school year. There was no conflict of interest with this group because I was not teaching any of their academic courses in the 2020-2021 school year. I used a near identical Script and Student Assent Form (Appendix D1), and Guardian Consent Form (Appendix E1). There were two changes to the process for this second iteration: first, I connected with parents by recording a video explaining the study and my intentions which was played at a virtual POD parent information evening; second, I gathered the signatures from students and guardians via a Google Forms (Appendices D2 and E2) in the hope of simplifying the process and gathering more participants.

Participants

Participating students in this study were Grade 6 and 7 students in the Spring and Fall of 2020. Two groups of students participated in the study. In the first group seven out of twenty-

nine Grade 7 students agreed to participate. At the time, they were aged 12 and 13 with three who identify as male and four who identify as female. They were involved in the study between May and June 2020 at the start of the pandemic when students were engaged in remote learning. The second group consists of six out of twenty-one Grade 6 students and one out of twenty Grade 7 students aged 11 and 12 - two who identify as male and five who identify as female. These students participated between September and November 2020 when students returned to in-person classes.

The study took place in an independent school in Vancouver, BC. school where the participants attend a private school within the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia (ISABC). According to a bulletin from the Barbara Mitchell Center for Improvement in Education, published by the Fraser Institute in 2017,

Families with children in independent schools earned an average of \$88,367 in income (after taxes) compared to \$77,396, on average, for families with children in public schools, which represents a gap of 14.2 percent ... families with children in elite independent schools maintain an average income (after tax) of \$119,242, which is 54.1 percent higher than the average income for families with children in public schools (Clemens, Parvani, & Emes, 2017, p. 1).

Being an International Baccalaureate school that addresses “specific curriculum and pedagogical preferences” (Clemens, Parvani, & Emes, 2017, p. 2), the School is categorized as a speciality school. In this study, it is also categorized as an elite school which constitutes one-fifth of independent schools in the province.

All of the students involved in the study speak English as their first language. Alternate languages spoken regularly at home by students enrolled at the School include Mandarin, Farsi,

Arabic, French, Cantonese, and Portuguese. The fourteen students involved represent a range of academic abilities including several with Individualized Education Plans that allow students access to academic accommodations.

Methods: Data Collection

Group 1, Spring 2020: Summary of Procedures (after assent/consent granted and participants recruited)

1. Maintain a practice of weekly journaling (protocols and expectations established with students from September 2019 to - June 2020).
2. Conduct a journaling study for 3 weeks for the entire Grade 6 and 7 cohort, regardless of participation in study. All journal entries will be uploaded to the School Preparatory School's Google Classroom. The co-investigator will engage in naturalistic observation, taking "field notes" during journaling activities to document student behaviour and interactions within the community. The last journal task will require the students to do a self-recorded interview where they will record their responses to a set of interview questions (see section 9) and post the recording on Google Classroom.
3. Journal entries and the self-recorded interview responses of participants will be accessed, anonymized, and saved as for data by the co-investigator after final grades have been submitted on June 11th.
4. During data collection (after submission of final grades), the co-investigator will ensure that no journal entries including comments, discussion posts, images will be gathered from non-participants. As part of the journaling program, students working on collaborative documents will include their names on all posts. Un-named entries or non-participant entries will not be collected as data.

5. Transcribe self-recorded interview responses.
6. Code data for common themes, frequently used words, and other indicators that help answer research questions (i.e. coding for evidence that perceptions are changing, looking for specific details/imagery/descriptions, length of pieces, coding for evidence that connections are maintained, etc.).
7. Analyze data. Please note: NVivo 12 software will be used for coding data from (e)journals, interviews, and researcher field notebooks.
8. Ongoing throughout: researcher journaling and poetic inquiry process. This is an arts-based parallel practice for critical self-reflection and connection to data. Data will be processed using procedural poetic techniques and will provide distillations of the collective experience of journaling during the COVID-19 pandemic.
9. The researcher will share findings of the data via email with participants before the final draft of study to ensure appropriate intention is distilled from participant's contributions as a form of member checking.

The Intervention - Journal Tasks Spring 2020

In the Spring of 2020, students were invited to respond to journal prompts: there were seven prompts provided in the Spring of 2020. The instructions given to students are summarized and briefly described in the table below. Some minor edits to the prompts have been made, only to omit any identifiers or clarify meaning for readers. All of the prompts from the Spring of 2020 were posted and accessed via Google Classroom while students were participating in BOLT.

Table 3. Prompts for Grade 7 Students, Spring 2020.

Journal Prompt #	Instructions and Description of Task
1.	<p>Silver Linings Mind Map</p> <p>Create a mind map in Google Draw exploring your understanding of a “silver lining.” Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A Title, your name, the date ● A background image/color ● The main idea “Silver Linings Are...” ● A definition of a “silver lining” ● At least three examples of things you consider silver linings and connections between them. ● Make it meaningful to you ● Keep it appropriate for school
2.	<p>Letter to a Graduate</p> <p>Write a letter to a member of the School community, a Grade 12 student approaching Graduation, wishing them well in the next chapter of their lives.</p> <p>You can write about memories you have of this student, you can write about how the Grade 12s are role models and mentors to the younger students, you could write about watching them play at the Winter Concert, you could write about their role in one of the CATS or in student leadership roles.</p> <p>N.B. Students were provided with a sample letter, a graphic organizer/planning document, and had an opportunity to peer-edit their work.</p>
3.	<p>Smile Notes</p> <p>Write a "smile note" to each of your classmates (you have 14 classmates, make 14 notes in the table attached).</p> <p>Kind thoughts only - consider time, place, and space.</p> <p>Find something you value in each person - you don't have to be the best of friends to appreciate something about a person or say something nice.</p>
4.	<p>“Letter to a Grad” and “Smile Notes” Reflection</p> <p>Reflect back on the process of writing a “Letter to a Graduate” and on the “Smile Notes” activity. How did engaging in these actions make you feel? What did you think about while you were working on these pieces of work? Did you encounter any difficulty? If so, how did you address those difficulties? How did reading the “Smile Notes” make you feel? Do you have any suggestions for the next time we do this activity?</p>
5.	<p>Dear Future Me</p> <p>Complete the graphic organizer and then use your plan to write a letter to your future self. Include words of encouragement. Ask questions. Let your future self know about your past self. Have fun!</p>

Journal Prompt #	Instructions and Description of Task
6.	<p>Reflection on My First Socially-Distant Gathering</p> <p>On June 18th we had our first socially distant gathering at the School since Friday, March 13th. It was a warm, partly cloudy, humid June day and we had a picnic out on the grass at the edge of the field.</p> <p>95 days ago, we left school for spring break and this is the first time you've seen some of your classmates and teachers face-to-face.</p> <p>Please respond to the questions below, in a different color. Write in full sentences with accurate punctuation. Please complete now.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you feel like on the way to school? Were you excited? Apprehensive? 2. What was travelling to school like? Did you notice any differences? 3. When you arrived, what did you do differently? What do you think of the changes? 4. What did you think about the seating arrangement outside? 5. What did you expect to happen? Did your expectations align with the reality? 6. Were you able to reconnect with your classmates? Were there any obstacles? Do you have any ideas for a solution? 7. Is there anything else you would like to say about the experience? Do you have any suggestions for future gatherings?
7.	<p>Reflection on Music 7</p> <p>Please answer the questions below. You may discuss:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning in the fall • the February 6th Centennial Theatre Show • Online BOLT learning • All of it! :) <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What surprised you most this year in Music? 2. What excited you most this year in Music? 3. What concerned you most this year in Music? 4. What confused you most this year in Music? 5. What was the greatest highlight of your year in MYP Music 7, and why? 6. What advice do you have for students entering MYP Music 7?

Group 2, Fall 2020: Summary of Procedures (after assent/consent granted and participants recruited)

1. The entire Grade 6 and 7 cohort will maintain a practice of weekly journaling (protocols and expectations established with students from September 2020 to - June 2021). The journals will not be graded, but feedback from the co-investigator will be given.
2. All journal entries will be uploaded to the School Preparatory School's Google

Classroom. The co-investigator will engage in naturalistic observation, taking "field notes" during journaling activities to document student behaviour and interactions within the community. The last journal task will require the students to do a self-recorded interview where they will record their responses to a set of interview questions (see section 9) and post the recording on Google Classroom.

3. Journal entries and the self-recorded interview responses of participants will be accessed, anonymized, and saved as for data by the co-investigator.
4. During data collection the co-investigator will ensure that no journal entries including comments, discussion posts, images will be gathered from non-participants. As part of the journaling program, students working on collaborative documents will include their names on all posts. Un-named entries or non-participant entries will not be collected as data.
5. Transcribe self-recorded interview responses.
6. Code data for common themes, frequently used words, and other indicators that help answer research questions (i.e. coding for evidence that perceptions are changing, looking for specific details/imagery/descriptions, length of pieces, coding for evidence that connections are maintained, etc.).
7. Analyze data. Please note: NVivo 12 software will be used for coding data from (e)journals, interviews, and researcher field notebooks.
8. Ongoing throughout: researcher journaling and poetic inquiry process. This is an arts-based parallel practice for critical self-reflection and connection to data. Data will be processed using procedural poetic techniques and will provide distillations of the collective experience of journaling during the COVID-19 pandemic.

9. The co-investigator will share findings of the data via email with participants before the final draft of study to ensure appropriate intention is distilled from participant's contributions as a form of member checking.

The Intervention - Journal Tasks Fall 2020


Eight questions were asked of Grade 7 students in the Fall of 2020 and eight questions asked of Grade 6 students. Most of the prompts from the Fall of 2020 were written by hand in a physical notebook and prompts were written or projected onto the whiteboard in the form of a Google Slides presentation (see Appendix 5 for examples). The Silver Lining Essay was typed and the self-recorded interviews were recorded on Flipgrid.

Table 4. *Prompts for Grade 7 Students, Fall 2020.*

Journal Prompt #	Instructions and Description of Task
1.	<p>How does it feel to be [back] at the School?</p> <p>First impressions New safety measures New classes Excited? Worried? Compare this year and last year</p> <p>Brainstorm: Make lists, draw pictures... Aim for 5 full sentences, minimum.</p>
2.	<p>What is friendship to you? Have you or a friend ever faced conflict? How did you overcome it?</p> <p>Use the jot notes you wrote in Teacher 1's class about friendship to help develop and extend your thinking.</p>
3.	<p>Free-write on a topic of your choosing.</p>
4.	<p>What are the ATL skills to you? Explain what each of these words means to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collaboration - Communication - Self-management - Research - Thinking

Journal Prompt #	Instructions and Description of Task
5.	<p>What is your strongest ATL skill? Name one of the five Approaches to Learning (Collaboration, Communication, Self-management, Research, or Thinking) and explain why you ROCK at it.</p>
6.	<p>Reflection During Hike in a local park As part of their Outdoor Education curriculum, POD students went on a hike through a local park. They did a scavenger hunt to identify local plant life, a five-minute observation of a small section of the forest floor with a magnifying glass, and a 5-minute reflection in the forest where they were encouraged to draw or describe what they saw and how they felt.</p> <p>N.B. This task was also completed by the Grade 6 students.</p>
7.	<p>Silver Lining Essay Introduction - Silver Linings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use a question, a sound, dialogue, or quotes. ● Explain what Silver Linings are to you ● Explain how people seek out relationships in tough times ● You can use COVID as an example or not <p>Describe a personal obstacle or time of adversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explain how you felt and why it happened ● Who were the people involved? ● Be detailed - the reader should really feel for your situation ● Use sentence starters to capture your reader <p>Explain the “good from the bad”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do you feel about that obstacle now? ● What have you learned? ● What would you want to tell others in a similar situation? ● Have you changed your mindset? <p>Leave the reader with a message of hope.</p>
8.	<p>How is social distancing impacting your school community? (self-recorded interview)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How have social distancing practices impacted your school community? ● Is there anything you cannot do right now because of social distancing that you miss? ● Have social distancing practices made anything better for you?

Table 5. Prompts for Grade 6 Students - Fall 2020.

Journal Prompt #	Instructions and Description of Task
1.	<p>Response to Artwork Students were shown the abstract image on the right and asked to describe what they saw.</p> <p>The “I See, I Think, I Wonder” writing frame was used to scaffold this activity. Students begin by describing, without interpretation, precisely what they observe. Then they begin making connections, discussing what they think the image could be or what it reminds them of. Finally, they pose questions about the image, inquiring into possible meanings.</p> 
2.	<p>Grounding Exercise - connecting with place and space Use 5 senses to describe space</p>
3.	<p>Grounding Exercise - connecting with place, space, and self Five things I can see... 5 things I can hear... Three things I can feel... Two positive truths... I am...</p>
4.	<p>Describe the first few weeks in the POD. Optional sentence starters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● My first few weeks in the POD have been... ● I’ve enjoyed... ● I’ve succeeded in... ● _____ is challenging and I’m trying to... ● The POD is different from Grade 5 because... ● The POD is similar to Grade 5 because... ● I hope that...
5.	<p>What are you grateful for? In your Individuals and Societies class today, jot down things that you are grateful for. Things that mean a lot to you, that make you smile, or that you are glad to have.</p>

Journal Prompt #	Instructions and Description of Task
6.	<p>What are the ATL skills to you? Explain what each of these words means to you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social - Communication - Self-management - Research - Thinking <p>Make as many connections as you can!</p>
7.	<p>What does community mean to you? What is your school community like?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe it in as much detail as possible. - Give examples if you can. <p>How does being part of this community make you feel?</p>
8.	<p>How is social distancing impacting your school community? (self-recorded interview)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How have social distancing practices impacted your school community? ● Is there anything you cannot do right now because of social distancing that you miss? ● Have social distancing practices made anything better for you?
9.	<p>Reflection During Hike in a local park As part of their Outdoor Education curriculum, POD students went on a hike through a local park. They did a scavenger hunt to identify local plant life, a five-minute observation of a small section of the forest floor with a magnifying glass, and a 5-minute reflection in the forest where they were encouraged to draw or describe what they saw and how they felt. N.B. This task was also completed by the Grade 7 student.</p>

Data Analysis

The analysis process began with data processing. After facilitating the data collection at the School, I subsequently spent time scanning and photographing journals and teacher/researcher observations, downloading journals and self-recorded interviews, transcribing interviews, and uploading files to NVivo.

I used the research questions as a way to think about and subsequently organize the data. The three research questions asked: 1) *In what ways does social distancing influence classroom community?* 2) *How might conceptions of place change as school transitions into an online learning track?* 3) *In what ways might journaling maintain students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social/physical distancing?* and 4) *How are students reacting to the ongoing changes, in terms of school-based, home-based, and remote learning?*

The research questions highlighted the importance of the student voice by rooting the research in the philosophies of place-based and experiential learning from the student perspective. These questions allowed me to focus on compiling a narrative about the impact of social distancing from the student perspective.

My own journals and teaching notes were used in a parallel practice of reflection to complement the ongoing research. These and the anecdotal evidence provided by my co-teachers, recorded in my journals, allowed me to deepen the inquiry into how students are being impacted by social distancing from a professional perspective.

Once all data was uploaded to NVivo, I engaged in content analysis and coded data for common themes by searching for words or the repetition of ideas. I then created nodes for overarching themes with subnodes for specific aspects of the larger theme. I did thematic analysis by applying open or inductive coding, analysing for patterns and trends within and between Spring and Fall student journal sets, and allowing my codebook to emerge from the data (Maher, Hadfield, Hutchings, & de Eyto, 2018). Student journals included electronic documents, paper/pencil documents that were scanned and uploaded to NVivo, as well as videos and transcripts of their self-recorded interviews.

Summary

This masters research initiative gathered data on the initial impact of social distancing measures put in place from March to June of 2020. This first data set, called Spring 2020, gathered data during a drastic pivot in education and 78 days of remote learning. A second data set, titled Fall 2020, collected during the initial six weeks of the 2020-2021 school year From September to November, gathered data on students' experience of returning to school with new social distancing protocols in place.

There was a considerable amount of administrative and processing that was ongoing during data collection. Journal entries captured in Google Documents were imported into NVivo and handwritten journals and observation field-notes were scanned, consolidated into PDFs, and uploaded to NVivo. Videos and transcriptions of self-recorded interview responses were uploaded as Google Documents.

Forty-four pieces of data were collected in the Spring of 2020 and thirty-nine pieces were collected in the Fall of 2020. Raw data totals include: participant 83 journal entries and 104 scans of my own handwritten journal entries and photos.

Chapter 5: Results

The research questions asked:

1. In what ways does social distancing influence classroom community?
2. How might conceptions of place change as school transitions into an online learning track?
3. In what ways might journaling maintain students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social/physical distancing?
4. How are students reacting to the ongoing changes, in terms of school-based, home-based, and remote learning?

This case study is of the Grade 6 and 7 student experience of social distancing measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. It aimed to capture and examine data about how social distancing measures impacted classroom community by exploring how a reflective journaling practice could maintain students' sense of school as community and how students reacted to the shift from school-based learning and remote learning. The Spring 2020 data set are electronic journal submissions collected on Google Classroom while students were learning remotely. The Fall 2020 data set are pen and paper journal entries gathered during in-person learning at school when students returned to school.

The Data

The documents relate to the impact of social distancing on classroom community, as reported by students in their journal entries, and as my co-teachers and I observed while teaching or while engaged in pastoral care. We compiled these observations from virtual classroom environments in the Spring of 2020 and from face-to-face classroom environments where social

distancing practices were being implemented for the first time. Of particular note are the student's verbal, artistic, and oral responses to reflective prompts about class activities in the Fall of 2020.

Figure 6. Screenshot of Student H's Journal. How social distancing impacted school community. Fall 2020.

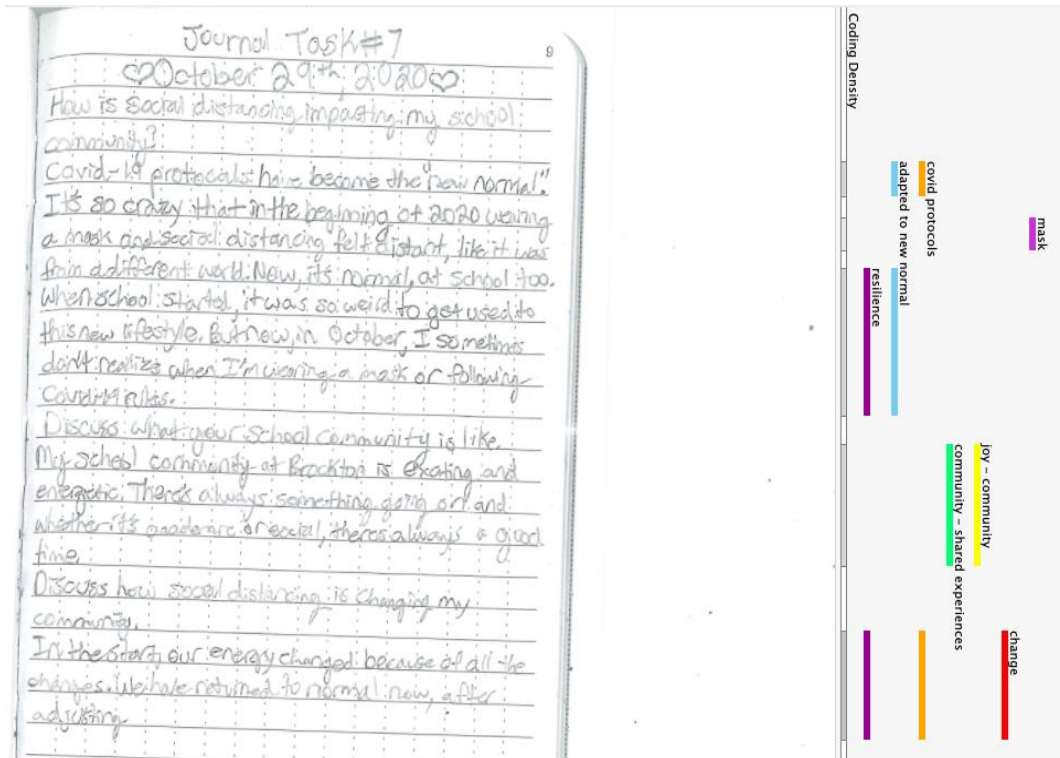
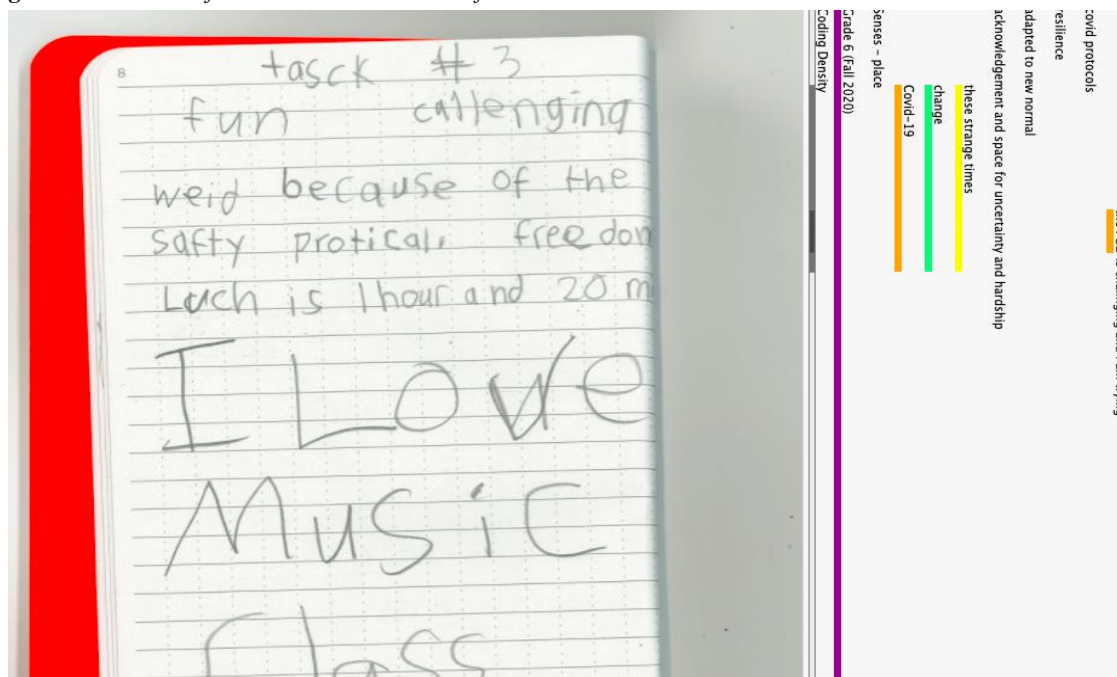


Figure 7. Screenshot of Student K's Journal. First few weeks in the POD. Fall 2020.



Data was collected and using a range of qualitative methods, framed within a community-based action-research project in the context of a Grade 6 and 7 program within a k-12 school that shifted to remote learning suddenly in March 2020. Data includes: student journals; video/audio self-recorded student interviews; my own naturalistic observations and teaching notes; and interviews with co-teachers at the School. Student journals and interviews consist of a collection of texts and audio/video content uploaded to the School's Learning Management System, Google Classroom.

The following three charts list Students A-M, the journal prompt title, the date, and whether or not the task was completed.

Table 6. *Journal Entry Completion, Grade 7, Spring 2020*

	May 7th, 2020	May 20th, 2020	June 1st 2020	June 4th 2020	June 15th 2020	June 18th 2020	June 19th 2020
	Silver Lining Mind Map	Letter to a Grad	Smile Notes	Reflection on Smile notes/Lette r to a Grad	Dear Future Me	Reflection on first socially distant gathering	Year-end Music Reflection
Student A	y	y	y	y	y	n	y
Student B	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Student C	y	y	y	y	y	n	y
Student D	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Student E	n	y	y	y	y	n	y
Student F	y	y	y	y	y	y	y
Student G	y	y	y	y	y	n	y

Table 7. Journal Entry Completion, Grade 7, Fall 2020

	Sept 15th, 2020	Sept 24th, 2020	October 1st, 2020	October 8th, 2020	October 15th, 2020	October 22nd, 2020	October 24th, 2020	October 29th, 2020
	How does it feel to be [back] at the School?	What is friendship to you? Have you or a friend ever faced conflict? How did you overcome it?	Free-write	What are the ATL skills to you?	What is your strongest ATL skill?	Reflection on Hike	Silver Lining Essay	How is social distancing impacting your school community? (self-recorded interview)
Student H	y	y	y	y	y	y	y	y

Table 8. Journal Entry Completion, Grade 6, Fall 2020.

	Sept 17th, 2020	Sept 21, 2020	Sept 28th, 2020	Oct 1st, 2020	October 8th, 2020	October 15th, 2020	October 19th, 2020	October 28th, 2020	October 22nd, 2020
	Response to Artwork	Use 5 senses to describe space	Five things I can see... 5 things I can hear... Three things I can feel... Two positive truths... I am...	Describe the first few weeks in the POD.	What are you grateful for?	What are the ATL skills to you?	What does community mean to you? (Flipgrid)	How is social distancing impacting your school community? (self-recorded interview)	Hike Reflection
Student I	n	n	n	y	y	y	n	n	n
Student J	y	n	n	y	n	n	y	y	y
Student K	y	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n
Student L	y	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n
Student M	y	n	y	y	n	n	y	y	n
Student N	y	y	y	y	n	n	y	y	n

The Spring 2020 group of Grade 7 students completed 44 of 49 tasks, responding to 90% of the prompts. The Fall group of Grade 6s completed 31 of 54 tasks, responding to 57% of the tasks. The single Grade 7 participant in the Fall 2020 group completed all 8 tasks assigned to their class. This difference of 33% completion rate between Spring and Fall participants is intriguing. The Spring participants had higher engagement while learning remotely compared to the Fall participants who were in face-to-face lessons.

Overall, the Grade 7 students were more successful than the Grade 6s, completing 33% more journaling prompts. This is evidence of the POD programming in action; students enter at the start of Grade 6 as 11 and 12-year-olds and are with the POD for 20 months and finish as 12 and 13-year-olds. The growth that occurs in that brief time is incredible! For instance, while comparing journal entries of Grade 6 students at the start of their POD journey with the Grade 7 students at the end of their time in the POD. The Grade 7s contributed, on average, 120 more words than the students two years their junior. This is one metric for discussing growth, but the older students' ability to articulate their ideas with clarity, coherence, and effective vocabulary was evident in their journal responses.

In both the Spring and the Fall groups, the male students completed more prompts. Female students in the Spring completed 86% of tasks, which was 9% less than the male completion rate of 95%. In the Fall Female students completed 58% of journal tasks and male students completed 70%, a difference of 12%.

There are a variety of factors that contribute to completion rates. The journaling sessions in the Fall of 2020 were run during a flexible block after other courses were complete for the day. Several clubs ran at the same time as the journaling session and precluded students from participating consistently. There are other factors, such as illness or other needs, that contributed

to absences from the journaling sessions. For example, as this was a pandemic year, students and staff were under guidelines to stay home at the first sign of illness and to stay home until they were well again.

Creating nodes and subnodes: a journey

The first two rounds of data analysis explored different ways of organizing and exploring the data. As a graduate student, I was familiarizing myself with the data analysis process and the NVivo software. In the first iteration of the Findings chapter, I responded to the research questions in a familiar narrative style of my personal writing. I wrote from the teacher perspective and the student voice was lacking. In the second iteration, I made connections to theories that appealed to me, but still the student voice was missing.

At that point, I revisited the data and began again from scratch. I used the students' words, verbatim, to create a series of nodes in NVivo. With the research questions in front of me, I tried to let the student voice tell the narrative and strove to allow finding to emerge from the data without prematurely making connections to the literature or any of my preconceived notions. My supervisor was instrumental in supporting this process, providing guidance and ensuring that the findings communicated the data clearly and accurately.

While developing this third list of nodes, I approached the data from a variety of angles, including:

- coding for evidence that perceptions are changing, such as a shift in word choice with positive or negative connotations;
- looking for specific details/imagery/descriptions that described specific emotions or compared emotions to particular symbols with positive or negative connotations;

- examining the word count of students' journal responses;
- and coding for evidence pertaining to connections between classmates' sense of community and sense of place.

This phase of data analysis yielded 41 nodes.

Table 9. *Classroom Community in a Time of Social Distancing: Nodes.*

Name	Description	Files	References
acknowledgement and space for uncertainty and hardship		14	21
the School - supportive community		21	47
academic or IB		4	7
same responsibilities		1	1
the POD is challenging and I am trying		5	8
community - shared experiences		5	16
glad to be back		4	5
joy - community		7	9
student-student relationships		22	36
teacher student relationships		3	3
change		16	21
concern about environment or pollution		1	1
COVID-19		15	37
concerned about COVID		7	9
COVID-19 protocols		3	15

Name	Description	Files	References
Creative Writing theme - lost		1	1
frustration with COVID-19		2	3
impact of COVID on family		1	1
impact of social distancing		1	25
friendships		1	8
learning		1	3
mask		1	5
physical contact		1	5
public spaces		1	3
sanitization		1	2
travel		1	1
quarantine		1	1
these strange times		7	7
wants things to go back to the way they were		1	1
worry about online learning		5	7
empowerment		3	5
Gratitude		3	5
hope		20	28
no mention of COVID-19		5	6
place - connection to known place		2	2
resilience		10	13
adapted to new normal		6	7
risk-taking		2	3

Name	Description	Files	References
same responsibilities		1	1
the POD is challenging and I am trying		5	8
senses - place		5	7

In the table above, the individual nodes have been re-grouped into twelve overarching nodes, eighteen minor nodes, and a further eleven similar subnodes grouped underneath. For example, theme of “hope” emerged as I noticed repetition of the root-word *hope* in student journal responses and reflections. Hope was a distinct theme. Another node that emerged was the repetition of social distancing. This node was nestled underneath the major node COVID-19 because social distancing would not have existed without COVID-19 and they were regularly mentioned simultaneously.

While doing initial thematic analysis by analysing for patterns and trends, the number of references for particular nodes were significantly higher than others and these became the six most prominent themes. Across both data sets, six major nodes emerged: community, relationships, shared-experiences, hope, COVID-19, and holding space for uncertainty.

Chapter 6: Findings and Discussion

Chapter 6 is broken into two sections: Findings and Discussion. The first half of the Findings section opens with the six main themes revealed in the data. The six main themes are probed by exploring extracts from student journals in detail. Then the research questions are answered explicitly, drawing from student journals, teacher observations, and personal anecdotes. The Discussion section is broader. In the Discussion there are sections that address significance and possible implications of the Findings. The Discussion includes: the overarching theme and take-away from this research study; a discussion of place vs/as space, digital communities, and place-based reflective practice; the importance of play; notes on the limitations of this research; and a discussion of the teacher perspective.

Part 1: Findings

The most prevalent node that emerged titled *the School community* had 47 references within the data. As a subset of data within *the School Community* umbrella, *student-student relationships (friends)* was the second most mentioned node with 36 references followed by *shared experiences* at 16 references. *Hope* was identified in the data 28 times; *mentions of COVID-19* occurred 37 times; and *students acknowledged and held space for uncertainty* 21 times.

Community

In total, there were 47 codes referring to *the School community* across 21 pieces of data. 37 references came from the Spring 2020 Grade 7 data set and 10 from the Fall 2020 set. The

questions that asked, explicitly, about community were from the Fall 2020 group. Journal tasks from the Spring 2020 group that contained the bulk of the data on *community* were the Music Reflection and Letter to a Graduate Reflection. This is an anomaly in the data, however, I think it is due to the age of the participants. The Fall 2020 students were just starting their Grade 6 year and were considerably less verbose than the students 22 months older than them.

What does community mean to you?

At the start of each academic year, students and parents read and sign an Essential Agreement document that outlines the expectations of all community members (students, parents, and teachers). We use the document to set expectations for behaviour on school grounds and on school activities, compassionate communication, appropriate technology use, and academic honesty. With the Grade 6 and 7 students, we model what being a member of the School community looks like and discuss how it impacts the learning environment for ourselves and others. These metacognitive discussions are designed to help the Grade 6 and 7 students develop their executive functioning skills and be functioning members of the School community.

With that in mind, I was especially interested in hearing what students had to say about their understanding of community. I was curious about whether the modeling and discussion my colleagues and I incorporated into our teaching practice was having an impact.

The journal task that prompted students to do a self-recorded interview asked: *What does community mean to you? What is your school community like? Describe it in as much detail as possible and give examples if you can. How does being part of this community make you feel?* Four participants in the Fall 2020 Grade 6 group responded to this prompt. At School, we often talk about community.

With an angelic smile, Student K said that “community means to be a group of people who help each other out when they need help and share common interests, like dogs.” What a response! For this eleven-year-old child, their meaning of community consists of a group of helpful dog-loving individuals. I wonder if this student has a dog and enjoys the company of other dog-lovers and owners or if they’ve always wanted a dog and enjoy the camaraderie of other dog-loving humans. Would this student be able to find community with a cat-lover, I wonder?

Another student said that community is “when people look out for you and it feels like home...people are always supporting you and they care for you always (Student J).” These students say that community is when people are helpful, supportive, caring, observant, share common interests, and spend time in the same place. It suggests that these students think of community as the connections and relationships between people and the spaces they spend time.

In response to the same prompt, Student L said that being a community member means that people are “part of the same thing...and often live in the same place. Like these lovely people [the student turned their laptop around to record classmates, who waved].” The final moment captured in the self-recorded interview is one that was especially intriguing. Throughout this recording, the student maintained a connection to their classmates. The group were comfortable joking with each other while recording their responses and Student L turned the camera on their peers at the end to point out exactly who these “lovely people” were and include them in the video. They laughed and chatted and appeared to have fun using Flipgrid to record their responses, speaking casually and informally.

The candid nature of this particular response, enabled because of the human interactions, underscores the importance of community. These students were working towards the same goal,

at the same time, in the same space, and the end result was richer because of the human interactions made possible by proximity, a mutual goal, and mutual respect.

Another student, Student M, said that the School community “makes me feel safe and happy that I can actually go to school and learn stuff.” The student responded to the prompt by re-reading the questions on camera and then answering them. There were many hesitations in the student’s speech, short statements, colloquial language, and filler words like ‘um’. Their body language was also very relaxed and their eye contact wandered throughout the recording, indicating that they were not reading from any prepared passage. This unpolished and unedited response indicates that the student responded candidly. This student begins this statement with their connections to feelings of safety and happiness *before* mentioning anything to do with school work, showing importance that this student places on the feeling of safety.

In these responses, the students highlighted their connections to other people and places. While these connections include common interests and proximity, more importantly they are grounded in a mutual understanding that being part of the School community is to be in an agreement based on an expectation that members will be supportive and caring. Students trust that members of their community will look out for each other and help one another. Students J and N said that the School community feels like home - like family.

Describe your school community

Students repeatedly referred to the School as being a supportive community when asked, “*What does community mean to you? What is your school community like? Describe it in as much detail as possible and give examples if you can. How does being part of this community make you feel?*” I intentionally tried to keep from using leading questions and I verbally asked students for their honest opinion. However, there is an issue with this question (and all of the

journaling prompts) because I am a leader in this community. Despite efforts to elicit authentic responses, participants may have felt some obligation to respond in order to appease me, as a member of staff.

Music Reflection

At the end of the 2019-2020 school year, the Grade 7 students were prompted to *reflect on their experience in their Music course, including: the learning that occurred in the fall and winter; the February 6th Centennial show; online BOLT learning; and anything else that they wanted to discuss*. There were asked to reflect on six things with respect to their experience in Music that year: *what surprised them the most; what excited them the most; what concerned them the most; what confused them the most; what the greatest highlight of the year was for them; and to give some advice to next year's Grade 7s*.

Student A said “I always had people around me willing to help or just to support me. Having that support really helped my growth and learning.” Student C mentioned that they “had to reach out to teachers and get help sometimes” when assignments and expectations were unclear. Student D’s tone was friendly and familiar, showing appreciation for one music teacher’s ability to stay so organized and referring to an inside joke between the class and their other music teacher. These end-of-year reflections displayed students’ ability to engage in familiar and comfortable dialogue with their teachers. There is an element of validating the efforts their teachers put into the course while acknowledging and showing appreciation for that mentorship. These reflections are acknowledgements of the positive, supportive network of peers and mentors in the Music program at the School and the knock-on effect of that support on development is a testament to the importance of community.

Students B, E, F and G wrote responses that referred to how much fun they had in the course and made more general statements about keeping up with the course load. These statements were shorter and sometimes they were incomplete or used bullet points rather than full sentences. They answered the questions briefly and with minimal details so these responses were more challenging to analyse. I wonder what contributed to this brevity? Were the students tired at the end of the year? Did they not value this particular course/space/place as much as their peers? Did the layout of the questions lead students to be brief?

Later in their reflection about Music during BOLT, Student A said that “[the teachers] have done a really great job doing all this online because I’m sure that most of the lesson plans were out the window.” This recognition of the work other community members put in to ensure the students at the School continued learning in a constructive way about the impact that community has on students. This student, a thirteen-year-old teenager, is at a point in their development where, typically, their focus is on peer relationships. For this student to acknowledge and show appreciation for the work done by the adults who ran this Music course in such odd circumstances is a testament to the strength of those connections. There are students in the Spring 2020 Grade 7 cohort who are the children of teachers - perhaps this meta-knowledge about the work that goes into creating and facilitating learning opportunities was gleaned from that aspect of the class dynamic. Perhaps, through observing or spending time with adults in their life who are in the business of education, this student has a more nuanced understanding of the work that goes into teaching and can articulate that gratitude clearly. Community connections grounded in awareness and appreciation of community members is discussed in more detail at the end of the Relationships section.

Letters to a Graduate

Another instance where students repeatedly demonstrated that they were members of a supportive community became evident during a project titled “Letters to a Graduate” where the Grade 7 students were prompted *to write letters to the Grade 12 students at the end of the 2019-2020 school year to give them a little boost during such trying times*. Three students spoke with notable clarity and compassion when they wrote their letters. For instance, Student B said,

I think that at the School we have a strong community that strives and succeeds like our strong Grade 12 students. I think that our Grade 12 students work very hard to stay at the top and it shows how tough and strong our school is. At the School we have the greatest role models I have ever seen.

Conversations about what it means to be a good role model occur frequently as part of my teaching practice. Being a small Junior Kindergarten to Grade 12 school means that there are always “little people” looking up to the “big people.” The younger students are in close contact with the senior students, seeing them on the playground, in the halls, during weekly school assemblies, and during teacher-facilitated activities that join junior and senior school students together. Obviously, in pandemic times, students stayed in their learning bubbles to keep everyone safe, but teachers and staff ensured that there were still socially distant opportunities for students to collaborate and that the senior school students were still visible to the little ones.

The School being studied in this particular research study is one that dedicates a significant amount of time to social-emotional learning. The School uses the IB Learner Profile language to discuss what it means to be an outstanding human being in a consistent way from JK-12 and we always encourage the students to strive to be an IB Learner by being: principled, caring, balanced, risk-takers, knowledgeable, inquirers, thinkers, open-minded, reflective, and

communicators. While encouraging the older students to be good role models for the younger students, we also encourage the younger students to acknowledge and respect the hard work of their senior peers - they'll be taking on the same responsibilities too.

This mutually beneficial, cyclical relationship pays dividends. Student C told the graduates that,

The School is here for you no matter what...No matter where you go, remember that there will always be a place, a family, and a home, for you here at the School. You have represented the School proudly, and we thank you for being kind and open-minded during your years here. You have made an impact on people's lives, and that will never change. We are all so proud of you.

Student F even used a metaphor to describe the transformational power of being part of a strong learning community, and the English teacher in me jumped for joy when I read this passage for the first time. They told the graduating student that,

Next year, you will be leaving the School, which most people consider their home, but I consider it a cocoon. It morphs you into the person you are today, and now that you have left the cocoon, you can do whatever you want!

The lasting legacy of the School community was summed up by Student F when they said, "once you're part of the School community you will always be a part of the School community."

Relationships

During the pandemic, these strong relationships are evident in response to four different journaling tasks, titled: Letters to a Graduate and Reflection (May 2020); Silver Lining Mind

Map (May 2020); Smile Note Activity and Reflection (June 2020); and the Reflection on the First Socially-Distant Gathering (June 2020).

Letters to a Graduate + Reflection

Student A reflected that, in writing these letters to the Graduating Students, “we wanted to make someone happier and just be that little ray of hope in the dark.” The use of figurative language and imagery, the metaphor about being a ray of hope in the dark, is likely a result of the Language and Literature lessons connected to this journal task. The visual connects to the Silver Linings Unit my colleague and I created as a way to incorporate Dweck’s (2012) positive growth mindset and pedagogy supporting student’s mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic (Doucet et al., 2020). The statement this Grade 7 student made demonstrated that they did indeed feel optimistic and empowered when working on this task. The simple task of trying to make someone happier and provide a “little ray of hope” appears to have been rewarding, allowing this student to feel like they have some measure of control.

In their letter, Student E commented on “how supportive everyone is, and how [good at] problem solving everyone is.” Student B commended the Grade 12th, saying that they “inspire me and my friends to be better thinkers and communicators, especially in this pandemic.” Problem solving, thinking, communicating, these statements connect back to Wood & Judikis’ (2002) conceptualization of community as a process, specifically, Yankelovich’s (1999) emphasis on the importance of dialogue. Yankelovich maintains that dialogue is a verbal transaction that has intention beyond that of simple conversation. However, other scholars accept that dialogue can occur through the exchange of text or a blend of voice and text. Milheim (2012) highlights the importance of dialogue, textual or verbal, synchronous or asynchronous (but timely) with regards to virtual learning environments. Britton (1982; 1996) and Zimmerman

& Reisemberg (1997) note that written reflections provide opportunities to engage in a protracted dialogue with oneself. Moon (2004) echoes this statement in terms of reflective journaling.

One thing some Grade 7s found challenging with this exercise was finding things to say if they had been paired with a Grade 12 student that they didn't know well. They expressed feelings of doubt and self-consciousness and found thinking critically and creatively in this context challenging. An exercise that helped students navigate this uncertainty was to talk them through how they might feel if they were the ones finishing Grade 12 in a pandemic. I asked them how they would feel if they were unable to see their classmates for months. I also asked how they would feel if they couldn't have a graduation celebration and if all their post-graduation plans were on hold. Guiding the Grade 7s into a headspace where they could think about the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic from another community member's perspective seemed to be a helpful thought experiment. By the end of the conversation the students could express how they would feel and then articulate what they would like to hear if they were feeling those emotions. This, in turn, enabled them to empathize and write a letter addressing the needs of the Grade 12 students.

Silver Lining Mind Map

In Student C's Silver Lining Mind Map, inserted below, they shared a reflection about one positive outcome of this pandemic:

In my family this isolation has caused us to reach out to friends we haven't seen in years, who we [now] see every week through Zoom. Isolation makes us long for spending time with others and it creates so many connections with people you might not normally connect with...Family time is becoming very important to people, taking time to be with

your family makes sure you have a good outlook, this is one of the silver linings of COVID-19.

Figure 8. Student C's Silver Lining Mind Map, Spring 2020.



In this example of an intersection of community and family the student uses the word family to define community, thus giving the two a clear hierarchy with family ranked as more important than community. They articulate that to be part of a community is to feel safe and happy with like-minded people. However, there are families that are not as aligned or interested in mutual goals. There are families that exist which lack respect for all members. I wonder if these adolescents, who are becoming more peer oriented and independent in Grade 6 and 7, are starting to define family and community for themselves, thus beginning to figure out what they value in their ideal communities.

These Silver Lining Mind Maps invite students to combine text and images to create a visual representation of what a silver lining means to them. In class we explained a silver lining as, literally, the bright edge of a dark rain cloud that has been gilded by the sun. Our explanation

posited that even when things are hard, scary, or sad, happiness and positive things can coexist in tandem with the difficult. The mind maps were created in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the final mind maps contained images of community and family, casting them as positive things that gave participants hope during the difficult time of social distancing.

Smile Notes + Reflection

The Smile Notes exercise is an activity that explicitly teaches students to use compassionate communication. During this activity, each student writes a compassionate comment or a favourite memory for each classmate at the end of the school year. These favorite moments took approximately thirty to forty-five minutes to complete. The students completed them synchronously on a single collaborative shared Google Document. There were so many students working on the document that some faced technology difficulties. There were too many people typing into the document at the same time and it wouldn't load properly. Their solution was to write their Smile Notes on a separate document and copy in their comments later. This activity left a positive impression on these Grade 7 students. They fondly remembered working on it while they couldn't be in each other's presence and one member of this study even asked to do it again a year later at the end of their Grade 8 year. This form of maintaining community in a time of social distancing by taking time to maintain relationships was a powerful method of connection.

Upon reading the Smile Notes, Student D said that "reading the smile notes made me happy that all these people could find nice things to say to me." Student B noted that "the smile notes gave me such a big smile that my [sibling] needed sunglasses to look at me." As an aside, the class had been working on figurative language in their English lessons all year - I was thrilled to see this student try to use hyperbole in their writing!

It is interesting that Students A and D students used imagery concerning light to communicate hope and joy. I see this as an echo of a successful unit titled Silver Linings where my co-teacher and I focused on being positive. Perhaps this use of figurative language is a product of students' incidental learning about what hope and joy look and feel like?

Reflection on the First Socially-Distant Gathering

In the last week of the 2019-2020 school year the Grade 7 class was able to get together on the school field for an hour on June 18th and reconnect before breaking for summer vacation. The journal task asked students to reflect on their surroundings and comment on any changes to the physical environment they moved through to get to the school grounds. Student B's account didn't mention anything they saw about the space they moved through, however, it rang with vibrant energy and enthusiasm. In their reflection on arriving at the event, Student B said, "[I was] very tired because I ran but as soon as I saw [the school] I was so excited."

Students were asked about their expectations of returning to school and how they felt upon returning after being away for three months. In general, students didn't provide much commentary on this prompt. They knew the event was going to be outside and expected to have to sanitize their hands, wear a mask, and maintain social distancing, and they adapted to this new normal. Most students echoed the sentiments of Student F who said "when I arrived instead of just walking into the school we walked out to the field and we also had to put hand sanitizer on which is also a change." The muted tone and mundane description of the event - the first time this student had been back to school in 78 days - was intriguing. The lack of excitement or detailed discussion about how odd this whole situation was is notable. Perhaps these students, as adolescents, adapted to the uncertainty of the pandemic efficiently? Perhaps these students were

exhausted from three months of online school and writing a reflection on June 18th was too taxing? Perhaps this situation was underwhelming for students?

Finally, they were asked to comment on whether they were able to reconnect with their classmates and if there were any obstacles. Student D said, “I was so excited, I walked really fast and got there early!” Student F said that “On my way to school I didn’t really feel nervous. I was more excited to talk to my friends... [and that it was] easy to reconnect with my classmates because all it took was just starting a conversation with them.”

Family

The relationships of a community constitute the core of a community. As noted earlier in the Community section, showing gratitude and acknowledging another person’s contributions to community solidifies interconnectedness (Wood & Judikis, 2002).

When Student A wrote that they recognized the efforts their teachers went through to ensure that they were well, knowing that their teacher would be reading and engaging with that comment, it was an example of how dialogue between learner and knowledgeable mentor is a powerful learning tool. It is likely that this comment can be attributed to knowledge about the teaching profession, gleaned through a close relationship with family or friends involved in the profession. This gratitude and acknowledgement, this show of appreciation, is rooted in those relationships.

Another example showing how familial relationships played a role on how social distancing impacted classroom community is when Student H wrote about reconnecting with family that do not live in Vancouver after being apart.

I recognized that going to [see my family] was more significant than I thought it would be. With my grandparents having limited time left, it was so important to be

there and to search for the silver lining. During tough times, strengthening relationships can be what lifts your spirits and gets you past obstacles. Not only did the trip bring joy to my relatives, but it also brought joy to me (Silver Lining Essay).

These relationships are inextricably linked. Social distancing impacted classroom community because it impacted the relationships between the participants, their friend and their families.

Shared Experiences

The sixteen references to *shared experiences* noted in the data usually corresponded to a physical shared place. Representation of this node was equally split between both the Spring 2020 and the Fall 2020 sample groups. These nodes were found in the Music Reflection, the journal task asking students to describe what it felt like to be back at school, and Smile Notes.

For example, in the Spring 2020 sample, Student A's End-of-year Music reflection mentioned that they enjoyed playing with another student. Before the pandemic, they spent extra hours practicing together at lunch and after school in the music room. This was a memorable highlight for Student A. Another example from Student D's reflection noted that one of their highlights of the year was playing their section's part of a song at the Winter Concert in the Centennial Theater. Both of these examples connect particular actions, with particular people or groups of people and a particular space.

In the Fall 2020 sample, Student H mentioned that "There's always something going on [at the School] and, whether it's academic or social, it's always a good time." This general comment about the atmosphere at the School notes that this particular place is associated with particular activities - academic and social. By mentioning them both this student might be weighting them equally in terms of importance

Three out of seven students in the same sample noted that they were concerned when the pandemic hit because they wondered if such a collaborative hands-on subject would continue to be feasible. It is a specialized music program with specific materials (marimbas and mallets) that rehearses a particular space (the music room) synchronously. Students wondered how the course would function when that shared space was no longer accessible to them during BOLT. The language choices expressed anxiety and uncertainty that turned to pleasant surprise at the success of the course despite social distancing challenges.

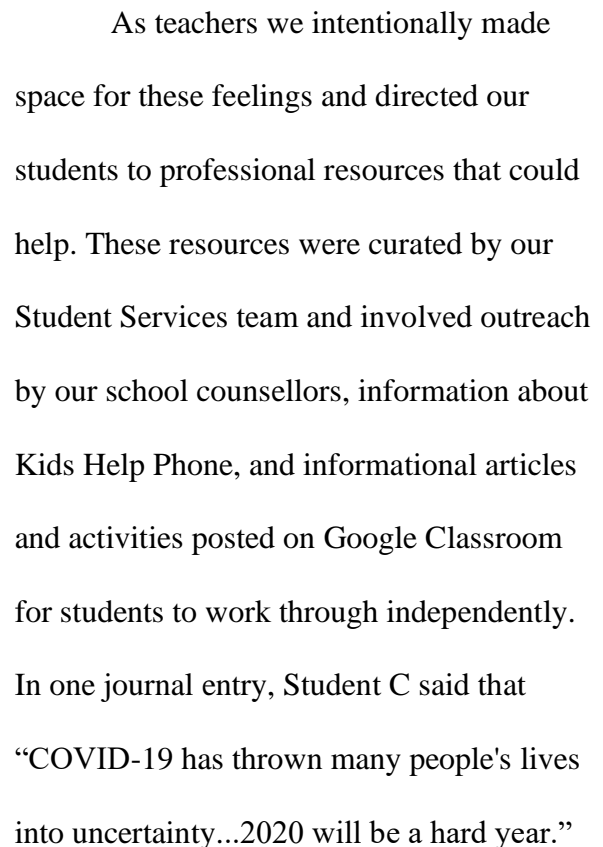
Shared experiences also encapsulate common occurrences and inside jokes. There was evidence of these occurrences in the Smile Notes students wrote to one another in June 2020 and also in the end-of-year Music reflections. Recent publications from authors such as O'Neill's (2019) chapter in the *Handbook of Music, Adolescents and Wellbeing* highlight how adolescents use music for profound connections. O'Neill describes a complex "entanglement ... of social interaction ... non-human, multimodal, and technological objects and the significance of these in adolescents' everyday lives" (O'Neill, 2019, p. 179). For the research participants in this study, it was the experience of inclusion that students commented on with positive language. Students expressed feelings of belonging, of finding humor in a moment and smiling or laughing with classmates. The shared experiences noted in the data were described fondly.

Holding Space for Uncertainty, Hardship, and Grief

Personal Reflection

I regularly take photos when walking in my neighborhood to incorporate into my journal. The following image was taken when I felt trapped and needed to get out of my house for a few minutes. The image below says, "This too shall pass; take what you need." Feelings of grief, pain, or frustration occurred - whether I wanted them to or not - and acknowledging them and

Figure 9. “*This too shall pass.*” Photo from *Personal Journal*, April 2, 2020.



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Student Journals

Student G said that sometimes people “need some boost in order to stay happy and healthy.” They hoped that by holding space for this discomfort and offering words of support, in the form of their Letter to a Graduate, they could “make this time a little less bleak.” Student D said “I can imagine that [the Grade 12s] would be feeling kinda horrible because of the state the world is in right now” and Student F acknowledged that the Graduating class of 2020 must be “bummed out.” Student G also said that “During these strange times, I know your graduation will be a bit strange. It also might be a bit underwhelming, as this is a moment you will not forget for your entire life.”

Student A dubbed this moment in time a “time of crisis” and in their Silver Lining Mind Map used a visual of clouds or darkness to visually depict the shadow being cast by COVID-19. The students’ expressed their understanding of Silver Linings by using visual and textual elements to represent the active action of finding “the bright sides” and remaining hopeful, even in the face of uncertainty and adversity.

When putting their learning of Silver Linings into practice, Student A put a positive spin on the COVID-19 situation, noting in their letter to a graduating student that “This year’s grad will be really [weird] but I think that really suits our school - just a little out of the ordinary.” What an interesting comment for a student to make; a strange, potentially non- standard situation that is certainly out of the ordinary suiting the ethos of the School. This student is bending and flexing to meet the circumstances created by the pandemic, showing resilience and a positive outlook. The student’s tone and choice of words demonstrates a wry sense of humor while also showing appreciation for the weird and wonderful community they belong to.

Figure 10. Student A's Silver Lining Mind Map, Spring 2020.



Another aspect of Holding Spaces was the literal restrictions of access to communal spaces. As shown below in the photos from my journal, shops were boarded up with plywood, seating areas were vacant or plastic wrapped, often creating veritable barriers between staff and the public. Gathering places for food and drink became impersonal, unwelcoming spaces. In conversations with friends the haunts we'd become familiar with and began to think of as "our spots" were now places we felt guilty to go.

Figure 11. Photos from Personal Journal: Breka Bakery on Davie. 2020 Mar 31; Davie St. 2020 April 2; Tim Hortons on Davie. 2020 April 28; Granville Island Market, 2020 May 16.



The first time I ventured far from my home, along a favorite walk I came across an extremely disconcerting sight. This particular path runs along a public park and when I walked

the playground shown below I thought it had been the scene of a violent crime. The play structures were wrapped up in caution tape, the only sounds were the plastic flapping in the cold wind and the squeak of the swings as they swayed in a lonely breeze.

Figure 12. *Photos from Personal Journal, David Lamb Park. 2020 May 6.*



Hope

The theme of hope appeared 28 times throughout the data. This is relevant because, in this time of social distancing, remaining hopeful indicates that students are secure and, relatively, well. Having a secure base (Carrington, 2019) in reference to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943), allows for students to access their frontal cortex (Carrington, 2019) and engage in logical thinking that goes beyond the search for basic needs. Students who are in a regulated (Carrington, 2019) state are then able to think critically and creatively, fully engaging in learning opportunities. Students who feel safe and secure are able to think beyond their current needs and think of the needs of others and to dream and hope for a better tomorrow.

After writing to a Grade 12 student, Student A reflected that “you can change the flow of someone’s day by doing something as simple as singing a song or playing an instrument. Even if someone has had a really bad day you can help them see a silver lining.” This idea of the silver lining, or “the light in the abyss” (Student A), was the theme of Spring 2020 in our class. Student

F defined silver linings as “bring[ing] out the good...giving joy... [and] thinking positive.” They acknowledged that the pandemic had challenges but then looked ahead. Student B said that they “hope this whole pandemic blows over so others like [the Grade 12s] don’t need to worry.” Other students, like Student C, “think that part of COVID-19 is that when we get back to ‘normal’ it will be a better normal than before. Less pollution, more awareness of homelessness and so on.” While hoping for a COVID-19 vaccine (Student F) they refused to allow the pandemic to overshadow the good happening in their world and encouraged other students to think forward, using phrases like “don’t stop dreaming” (Student C).

The Grade 6 students who were new to the POD this year voiced a different version of this hopeful theme. At the start of September, when asked about how their first few weeks in the POD were going. They wrote in their journals that they were “excited” and “hoping for a good year” (Student L). This hopeful tone from the new POD students could be attributed to the fact that everything was new to them this year, and will be discussed in great detail in the following section, *Change and Resilience*. Student H, when asked about their first few weeks in face-to-face classes said that, “I’m really glad to be back.”

A Note on Change and Resilience

This theme of change and resilience was one already familiar in the POD. Grade 6 and 7 are transition years in the School and the POD program is designed to support student’s transition from primary/elementary school to intermediate/secondary. There is a lot of change that occurs during the twenty months of this program, and one goal of the program is to help students develop strategies and coping skills that will help them be resilient as they face challenges and change.

Student A wrote on their Silver Linings Mind Map that “change is constant” and in their year-end reflection for their Music class they said “we had to change the way we are doing things and adapt to the different styles of learning.” These words encapsulate a growth mindset attitude to pivoting and flexing in times of change or stress - skills I aspired to help my students cultivate, even before the pandemic. As Student G said, “life is going to keep moving;” it is not static or stationary. As my students grow into adults and start lives beyond my classroom they will continuously face challenges and opportunities for growth.

Student D made a specific comment on how their experience in Music changed, saying that “I thought it would be very difficult to do music because we usually focus on marimbas and playing them, but it still worked!” They also adapted their social norms, saying that after the School’s socially-distant gathering, several students “went to get ice cream whilst staying physically distanced.”

As noted in the previous section, *Hope*, journal entries from the Grade 6 students new to the POD had a hopeful tone to their writing and a conspicuous lack of commentary on the impact of social distancing measures on their first few weeks in the POD. Instead, the journal entries of all Grade 6 participants contained comments about the changes associated with moving to the POD: increased responsibility, more freedom, a bigger workload, sleep, and the homework expectations. They mentioned that going to so many “different classes” was “fun and challenging.” Only one student in this group, Student K, noted that there were new “safety protocol[s]” that needed to be adhered to and drew a picture of a face mask on her page. In another journal entry, when asked to describe the room with their five senses, no students made any reference to social distancing measures. Instead they mentioned people they saw, the sound of the teacher’s voice, photos on the wall, and various pieces of stationary.

I argue that this absence of reference to COVID-19 is due to the fact that many of the new safety protocols put in place simply became part of the larger shift to life in the Senior School. Everything was new to these young Grade 6s and so the social distancing measures became part of the larger transition from Grade 5 to Grade 6. There were other, more pressing, matters to attend to; such as getting enough sleep, managing a more demanding academic program, and building up their executive functioning skills (namely organization and self-management) so they could get to the right class, on time, with all the necessary materials and with their homework completed.

In comparing the Grade 6 journals to a Grade 7 journal also written at the start of September 2020, there is a noticeable difference in the level of detail and articulation. Student H spent more time reflecting on the subtle changes in their school experience, as well as the impact of these social distancing measures on other people in their school community. They noted that “the world changed” and that “it will take time” for people to adjust to this new normal. In a later journal entry, Student H noted that they were surprised at how quickly everyone adapted to this new normal and just got used to wearing masks and washing their hands more.

Part 2: Discussion

Research Questions Answered

Student journals gathered from two sets of Grade 6 and 7 participants in the Spring and Fall of 2020 provided insights into students' experiences of COVID-19 and the impact of social distancing measures on their communities.

Question 1: In what ways does social distancing influence classroom community?

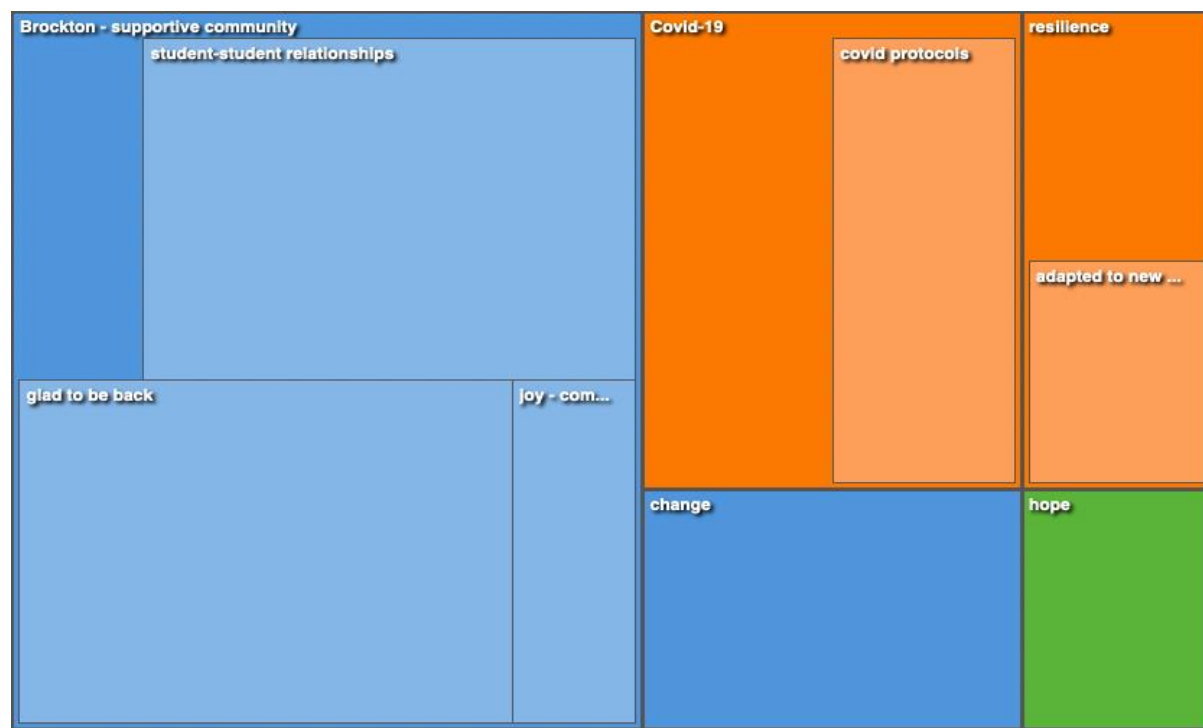
The data showed that social distancing measures impacted classroom community. Initially, students were apprehensive of the social distancing measures being put in place, but most adjusted to the new normal within a few weeks, needing fewer reminders from teachers about wearing their masks, using hand sanitizer, and staying physically distant. Observations note that students miss the physical contact they could once engage in without much thought, such as hugs, playing tag, sharing school supplies, sitting side-by-side, and sharing meals together. They also note that students felt disoriented because of the social distancing measures that required schools to go remote and prevented adolescents from seeing friends and family outside their household.

For the Spring 2020 Grade 7 that engaged in remote learning, the stricter social distancing measures put in place from March to June 2020 had a significant impact on classroom community. Many students missed their routines and the shared experience of interacting with each other in person. Teacher observations mention that video conferencing during classes was a useful tool to maintain and support connections between students, but it did not replace in-person interactions long term and technical difficulties were often a point of frustration. However, other students reported thoroughly enjoying the freedom and flexibility of working asynchronously

and independently at home.

The figure below shows Grade 7 Spring 2020 responses to the journaling task titled, “The First Socially Distant Gathering.” Most of the comments are about the supportive community at the School followed by comments about the conditions caused by COVID-19 social distancing measures. There is also a considerable amount of dialogue about resilience, change, adaptation and hope in this particular group of journal entries. That being said, three out of seven students completed this journal task and when asked why they didn’t complete the task students said they were exhausted and asked to be excused because the journaling tasks were not being assessed. I was surprised that these students requested to be excused - they’re usually students who enjoy writing and seek out opportunities to extend their learning. The fact that they asked indicated to me that they were experiencing fatigue and burnout.

Figure 13. Grade 7 Reflection on First Socially Distant Gathering, Spring 2020.



Similarly, social distancing measures and the impact of COVID-19 was not, initially, a

main focus for the Grade 6 class at the School in the Fall of 2020. Upon arriving at school in September 2020 after engaging in remote learning for three months from March to June 2020 and socially distancing for the summer students had to pivot and adjust to new safety protocols and expectations. However, the impact of the changes may have felt less drastic amid a host of other changes these students experienced. At the School, students starting Grade 6 enter the Senior School. They experience many changes including a new uniform, moving to a different room and seeing a new teacher for each class, more freedom during breaks and lunch, and new extracurricular activities. When asked to describe their first few weeks in the POD, Fall 2020 Grade 6 students made minimal comments about COVID-19.

Figure 14. Grade 6 How were your first few weeks in the POD? Fall 2020.



The way the Fall 2020 group spoke about social distancing measures was interesting. They spoke about wearing a mask and hand hygiene the same way they spoke about the changes involved in moving from the Junior school to the Senior school. Their journal entries indicated that they'd pivoted and adapted to these new norms in the same way they'd adapted to other

changes in their school experience. The data also indicated that the social distancing measures put in place have not influenced their perceptions of the strength of their classroom community, but reinforced the importance of their peer relationships and physical contact through heightened awareness of proximity.

However, when asked explicitly to describe “The Impact of Social Distancing on School Community,” the six Grade 6 and 7 Fall 2020 responses revealed more nuanced data. When asked explicitly in a self-recorded interview how social distancing has impacted their school community, six Grade 6 and 7 students answered that social distancing has impacted them in seven areas: friendship (8); physical contact (5); mask (5); learning (3); public spaces (3); sanitization (2); travel (1). In these self-recorded interviews four out of six students mentioned that social distancing impacted their relationships. Specifically, four students mentioned missing physical contact and that not being able to “hug” or “be close to” family and friends was having a big impact on them. Another four out of six discussed how social distancing measures impacted their ability to gather to celebrate life events or engage in group activities in and out of school, two thirds discussed masks, and one third discussed hand sanitizer.

Figure 15. Grade 6 and 7 Impact of Social Distancing on School Community, Fall 2020.



When comparing Figure 11 and Figure 12, the data illustrates intriguing differences between the Spring 2020 Grade 7 and Fall 2020 Grade 6 and 7 student experience of the social distancing measures. Both groups discussed how the School is a supportive community, however, the representation differed dramatically. The Spring 2020 group spoke most frequently about the supportive community at the School and the Fall 2020 group spoke about COVID-19 most frequently. The way groups spoke about resilience and adapting to the new normal were relatively equal but the Spring 2020 group included discussion of change and hope.

Question 2: How might conceptions of place change as school transitions into an online learning track?

While students did engage in reflective journal writing that asked them to observe their environment and describe it in detail, the depth and breadth of thinking and discussion about place and their connections to place weren't detailed enough to draw conclusions. Perhaps asking

more detailed follow-up questions would have remedied the situation. Perhaps asking different questions altogether would have solved this issue. Or perhaps questions about conceptions of place might be a question better suited to higher grades or university students. My rationale for this final statement about asking more mature students to discuss place and space stems from a journaling activity the Grade 7s did in May of 2020. They were tasked with writing and sending letters to graduating Grade 12 students in our school, congratulating them on completing secondary school and wishing them well.

The notes I recorded about conversations with graduating students and their teachers last spring I noted that many Grade 12 students felt especially frustrated and saddened about the impact COVID-19 had on their graduation. For many months it was uncertain whether they would get to have an in-person celebration at all. However, the school was able to put together a “drive-in” graduation for that small cohort of students and give them some closure. The older students felt the isolation keenly as they, as a whole, have more independence and move outside their households more regularly. It is no surprise that they felt the impact of social distancing more acutely than younger students, who spend the majority of their time in peer groups at school or with their families.

In their letter to a graduating student, one Grade 7 student wrote, “Next year, you will be leaving the School, which most people consider their home, but I consider it a cocoon. It morphs you into the person you are today, and now that you have left the cocoon, you can do whatever you want!” This perceptive and metaphoric comment resonated with the POD teachers and was appreciated by the graduating student who received it. In these letters, students discussed not the School as a place, per say, but as a community. The connections between students and the legacy they left behind when they graduated was a consistent theme throughout the activity.

The second set of journal entries gathered in the Fall of 2020 from Grade 6 students are also inconclusive in terms of data about conceptions of place. They are a full eighteen months younger than the students in the June 2020 data set and the difference in age is evident in their journals. The Grade 7s of June 2020 were beginning to articulate more detailed reflections about their own learning and connections to place compared to the Fall 2020 group of Grade 6s.

The following three images are screenshots from three separate journal entries, arranged in ascending order by age. The first is from a Grade 6 student in Fall 2020, the second is from a Grade 7 student in Fall 2020, and a third is from a Grade 7 student in Spring of 2020.

Differences in word count, the use of punctuation, vocabulary choice, and overall structure show how skills advance over the course of a 20-month period in the POD. This difference in ability is expected and is normal for this period of rapid growth and development. The younger students found it challenging to stay focused on the task long enough to jot down more than cursory observations of place and space. The older students were able to consider perspectives beyond their own.

Figure 16. Screenshot of Student I's Journal: Describe your first few weeks in the POD, Fall 2020.

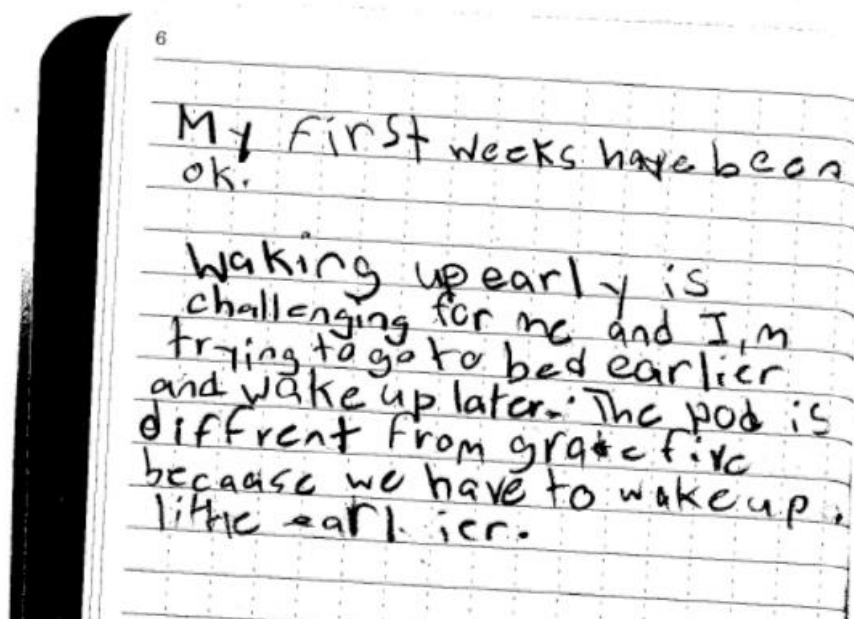


Figure 17. Screenshot of Student H's Journal: How have you grown as a student at the School? Fall 2020.

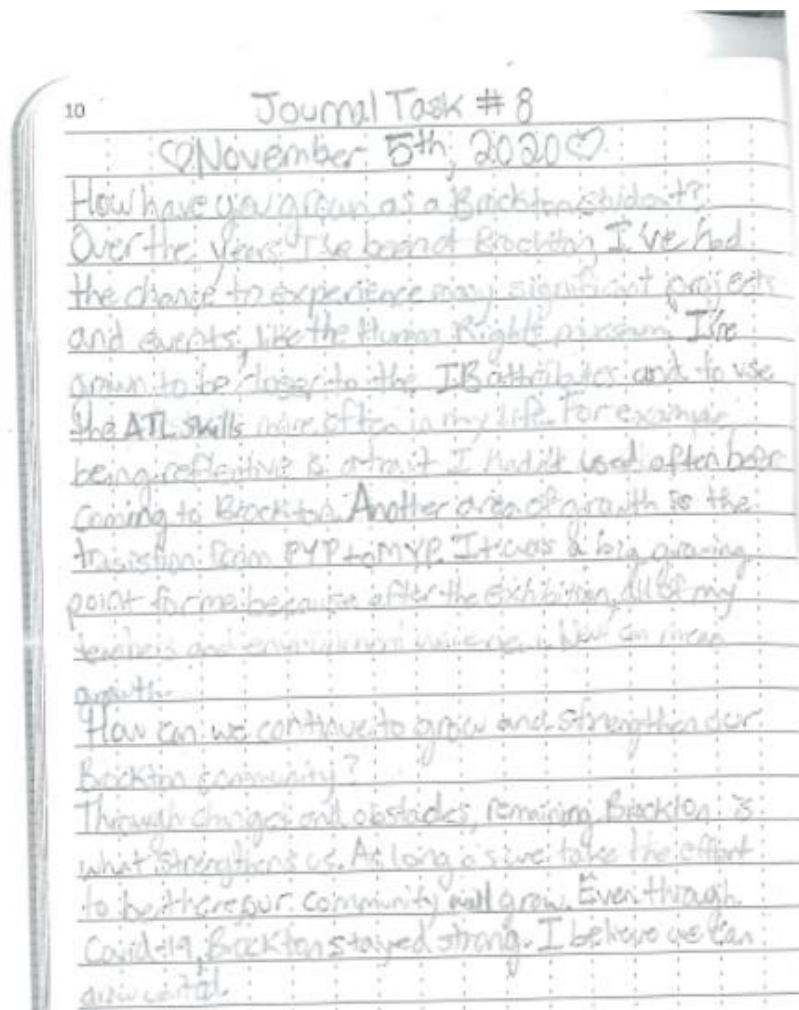


Figure 18. Screenshot of Student C's Journal: Letter to your future self, Spring 2020.

June 8th, 2020

Dear future me,

I have a few questions for you. Did I actually go through with that nose piercing I've always wanted? How do I dress, is my favourite piece of clothing still a black leather jacket and black heels? Did I make it to 5ft 3in? What colour is my hair right now? More importantly, did our dream of having a tourist business in the Okanagan and a restaurant there happen, are we on our way to it? Maybe our dream changed, but did we at least go to culinary school? Do we have the vineyard, the orchard, the garden? Did you get the motorcycle? Or the sleek black sports car? These are my questions, where are we now?

How is Rascal doing? Please tell me I got him, or maybe it's time to save up. If we don't have that restaurant, don't forget the dream. One day it will happen for us. One day you will wake up, go for a ride on a horse through your vineyard and through your orchard, and one day you will have your restaurant. Chances are, when I get this letter, it won't be far enough in the future for me to already have my dream, but when I get this letter, I'll be reminded that I've had this big dream for a long, long time.

When I get this letter, I hope I'll think about how other people react to me, and how I react to them. I hope I am a good person. I hope that I will care. I hope that I think outside the box, that I have an open mind about others. If that is not the case when I get this letter in the future, I'd better change my attitude quickly, because I am not a quitter. Think about what's right, you only have one life, but also take care to remember that others also have one life. So make the most of every day, but think about the affects, of every single action you take.

I know I have it in me, to make something of my dream, if I think outside the box and I look at others within it. Take note of people's actions, they have a lot to say, if you are only there to listen, you can make a huge difference to someone's day. Accountability and responsibility should be the way I live, no matter what other people say I am in control of my life.

Don't stop dreaming,
Student C

Within the constraints of this particular research study and the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, data gathered about conceptions of place was limited. The illustrations above show changes in students' writing over time. While the original question asked how conceptions of place change as school transitions into an online learning track, older students might be in a better position to respond to such a conceptual question.

Question 3: In what ways might journaling maintain students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social and physical distancing?

Grade 6 and 7 journal entries contained 47 references to the school community with 36 direct references to friendships and 16 to shared experiences compared to 8 references to school work. This data collected from student journals show that these participants mentioned their relationships twice as often as their school work. Perhaps these numbers are due to the fact that the journaling questions focused on social-emotional learning more than asking direct questions about academics. Data about whether independent journaling intervention impacted students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social/physical distancing was inconclusive. The data gathered indicated that students are more preoccupied with their socializing and place more value in that aspect of their community membership.

From a different perspective, teacher observations and my personal journal entries noted that group activities and collaborative documents did appear to have an impact. As discussed in detail earlier in the chapter, student journals from June 2020 contained reflections on two group activities: an assignment titled Smile Notes and a socially distant end of year get together.

For the Smile Notes activity, students were asked to contribute to a collaborative Google Document sharing memories or kind words with each of their classmates. My teacher observations note that some had reservations about the activity, or complained about it when it was first introduced, but all engaged and the majority noted in their journals that they were happy to receive such kind comments from their peers.

The second group activity was a socially distant get together we hosted on the school field during the last week of classes. These students had left campus for Spring Break on March

13th and finished their school year online. They'd seen one another on a screen, but hadn't gathered together in person for three months, 78 days to be exact. It was a long time for adolescents to go without seeing their peers. My teacher observations noted how much the students had grown, physically, over those three months. One boy in particular had grown at least four inches since I'd seen him last.

The seven questions I posed for reflection on June 18th after the gathering were:

1. What did you feel like on the way to school? Were you excited? Apprehensive?
2. What was travelling to school like? Did you notice any differences?
3. When you arrived, what did you do differently? What do you think of the changes?
4. What did you think about the seating arrangement outside?
5. What did you expect to happen? Did your expectations align with reality?
6. Were you able to reconnect with your classmates? Were there any obstacles? If so, do you have any ideas for a solution?
7. Is there anything else you would like to say about the experience? Do you have any suggestions for future gatherings?

Responses noted that the students were excited to come back to school and catch up with their friends. Two students noted that they actually ran to school because they were so excited. None of the students noticed anything different about their commute to the campus, nor did they notice anything strange about being back at the school or know what to expect, barring the new protocol of sanitizing their hands repeatedly and maintaining distance between one another.

My personal journal entry from June 18th, 2020 - the day the Grade 6 and 7s first socially distant gathering at school since March - was detailed and my memory of that day is vivid. It was

my first time being on public transit since we'd begun working remotely and I distinctly remember being very anxious and uncomfortable on the way to school. There were large yellow signs attached to every other seat, effectively closing them to enforce social distancing on the bus - which was at half capacity - and the driver's cab on the short bus was sealed off from the passenger space with a clear plastic sheet.

Figure 19. *Photos from Personal Journal. 2020, June 18.*



As the bus travelled through the Downtown East Side of Vancouver, the need was evident. The crowds of people lining East Hastings street had grown since I'd last been through the area, and very few people were wearing masks or socially distancing. I took a picture of myself with my mask on during that bus ride. Even with the lower half of my face covered, the tension and nervousness I felt that day is visible in my eyes. This difference between adolescent participants' experience and my experience of this first socially different gathering is drastic.

Student journals from the Fall of 2020 indicate that students were preoccupied with peer relationships. There is an eighteen-month difference in those two age groups that could account for this difference. One colleague from the POD posited that, by intentionally taking advantage of the place we work - a small school nestled into the forest in the shadow of the North Shore mountains of Vancouver - we *made* space for the POD students to cope.

There is a place dubbed The Big Woods on campus. It lies on the west side of a pebble and sand field where the physical education classes are held, approximately 250ft from the school buildings. Separating this field from The Big Woods there is a chain link fence with one opening to the forest. Students know that the woods are out of bounds during regular recess and lunch and that they must seek a teacher's permission to enter that space because it is secluded. This year, in the spirit of keeping distant from other cohorts and getting outside into the fresh air as much as possible, POD students played there every day at lunchtime.

My colleague and I noticed that by February, the students knew every nook and cranny of that space. They knew the trails, the short cuts, the best hiding spots, and the spots tangled with roots and branches. We also noticed that their behaviour shifted. There, away from the rest of the school, they have some privacy from the other teachers and students on campus and the freedom to unwind. They didn't have to set a good example for the Junior School students, they didn't

feel compelled to act like their older peers, they could just be kids. They could run, shout, climb, jump, be silly, and play games all while experiencing consistency and safety in the routine of going to a green space every day.

Figure 20. *The Big Woods.*



This observation, and the data from student journals, indicate that the best ways to maintain students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social and physical distancing is to give them space and time to work with each other. The observation about POD students playing in The Big Woods show that having opportunities to play together is an important part of maintaining these adolescent students' sense of school-as-community. Data discussed throughout this chapter indicate that synchronous collaborative activities (written or verbal) that positions students such that they work towards a common goal is another way to maintain students' sense of community.

Question 4: How are students reacting to the ongoing changes, in terms of school-based, home-based, and remote learning?

Students reacted to the social distancing measures with varying levels of resilience and flexibility. The student experience of shifting between regular school-based learning, remote home-based, or hybrid learning varied. This academic year, little has changed for Grade 6 and 7 students at school. Masks and hand washing are changes, yes, but they come to school Monday to Friday 8:00am - 3:15pm, spending a significant portion of their waking hours at school. Even with the social distancing measures, students can socialize with their peers and have some sense of a normal routine. The biggest changes remain their separation from extended family and friends that they would see during evenings, weekends, and extracurricular activities outside of school.

One such example is evident in an essay written by Student H who wrote an essay about a silver lining they found during the pandemic. In the essay, Student H describes how they lost four weeks to quarantining over the summer because they travelled internationally to see family. Student H expressed how they were first frustrated and nervous upon learning they would be travelling. They even concocted a grand plan to avoid the trip. However, they found a silver lining upon arriving at their destination.

The moment that I knew everything was worth it was when I saw my grandparents for the first time in 12 months. I was so overwhelmed by the fact they weren't on a screen and they were in front of me. The craziest thing happened at this moment. As I saw my grandparents standing before me, for one split second I felt like everything was normal. As much as it hurt me to remember what life used to be like, it was also so incredible (Student H, Silver Linings Essay, Fall 2020).

Student H describes feelings of hope and gratitude upon reconnecting with their family

members. The sacrifice involved in spending a year apart and losing a significant chunk of their summer vacation to quarantine in order to keep their family safe was deeply appreciated by this particular student. They were thrilled to see their relatives in person, rather than on a screen and it allowed them to feel some measure of relief and sense of normalcy. In this example, Student H is reacting to the ongoing changes imposed by social distancing measures with some initial hesitancy and resistance due to fear of the virus and frustration with the personal inconveniences imposed by quarantine. However, they deem the sacrifice is warranted by the knowledge that they can spend time with their family members while remaining safe.

In terms of school-based, home-based, and remote learning, casual conversations recorded as observations in my teaching journals (September 2020 and February 2021) reported that students preferred doing school-work remotely. These students enjoyed the fact that the amount of work was reduced and that they could do it at their own pace. They did acknowledge that their self-management skills had to be strong in order to make sure they met deadlines, but they didn't find the work difficult. When asked what they missed when working remotely, they often mentioned missing their friends or mentioned that the technology was a frustrating complication

To answer this question more thoroughly, I drew from the observations of my coworkers and it is interesting to note that observations from the co-teachers of Grades 6-7 echoed my own. I'm interested in the fact that we, as adults and trained professionals, were able to discuss our understanding of how students were coping in a more nuanced way by comparing them to previous classes of Grade 6 and 7 we've taught in the past. In this unprecedented time, we could draw on our past teaching experiences and validate our own perceptions against one another.

One colleague shared her experience of managing fear, guilt, and panic while visiting loved ones and being terrified of being the one to make someone else sick. She noticed a similar shift in students which included an increased awareness of the impact of their actions on others and some associated anxiety (personal communications, June 18th, 2020 and February 8th, 2021).

Increased frequency and intensity of exhaustion while online teaching was another factor my colleague and I often discussed. Teaching remotely is different and draining (Sokal, L., Trudel, L. E., & Babb, J., 2020). Screen time takes energy and constantly trying to pick up on subtle facial, voice, and body cues through a screen exhausted us faster.

For instance, one point of contention during BOLT centered around student's webcams. As part of BOLT we outlined certain expectations for the Google Meetings in the School's Essential Agreement. While learning remotely, students were encouraged to have the camera on so teachers and students could see each other's faces. In practice this didn't always happen, but it was certainly more enjoyable to teach faces rather than black squares.

My colleague noted in her own reflections that she terribly missed teaching in person. As an extremely social extrovert she is energized by people; loves storytelling and finding connection with friends, colleagues, and students. Being without those connections altered her way of being.

Anecdotal evidence and teacher observations proved to be essential while answering this question. Thus, intentionally gathering regular observations from teachers and other community members at regular intervals throughout the study would have improved this study and could be another avenue for further study.

Triangle, Circle, Bloom

A sketch, a stamp, a tattoo, a brand

to remind me of the important things.

Shelter, sleep, sustenance [and sex]

form the foundation from which

everything

grows.

Security, safety, resources, access, health, wealth.

The space and place to be one's own.

As we own our own we can become known

and know others.

Because if we can't sleep sound in

our own beds how can we be expected to know or grow anything

beyond the heaviness in our heads or the hunger in our hearts

or the hurt of empty bellies.

Hear me. Hear me.

Striving for success and expecting respect is beyond the scope

of someone who hungers. Freedom and strength and resilience

cannot take root in an unstable foundation. Trying to inspire someone

who only desires a warm, dry, *safe* bed is hypocrisy.

So, get curious; over and over and over again.

Ask. Ask and listen. Ask and listen and hear.

Ask, and listen, and hear, and see, and stay, and say

and do and do and do and do and do not give up

until they do not need to ask anymore.

It is the actions, beyond the words, that complete that circle

and stand a chance at making it whole.

Breaking old cycles.

Once the holes begin to patch, bridges begin to mend,

trust can begin to build.

Only *then* can there be Blooms.

The scars will remain, knobbly and gnarled,

holding space for the grief, the pain, and the grit.

Never to be forgotten, but to grow thick

and strong. Strong enough to shatter the confines

of their foundations and send up shoots beyond

any artificial boundary.

January 28th, 2021

Overarching Theme

There is one overarching theme that appeared, over and over, in the two years that I have been developing this Master's Thesis. It appeared before the pandemic hit and it will remain the guiding principle that my professional ethos rests upon long after the pandemic becomes history. This theme can be summed up in that phrase, "Maslow before Bloom" (Doucet et al., 2020) In essence, Maslow's theory involves a hierarchy of human needs where the most basic needs must be met for a person to develop and Bloom's Taxonomy theorizes a graduated hierarchy of learning goals intended to assist teachers in constructing meaningful learning with depth. This

phrase, Maslow before Bloom, acknowledges that a person must feel safe before they can be expected to learn anything. It also highlights the importance of relationships and connections in a person's development and as a secure foundation for learning. Trust, through a sense of security and safety, must be established for growth to occur.

In this time of social distancing, the education community, in fact all communities, are trying to maintain and sustain the one thing that is essential for their existence - connections. In the data gathered for this Thesis, I (re)connected to that founding principle - that connections, relationships, are vital. Strong relationships, nurtured with care and built on trust and respect, *are* community.

For example, the quote from Student M's self-recorded interview connects to the conceptual framework used by BOLT and other remote school programs that came into existence at the outset of the pandemic, described at the outset of this study, specifically, the principle of 'Maslow before Bloom'. The students' community "makes them feel safe and happy that I can actually go to school and learn stuff." It is evidence that supports the importance of meeting students' basic needs before attempting to teach them anything.

The enduring legacy of a strong community is one established on balanced, positive, honest relationships. When building BOLT, teaching staff used trauma-informed pedagogy and applied Maslow's framework, as adapted by Milheim (2012) to the program. Within the hierarchy of needs, students were intentionally given space to be vulnerable, voice concerns, and ask for help. I argue that a strong learning community goes beyond the walls of a classroom, encompassing connections that span multiple grade levels; all staff - teaching and otherwise; parents; and extended family and friends. It is important to get all stakeholders of a child's education working towards shared goals, whether those goals be academic, social-emotional,

physical and mental wellness, athletic, or creative. By acknowledging and showing gratitude for all the relationships and connections that come together to create the multifaceted learning community, we are able to align our objectives as a community and support the growth and development of all stakeholders.

Troubling Place vs/as Virtual Community Spaces

This process of building and maintaining community in a virtual space raised questions about place-based pedagogies for me. In the beginning, place-based pedagogies were fundamentally centered on creating strong connections with particular places by making vivid memories through shared experiences in particular places with particular people. These connections do not need to be positive or negative but must be strong and memorable to constitute a meaningful place-based learning experience. For instance, I have some fond memories of planting bulbs on the school grounds in the fall and then memories of being thrilled when those bulbs erupted into bright yellow tulips in the spring. I can still picture the flowers swaying in a gentle mountain breeze. I also have a sharp, not-so-fond memory of slicing my finger with a trowel while I was planting those bulbs and now I have a scar on my knuckle to remind me to pay attention and be fully present when gardening.

Once our place of learning, the School, went online, I had to ask myself a question; should I re-evaluate or redefine the importance of a physical space while studying and conversing about community? This question instigated wonderings about the definition of place-based education. Does a person have to be physically present to participate in place-based education activities? Can a community, established through shared experiences in a particular place, transition to a digital space with its integrity intact or will essential elements of membership be lost in translation?

Wood & Judikis' six essential elements of community do not define communities as necessarily being in a specific place (2002). "Face-to-face contact is not the necessary glue - common purpose is" (Wood & Judikis, 2002, p. 94). In terms of the impact of technology on communities, Wood and Judikis argue that "virtual communities *are* communities" (2002, p. 93, emphasis from original). Communities are created when people share multiple points of common interest (Bailey 1974; Alinsky 1989; Davis 1991) and staying connected with people by entering into dialogue about a common interest or purpose in a virtual space does not change that vital aspect of community.

In discussion with my supervisor, he noted that there are at least two versions of a community: "a virtual network of persons who usually share a common interest; and place-based neighborhood communities of individuals whose relations are fundamentally connected to place" (personal correspondence, April 4th, 2021). Networking opportunities made possible by the internet have enabled us to connect with networks of people from all across the globe both synchronously and asynchronously. As my students showed me in this past year of pandemic, communities can and will share ideas, participate in activities, and engage in dialogue using image, text, sound, video, or a blend of all four. That being said, it would be interesting to see how much students relied on social-media during this time of social distancing to stay connected to their peers.

What emerged in the data, and through an extended series of personal and academic reflections, is the understanding that it was not the physical place itself that was important, but the connections and relationships between people and their places that created a sense of community.

Troubling Remote Learning

In the context of COVID-19, relationships in learning communities must be thoughtfully built and maintained with intention because learners and teachers could not rely on proximity - time spent together, or shared spaces and experiences - to present opportunities for connection. In the data I gathered, in the literature I read, and in the professional development I received at the School, this message of “connections first” was repeated (UNICEF, 2017; Carrington, 2019; Bender, 2020).

Teaching observations from June 2020 include moments where students discussed being bored or uninspired at home and finding it difficult to concentrate on school work in the places they usually go to relax and unwind. Journaling sessions at school with the Grade 6s that revolve around place often produce notes about the people in their class rather than the place itself.

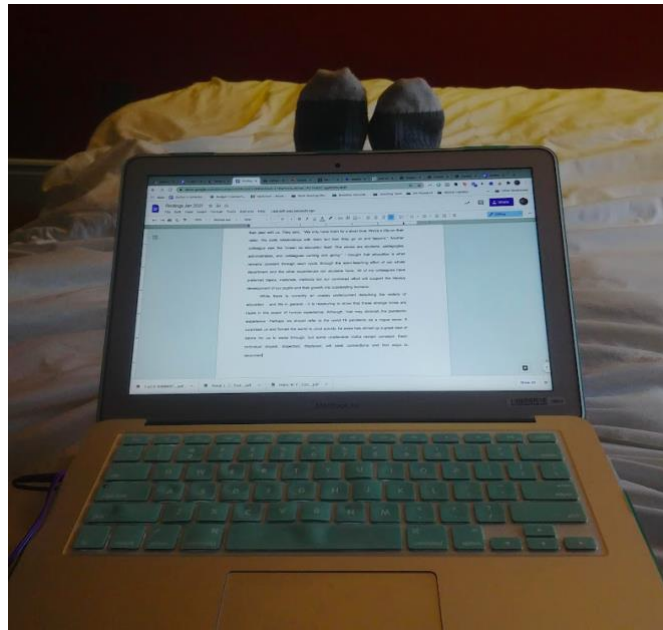
In conversation with co-teachers from the POD, we discussed whether we thought conceptions of place changed as the School transitioned into an online learning track and back to in-person learning. In professional development meetings where staff went through training to prepare for teaching online, we considered how we were inviting students into our private spaces - our homes - and they were doing the same for us. During this training, teachers became aware that the line between private and public spaces was being blurred in ways we hadn’t experienced previously (personal journal, March 30th, 2020). When launched online learning with the students in early April 2020, POD teachers encouraged students to carve out a “study space” for themselves in a public area of their homes. For many students this was not possible, as the rest of their household was also attending classes or working from home.

Figure 21. Photos of “office” from Personal Journal: Left, 2020, March 24; Right, 2021, May 9.



In an entry from my personal journal, I note and reflect on how I was a little uncomfortable with being on a video chat with students who joined our class from their beds (April 20th, 2020). Setting up the expectations and protocols for our calls was very intentional - we specified that students must be dressed appropriately (not in pajamas) when they attend classes. In my journal I mentioned that it was a strange position to be in, setting expectations on how students dress while they're in their places of relaxation. Ten months later, February 9th 2021, I am still attending a weekly staff meeting remotely - from my bed to be precise. I live in a small apartment with my partner who is also working from home and this is the quietest place for me to be in attendance. It is common practice for me to ensure the space is especially tidy on Wednesdays - I'd be mortified if a colleague caught a glimpse of my dirty laundry. I used to come home, curl up in bed with a book and unwind. Now, I often find that on Wednesdays, after staff meetings, I don't want to spend any more time sitting on the bed after the meeting ends, and I feel restless or need to leave the house altogether.

Figure 22. Photos of “office” from Personal Journal: 2021, January 28.



Clearly, this experience of working from home via video chat has altered my connections to the places I work and relax. To return to the conversation and reconnect to the discussion about journaling, I would like to highlight how my personal journaling practice developed and deepened my awareness of and connection with place. An extension of my own journaling practice became a collaborative artistic initiative between my sister and I. We live on opposite ends of the country in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Vancouver, British Columbia, respectively. *Saltwater Prose* is what we titled the correspondence and collaboration on a series of poems that we sent from coast to coast between September 2019 and December 2019 while I was taking an A/r/tography course. The data that emerged from entries during that period highlight that my connection to place was shifting. Part of the bargain I’d made with myself upon leaving St. John’s involved a commitment to maintaining strong familial relationships and seeing my family at least once a year. At the time of writing this chapter, I suspect it will be double that until I see my family again in person. My connection to and appreciation for my connection to home

changed when I was prohibited from travelling home by COVID-19.

People's experience of virtual and physical community in k-12 education is another area that could be researched. With digital platforms becoming more popular, students are using those virtual spaces to connect with their communities (Chassiakos, & Stager, 2020). For schools, this presents new avenues for education with the student, teacher, and parent populations.

Teachers could not be in the same physical place as their students in the spring of 2020, and the population of British Columbia was strongly encouraged to follow public health guidelines that limited students' ability to see friends and family outside their immediate household. This limiting of in-person contact with/in communities and the limiting of indoor and outdoor activities

We created a virtual space to converse, but Google Meet has its limits, one of which being one-way audio communication that prohibited group conversations. Sometimes the divide would be even greater, such as during asynchronous learning where teachers and learners engage in activities at different places and times. Yet, using these online tools, we could still inhabit the same space of learning - the online journal.

Place-based Education: Dialogue and Reflection

There are considerable bodies of research that suggest place-based education (Smith, 2002a; Sobel, 2005; Knapp, 2014) and engaging in reflective journal writing (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985; Moon, 2004; Dymont & O'Connell, 2011), as two distinct teaching techniques that improve social and academic skills. However, more research is needed to explore the combined impact of place-based education and journal writing on young people's ability to connect to their places and express that connection to themselves and to others.

The value of using journals to gather this data, at this time, is that it created an informal,

ungraded, asynchronous space for students to sit with their experiences and reflect on them. The qualitative methods used in this study allowed me to explore the nuanced experiences of students' experience of social distancing as expressed by students in their own words. A qualitative approach using an experiential and place-based education lens provided a framework to explore how students maintained connections to their peers while considering how particular settings or platforms impacted experiences of connection.

The Importance of Play

One observation my colleague, Teacher 2, shared while supervising this play in The Big Woods is that all of the students, regardless of maturity level or academic strength, engaged in play that we would typically see in younger students (personal communication, February 5th, 2021). We wondered if these behaviours are a result or a reaction to the pandemic? We asked a lot of students over the last year - for instance their self-management had to improve in a short span of time and they took on more responsibility. They "grew up" faster than they normally would, and lost three months of being able to play with their classmates. We wondered if students would have engaged in younger play if they didn't have this time/place? For instance, if the School was an urban school without green spaces, or where students were always mixed in with all ages? We wondered if this younger play was a reaction or response to "growing up" at an accelerated rate because of the pandemic? We don't have any answers for this query, and it begs more research into play as a coping mechanism in the context of this pandemic.

Teacher 2 noticed students reverting to play associated with younger development age. Playing house and sword fighting with sticks is a sort of play usually seen in Grade 2 and 3. Perhaps this behaviour is a response to having to "grow up" quickly last spring. Perhaps having the place and space to be kids enables them to cope.

The journal tasks did not ask specific questions about place and space and play; however, this avenue of research is an interesting one: *How has social distancing impacted adolescents' play?* This might be an intriguing route for future research to explore.

Figure 23. *Ode to the Big Woods.*

Ode to the Big Woods

To those tall behemoths, standing guard, making
space between their branches

the sky

and the forest floor

for our shouts and squeals and shrieks of delight to echo, unhindered.

A cocoon, nestled. A secluded spot for us to see smiles, socialize, and breathe deeply.

A perfect place for us to catch up on being kids.



A Few Notes on Limitations and Hindsight

Place and Privilege

This thesis gathered data from a small independent International Baccalaureate school in British Columbia, Canada. Vancouver, BC, had a relatively moderate response to the COVID-19 virus; I acknowledge that many families experienced trauma and loss - this is not a belittling of their pain - but an acknowledgement that there were other places in our global community that experienced more hardship than we did. As a private school, even one with a considerable financial aid program, the students and families who are part of our community are quite affluent and financially secure and they value education.

The students in this case study have access to considerable resources. Each student has a laptop with internet access, they had the necessary texts we were studying at school, and their basic needs were being met in terms of shelter, sustenance, and the support from immediate

family. While working remotely, students experienced a series of new challenges revolving around technology and accessibility. Losing WIFI or experiencing technology issues completely incapacitated student engagement, precluding interactions during “class” time on Google Meet or group activities. When the same issues arise in a classroom setting, teachers are usually prepared to pivot or can improvise to keep a student engaged in the learning process. However, any issues with the avenue for connection to the computer video, and more importantly the audio, was a frustrating roadblock with potential to derail a lesson. One limitation of this study is that the participants come from a place of privilege. Their experience of social distancing and the subsequent impacts occurred - in general - with a modicum of comfort.

My co-workers and I explicitly framed our teaching in the Spring of 2020 and the Fall of 2020 with a growth mindset (Dweck, 2012) approach that intentionally de-escalated apprehension, fear, and stress. We opened up space to discuss the pandemic, acknowledging the uncertainty and the challenges but also showed gratitude for our privileges. At the macro level, we live in a beautiful part of British Columbia, Canada. The restrictions put in place were moderate, compared to other parts of the world. There is an incredible amount of green space in Vancouver, and people were able to get outside while social distancing relatively easily and our weather was conducive to this outlet. At the micro level, we work at a private school where students were, largely, able to handle the upheaval because they were financially secure. (As a caveat, I am not privy to the financial situation, so I am making a gross generalization/assumption here.) We acknowledged our privilege and chose to try and give back in the small ways we could - with words and small actions that might improve the quality of life for those in our community.

Lack of Negative References to COVID-19

Another complexity of this research that needs to be noted is my position as teacher and researcher and the way my lessons were echoed back in my students' journal responses. My primary role is to meet my students' needs and build positive relationships with them, as such, I am an active participant and (hopefully) a positive influence on them. There are many parallels between my personal beliefs and the intentions I had in my units - such as the Silver Linings unit my co-teacher and I created which intentionally invited our students to look for "the bright sides" in moments of adversity and challenge.

The scarcity of explicit negative references to the COVID-19 virus throughout both data sets is conspicuous, and this absence of data is also an interesting trend. It is possible that this data is lacking because of the growth-mindset frame my co-teacher and I used at this point in the school year. We intentionally tried to do school-work that was easy and enjoyable so students wouldn't be overtaxed or disengaged from the learning. Upon reflection, I wonder if providing space in these journals activities for frustrations and fears would have been more authentic. I wonder if designing different journaling prompts would have revealed different data. I maintain that my co-teacher and I prompted students to reflect in a way that we, as professionals, thought would best suit their needs at the time. In those moments of professional choice, I am glad I put my students' needs first, even if it inspired student responses that focused on the positive.

We designed the Silver Lining's Unit, specifically, to foster a positive growth mindset in the initial weeks of remote learning and support students' mental health and physical wellbeing. The data gathered from journal entries completed throughout this unit contained statements that mirrored my own beliefs, sometimes using phrases I myself used during lessons. This data indicated that I influenced my students' perspectives, helping them shape positive attitudes and

cultivate resilient behaviour over the course of my lessons with them and their journaling activities. As a teacher, it warmed my heart to see and hear my students face the uncertainty of our pandemic world with courage and resilience, however, as a researcher I do need to acknowledge how much my teaching has influenced my students' perspectives.

Limitations of Flexibility and Impact on Data

The journal tasks executed in class did sometimes differ from those proposed in my Research Proposal. My role as teacher and researcher, with my students' needs remained the priority of my work as teacher and researcher. The changes were made as we continuously pivoted to meet the needs of our students. Our practice is trauma-informed and student-centred, where we aimed to give students the support they needed, keeping in mind that these children were vulnerable during this pandemic. My co-teachers and I flexed, when necessary, and pivoted to accommodate needs as they arose, as such, some journal tasks varied from the original proposal to meet these needs.

From the perspective of a researcher, this flexibility proved to be counterproductive. In hindsight, I would have gathered more data that explicitly focused on my research questions and incorporated more interviews or small focus groups into the research plan. Engaging in discussion with adolescent participants where I could have asked for verbal clarification or more details would have garnered richer data and more precise answers to the research questions I asked.

Some of the limitations of this study stemmed from the data collection and journaling program, I did some more reading. Applebaum (2014) noted that being reflective, and engaging in reflective journaling does not often come naturally or easily. Studies discuss how students usually do not know how to reflect and assigning journaling tasks is not an effective way to

support learning and growth (Dyment & O'Connell, 2011; Coulson & Harvey, 2013). Students must be taught how to reflect and how to clearly communicate those reflections while producing texts and a considerable amount of thought must go into the particular questions being asked to prompt reflection and build those skills over time. It is also important to give timely feedback to journal entries and maintain a meaningful dialogue with the learners (Yankelovich, 1999; Dyment & O'Connell, 2011; Burns, 2020).

Differences in Adult and Adolescent Perspectives

Data generated and submitted in response to the prompts above were collected and used to curate a collection of documents from the student participant perspective. In this section, the student voice is further supported and troubled by anecdotal evidence of student behaviours observed by their teachers.

From the teacher's perspective, social distancing measures that impacted class sizes had a significant impact on classroom community. One teacher noticed that having separate Advisor classes for Grade 6 and 7 changed the dynamic of the POD (personal communication, February 5th, 2021). Usually the Grade 7 students would naturally become leaders, role modeling the routines and practices for the younger children to follow. As standard practice, the POD teachers intentionally create opportunities for the Grade 7 students to actively mentor the Grade 6 students. Due to the fact that social distancing measures necessitated increased separation this year, the program couldn't take advantage of those cross-grade collaborative learning opportunities as often. In reflecting on the past year, one POD teacher noticed that the lack of collaboration and group learning had an impact. The Grade 6 students took longer to pick up on routines and expectations than in the past. Learning by observing and imitating older students is a vastly more impactful teaching tool compared to being told or shown by teachers alone

(personal communication, February 5th, 2021).

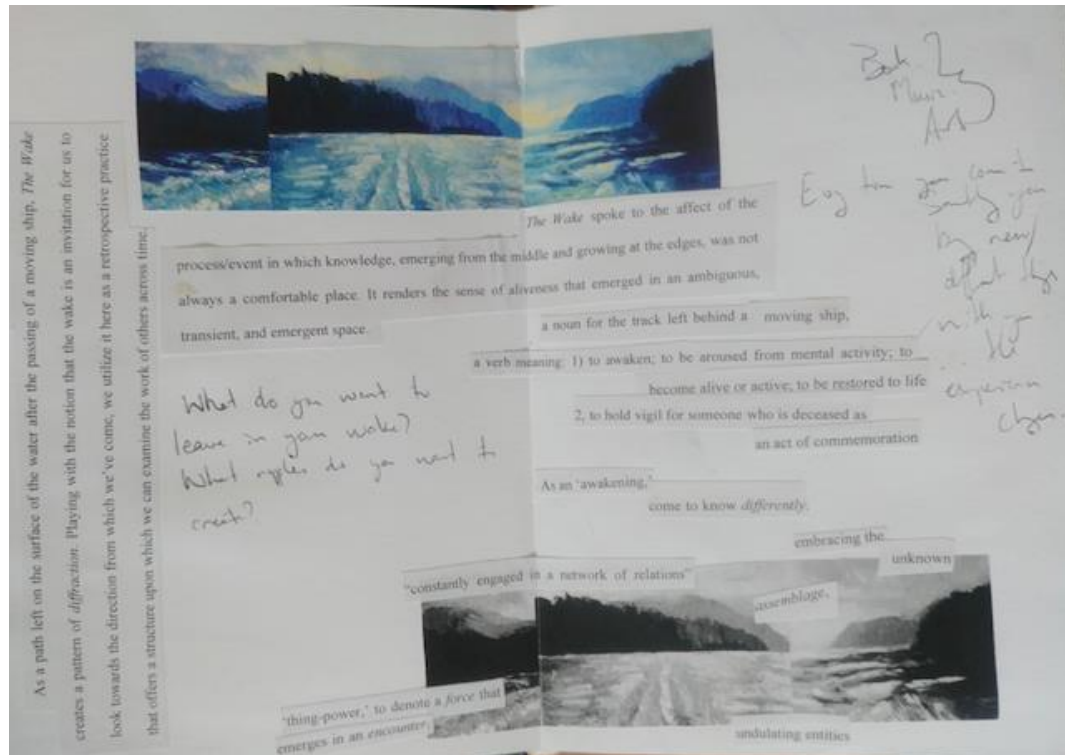
From my personal experience, I've found social distancing to be extremely challenging. I have a small number of strong connections in Vancouver and abroad. Those new friends I've made since moving to the West Coast are also from away and we banded together upon arriving here, finding solace in other souls who left home for work or to see another part of the world and suddenly found themselves far more isolated than they'd bargained for. It is a tough time for an adult to be without the support of a close family network - those close friends have become my familial network while we're all stranded on distant shores.

While examining my journals, a thread emerged. It was one I've been paying close attention to and mapping out since pre-pandemic times, but in recent months this theme has come to the forefront of my self-analysis - mental health. Specifically, the unpredictable pendulum of anxiety and depression. I noticed the arcs of those two states becoming more pronounced in the spring of 2020 alongside entries related to COVID-19 and the behavioural ethics committee application for this Master's thesis. Coincidence? I think not.

As an individual I take pride in being a reflective thinker who is well attuned to my own state of mind and as a professional educator I am keenly aware of the energies of those students who are in my care. Experiencing an exacerbation of mental health challenges that I couldn't explain or rationalize was deeply unsettling for me. My anxiety and depression shook the foundations of who I knew myself to be. My anxiety and depression forced me to understand myself better and unpack several beliefs about myself that took some time to reconcile. My anxiety and depression forced me to rest, forced me to ask for help, and forced me to dig deep and make a choice to continue with my graduate work or step away for a time. Most importantly for this chapter on Findings, it forced me to find out what I value as a person and as a

teacher/researcher. What I discovered as I re-read my journals were threads of excitement and a passionate curiosity for learning and growth. However, there were also repeated references to feeling overwhelmed, drained, avoiding, or procrastinating work while trying to make progress during periods of social distancing.

Figure 24. *The Wake*.



Chapter 7: Conclusion

“Lovely people,” they said with a smile and a touch of sarcasm.

A little quip born of comfortable camaraderie (and a love of dogs).

Safe, home, care, support, fun. All words to describe their community; their School.

“I’m happy to be here. It feels like home.”

“They have my back, and I have theirs. That’s what community is.”

What a captivating time to be engaged in education research! In the last eighteen months the world made sweeping changes to the way schools operate in order to lessen the spread of disease. Governments around the world reacted to COVID-19 with variations on the same theme: keep your distance from other people and stay healthy to keep our whole community safe. Schools moved to and from eLearning platforms; retail shops reduced hours or closed; grocery stores and pharmacies reduced the capacity of their buildings, customers in any venue were asked to line up six feet apart, indoors and outdoors; people abroad were advised to head home; borders were closed. Trips were cancelled, weddings postponed, funerals suspended, toilet paper, hand sanitizer and Lysol wipes in high demand, and video-conferencing platforms like Google Hangouts and Zoom became professional work tools for educators. The impact has been felt world-wide and changes have continued for more than a year. As an educator, I am still fascinated with how quickly my professional community adapted to this new reality. Teachers are incredibly good at thinking on their feet and being flexible, but adapting rapidly during the shifting landscape of the COVID-19 pandemic required a whole new level of dexterity.

In this study, data was collected from the journals of two sets of Grade 6 and 7 participants in Spring and Fall of 2020 which provided insights into students' experiences of COVID-19 and the impact of social distancing measures on their communities. Data indicated that:

1. Social distancing influenced classroom community by placing constraints and limitations on interactions between students in separate cohorts and learning bubbles. Within individual classes and friend groups, social distancing measures deterred students from making physical contact. Students defined community as a place where people share interests and care for one another. Data indicated that students' school communities are important to them.
2. There was insufficient data to make any definitive claims about whether conceptions of place altered as school transitioned into an online learning track and back again. Observational data contained some comments about some students enjoying the independence and flexibility offered by remote learning. Other pieces of observational data indicated that some students struggled with learning from home. Students did make comments about being glad to be back when they returned to School in September 2020.
3. The act of journaling contributed to maintaining students' sense of school-as-community during a time of social/physical distancing in some capacity. While reflecting on COVID-19 and actively thinking about the impact of social distancing, students often voiced that the social distancing measures were becoming normalized as they got used to them. Students commented that they enjoyed activities that included dialogue or collaboration, indicating that they were important in maintaining a sense of community.
4. Students are reacting to the ongoing changes with varying levels of resilience. Students who were more independent and motivated to succeed found success with the flexible

asynchronous schedule while learning from home. They noted that the uncertainty of transition between school and home-based and fear or concern surrounding the unknowns of COVID-19 posed challenges, but the majority of students overcame those challenges.

Through this graduate work I have learned about the research process and there are many things I would do differently, if I could. Anecdotal evidence and teacher observations proved to be essential, thus, intentionally gathering regular observations from teachers and other community members would have been a great source of data and could be another avenue for further study. Upon completion of the study, the data - or lack thereof - indicated that a more focused and structured method of data collection would have been beneficial. Designing a series of collaborative interventions that included student reflections and detailed interviews about feelings of isolation, connectedness, community, and sense of place at school compared to home would have clarified understanding of student experiences during COVID-19 pandemic.

Wood & Judikis identified six essential elements that must be present for community to be exist:

1. a sense of common purpose(s) or interest(s) among members;
2. an assuming of mutual responsibility;
3. acknowledgement (at least among members) of interconnectedness;
4. mutual respect for individual differences;
5. mutual commitment to the well-being of each other; and
6. commitment by the members to the integrity and well-being of the group, that is, the community itself (Wood & Judikis, 2002, p. 12).

While this definition of community does not make any explicit reference to community members sharing the same place/space, the data collected from students and observed by their

teachers suggests that sharing a physical space is important to this adolescent School community. Creating the conditions to maintain community during a time of social distancing presented challenges. Creating opportunities for shared learning experiences - the shared purpose, assuming of mutual responsibility, and feeling of interconnectedness - while students studied from home proved difficult. Using synchronous sessions to do group activities with intention or engage in structured dialogue (textual and verbal) proved to be the best way to maintain community. Doing things together, finding common purpose through learning goals and meaningful service actions, allowed students to commit to take on some responsibility for the well-being of the community members. This in turn fostered a sense of interconnectedness that maintained the integrity of the community.

An important take-away from this case study is that the data for this particular sample indicates that relationships and connections are essential - especially in times of uncertainty. This study examined the impact of social distancing through an experiential, place-based education lens. With this pedagogy in mind, this framework posits that teachers have to intentionally create time and space for students to collaborate and build strong, honest connections. In addition, the importance of holding space for grief in combination, intentionally seeking silver linings, and making space for play cannot be understated. The data produced intriguing findings, however, more exploration is needed in this vein of research to better understand how students are coping with the long-term social distancing measures being used to keep the population safe.

Addendum: Pivoting into Practice - Next steps and Take-aways for Educators

A successful teacher is one who builds strong relationships; strong enough that a student can, in turn, build strong relationships with themselves and others (Carrington, 2019). I can liken

this action to a wave that rises and falls, cycle after cycle, or a mandala, made, painstakingly and with care, all the while the crafter knows it is impermanent.

Throughout my experience of pursuing graduate work in the midst of a pandemic, there has been an undercurrent of unease. An unsettling, looming, foreboding, brooding, *thing* in the background. Call it what you will. Sometimes it is subtle, barely there as life goes and flows on around and through that thing or skates along over it, avoiding and ignoring the nagging sensation of *but...* It is a quiet drone of unease like the incessant sound of fluorescent lights. It is the far-off wail of a siren. It is the tightness in a voice gone hoarse with saying “I’m fine.”

This anxious undercurrent is a force that is an exhausting presence. My data collection occurred in the tense initial stage of strict self-isolation last June and then during Stage 2 in British Columbia. The second set of data was gathered three months later, in September of 2020 and by that time the data show that students had adjusted to the new normal. Now we’re in a place of COVID fatigue that my data did not gather. This subtle undercurrent of exhausted, lingering fear is having a profound impact on people. I would argue that it is the feeling of “*dis*” as in dissonance, dislocated, dislodged, and a profound dislike. As a Newfoundlander, I can colloquially, and emphatically, say that “Dis sucks.”

This research, this capsule of primary sources and interpretations, exists because of a particular event in time. I am writing these findings in the spring and summer of 2021, a year and a half after the first reported case of COVID-19 in China (World Health Organization, 2020, December 18) and eighteen months since the epidemic was no longer in some far-off place, but a pandemic that had a direct impact on my life and the lives of the students I teach.

There are many new publications about the impact of the pandemic on essential workers but one in particular from the University of Winnipeg explores “Canadian teachers’ attitudes

toward change, efficacy, and burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic” (Sokal, L., Trudel, L. E., & Babb, J., 2020). Data was collected for this study at the same time I collected my first set of data at the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

During the time when our data were collected, teachers in Canada were adjusting to what many believed would be a short-term change, which has not proven to be the reality of COVID-19. Our findings showed that over the course of the last three months of the 2019–2020 school year, teachers became more efficacious at managing online behaviour of students and demonstrated a greater sense of accomplishment in their teaching as time went on. While these findings are encouraging, they are tempered by the finding that over this same time period, teachers maintained a perception that their stress exceeded their coping capacity, and likewise demonstrated progression on the pathway to burnout. It will be important to address teachers’ thoughts and feelings about remote teaching as well as their exhaustion if we are to mitigate their continued progression toward burnout (Sokal, L., Trudel, L. E., & Babb, J., 2020). This extended period of stress is coupled with a phenomenon that the media has termed “COVID fatigue” or exhaustion of people’s capacity to remain vigilant and be diligent about social distancing measures.

My professional notes from a Humanities department meeting on Thursday January 21st note that one colleague posted a picture of a wave and asked us how it relates to students and our roles as their teachers. One colleague said that the wave is their year with us. They said, “We only have them for a short time. We’re a blip on their radar. We build relationships with them but then they go on and beyond” (The School Humanities Department, 2021, p. 15). Another colleague saw “the ocean as education itself. The waves are students, pedagogies, administration, and colleagues coming and going” (The School Humanities Department, 2021, p. 15). All of my

colleagues have preferred topics, materials, methods but our combined effort will support the literacy development of our pupils and their growth into outstanding humans.

While there is currently an uneasy undercurrent disturbing the waters of education - and life in general as a result of the social distancing measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 - it is reassuring to know that these strange times are a ripple in the ocean of human experience. Perhaps, instead, we should refer to the COVID-19 pandemic as a rogue wave. It surprised us and forced the world to pivot quickly. Its wake has stirred up a great deal of debris for us to contemplate and navigate, however, some unalterable truths remain constant; The ocean, education, and humanity is immutable. While waves might roll and roar, always shifting and changing, they seek to return not necessarily to calm equilibrium, but to togetherness. Each individual droplet, dispersed, displaced, will seek and find ways to reconnect and regroup. Perhaps this is where the Findings of this thesis may lead - towards a style of teaching that supports community development so that current and future generations of learners know how to come together in the face of adversity and support one another through challenges.

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Appendix A: The IB Education

The IB Learner Profile

The IB Learner Profile places the student at the centre of an IB education.

The 10 attributes reflect the holistic nature of an IB education. They highlight the importance of nurturing dispositions such as curiosity and compassion, as well as developing knowledge and skills. They also highlight that, along with cognitive development, IB programmes are concerned with students' social, emotional and physical well-being, and with ensuring that students learn to respect themselves, others and the world around them.

IB educators help students to develop these attributes over the course of their IB education, and to demonstrate them in increasingly robust and sophisticated ways as they mature. The development of these attributes is the foundation of developing internationally minded students who can help to build a better world.

Attribute	Descriptor
Inquirers	<i>We nurture our curiosity, developing skills for inquiry and research. We know how to learn independently and with others. We learn with enthusiasm and sustain our love of learning throughout life.</i>
Knowledgeable	<i>We develop and use conceptual understanding, exploring knowledge across a range of disciplines. We engage with issues and ideas that have local and global significance.</i>
Thinkers	<i>We use critical and creative thinking skills to analyse and take responsible action on complex problems. We exercise initiative in making reasoned, ethical decisions.</i>
Communicators	<i>We express ourselves confidently and creatively in more than one language and in many ways. We collaborate effectively, listening carefully to the perspectives of other individuals and groups.</i>

<i>Principled</i>	<i>We act with integrity and honesty, with a strong sense of fairness and justice, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere. We take responsibility for our actions and their consequences.</i>
<i>Open-minded</i>	<i>We critically appreciate our own cultures and personal histories, as well as the values and traditions of others. We seek and evaluate a range of points of view, and we are willing to grow from the experience.</i>
<i>Caring</i>	<i>We show empathy, compassion and respect. We have a commitment to service, and we act to make a positive difference in the lives of others and in the world around us.</i>
<i>Risk-takers</i>	<i>We approach uncertainty with forethought and determination; we work independently and cooperatively to explore new ideas and innovative strategies. We are resourceful and resilient in the face of challenges and change.</i>
<i>Balanced</i>	<i>We understand the importance of balancing different aspects of our lives—intellectual, physical, and emotional—to achieve well-being for ourselves and others. We recognize our interdependence with other people and with the world in which we live.</i>
<i>Reflective</i>	<i>We thoughtfully consider the world and our own ideas and experience. We work to understand our strengths and weaknesses in order to support our learning and personal development.</i>

Through the development of these learner profile attributes, an IB education seeks to empower young people for a lifetime of learning, both independently and in collaboration with others.

ATLs

The acronym ATL(s) refer to the approaches to learning in the IB curriculum, specifically, the skills developed over the course of the program. The focus on approaches to learning is grounded in the belief that learning how to learn is fundamental to a student's education.

The five categories of interrelated skills aim to empower IB students of all ages to become self-regulated learners who know how to ask good questions, set effective goals, pursue their aspirations and have the determination to achieve them. These skills also help to support students' sense of agency, encouraging them to see their learning as an active and dynamic process.

The same five categories of skills span all IB programmes, with the skills then emphasized in developmentally appropriate ways within each programme. The five categories are:

- **thinking skills**—including areas such as critical thinking, creative thinking and ethical thinking
- **research skills**—including skills such as comparing, contrasting, validating and prioritizing information
- **communication skills**—including skills such as written and oral communication, effective listening, and formulating arguments
- **social skills**—including areas such as forming and maintaining positive relationships, listening skills, and conflict resolution
- **self-management skills**—including both organizational skills, such as managing time and tasks, and affective skills, such as managing state of mind and motivation.

The development of these skills plays a crucial role in supporting the IB's mission to develop active, compassionate and lifelong learners. Although these skills areas are presented as distinct categories, there are close links and areas of overlap between them, and the categories should be seen as interrelated.

Appendix B: Student Assent Spring 2020



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Faculty of Education

Department of Language & Literacy Education
2013 – 6445 University Blvd
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: (604) 822-5788
Fax: (604) 822-3154
Email: lled.educ@ubc.ca

Statement of Student's Assent

Title of the project: “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through (e)Journaling.”

Researchers: Dr. Kedrick James, Principal Investigator, and Ms. Darhen Sing, Co-Investigator, from the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. Ms. Darhen Sing is conducting this study to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Arts thesis and as part of a professional development program supported by the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia (ISABC). Please contact the researchers if you have any questions: _____.

Please **return this form to Ms. [Teacher 3]** within the next seven (7) calendar days, by Monday June 8th, 2020. _____

Please fill out the information below.

[Teacher 3] has explained to me what I am going to do and for what purpose. I understand the purpose of the activities that I am going to take part in and I agree to participate.

I assent / I do not assent (*circle one*) to sharing my journal entries, including posts, reflections, discussion threads, comments, recordings, and images.

I assent / I do not assent (*circle one*) to observations about me during journaling activities to be included in this study.

I assent / I do not assent (*circle one*) to sharing the self-recorded response to interview questions.

I do / I do not (*circle one*) want to receive a copy of the final paper. If ‘yes’, please include your email address below.

Printed name of the student

Student's Signature

Date

Protocol for Obtaining Student Assent

1. Explaining the Research

- **SCRIPT:**

“Hi, my name is [Teacher 3]. I’m a Special Education Assistant in Junior Kindergarten here at School. I am helping Ms. Sing do a project to learn more about how journaling can impact students’ sense of community during this time of social distancing. As a Grade 6 or 7 student you are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your perspective and generate knowledge that could help other students like you. This study will be taking place in June 2020. It has full support from our Head of School who called it “an example of lifelong learning.”

If you say “yes” to being part of this project with Ms. Sing you give her permission to use your journal entries, discussion posts, comments as well as self-recorded interview statements in her research. Would it be “okay” or not “okay” for her to use these for her research?” Please remember that you can withdraw your consent to be a part of the study at any time while the study is ongoing. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, you can withdraw at any time without consequence, and not participating will not affect your marks.

2. Collecting Artefacts

- **SCRIPT:**

“If you say “yes” you give Ms. Sing permission to copy your journal and study it. Sections of it, without any way of identifying that you wrote it, may be shared in a publication or presentation so that other teachers can learn from this research and do similar projects with their own students.

“If you say “yes” to being part of this project with ... Sing, you give her permission to save your journaling work and analyze the documents once school finishes for the summer. She won’t know who said yes to the study or who said no until after the final reporting period.”

3. Observations

- **SCRIPT:**

“If you say “yes” you give Ms. Sing permission to use the observations of you she makes during journaling activities. These observations, without any identifiers, may be shared in a publication or presentation so that other educators can learn from this research.”

“If you say “yes” to being part of this project with Ms. Sing, you give her permission to use her observations of your behaviour and your interactions with other community members (classmates and teachers). She won’t know who said yes to the study or who said no until after the final reporting period.”

“You can say ‘yes’ to letting Ms. Sing use your journals and ‘no’ to the observations if you wish.”

4. Self-recorded interview:

- **SCRIPT:**

“If you say yes, you will also have the opportunity to submit a recorded response to interview questions. These recordings may be videos or just audio recordings. Are you interested in submitting your self-recorded interviews for the study? “yes/no”

“You can say ‘yes’ to letting Ms. Sing use your journals and ‘no’ to submitting the interview, if you wish.”

5. How will my journaling work be used? What are the benefits?

- **SCRIPT:**

“If you consent to participating in this study, Ms. Sing will save copies of your journal work after she submits your final grades. She will remove your name from the documents to make them anonymous then analyze this data (your journal work) to look for themes and patterns.

“If you consent to participating in this study, Ms. Sing will use this data to write, and hopefully publish, at least one research paper. By participating in this study, you will help generate new knowledge that will be shared with the education community.”

“Ms. Sing’s final Thesis document will be available online through the University of British Columbia website. The data that will be made available include journal entries and sections of self-recorded interview transcripts with all identifiers removed. Once this thesis becomes available to the public you will not be able to withdraw your data.”

6. Closing Statement

- **SCRIPT:**

"This study supports the POD mission of nurturing outstanding humans who feel well and connected to their communities during this time of social distancing. Please be aware that in order for you to participate in this study, you must get your guardian's consent. One email will come to you and another email will go to your parents later today or tomorrow. Please make sure that you return this assent form and your guardian's consent form by Monday June 8th, 2020."

Appendix C: Guardian Consent Spring 2020



a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Faculty of Education

Department of Language & Literacy Education
2013 – 6445 University Blvd
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: (604) 822-5788
Fax: (604) 822-3154
Email: lled.educ@ubc.ca

May 30th, 2020

Informed Consent Form

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

We are writing to invite your child to take part in a research project on **“Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through (e)Journaling”** at your child’s school, conducted by Dr. Kedrick James, Principal Investigator _____, Ms. Darhen Sing, Co-Investigator _____ from the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia.

Context and Purpose

This study is to investigate how journaling (including reflective, dialogic, and collaborative forms) can maintain a sense of classroom community during a time of social distancing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Darhen Sing is conducting this study to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Arts thesis and as part of an Action Research professional development program endorsed, funded, and facilitated by the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia. She has the full support from School’s leadership team and Head of School, who called this study “an example of lifelong learning.”

In light of the social distancing practices in place, this study will be conducted remotely, using the School Online Learning Track (BOLT) framework to communicate with participants and collect data.

What are we doing in this study?

We are exploring the impact journaling has on students’ sense of community during a time of social distancing. This quick-response research study consists of gathering data about the impact of journaling interventions on Grade 6 and 7 students from the POD.

What will happen if your child agrees to participate in the study?

All POD students, whether in the study or not, will engage in the same journaling activities but research data will not be collected from students who do not wish to participate. If your child agrees, their work will be collected as data.

One of the multimodal journaling activities involves an activity where all students self-record a response to a series of interview questions about the journaling experience during Covid-19. These questions will prompt students to reflect on the journal writing tasks, the process, the skills they practiced, and their experience documenting and communicating their experiences with their community. They will have a choice to record their responses in either an audio or audio/video format, which will take approximately 20 minutes.

To remain impartial, Ms. Sing will designate a third-party assistant within the School community. The third party, [Teacher 3], is another teacher at School. She will introduce the study and collect consent and assent forms. Ms. Sing will not know who consented to participate until the end of the school year after grades have been submitted on June 11th, 2020.

One example of a journaling task would be writing about their experience using Google Hangouts to attend classes, compared to classes in the school building, or outside on a field trip in the community. One example of an interview question would then ask them to reflect and elaborate on the impact of writing a journal entry and how it helped them feel connected to the community.

How will the data be used and how will the results of this study be shared?

Data from journals, recordings, and researcher's observations of student behaviour and interactions with their community and place will be analysed using qualitative methods. Ms. Sing will study the data, looking for patterns and common themes. She will attempt to collate and cultivate a narrative of the adolescent experience of social distancing and the impact on the school community they felt during this global pandemic. Participants will have the opportunity to check any findings before they are shared. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time. The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. Participants and their families will have an opportunity to receive a copy of the thesis abstract. Findings may also be shared within the education community during professional development workshops and conferences.

Is there any risk involved in participating in this study?

We do not think there is anything in the study that could cause harm. The journal tasks are designed to promote the growth of students' observational and reflective skills, attempting to foster a sense of community while practicing social distancing. Journaling activities will be done as part of normal learning activities that all the students are doing, not only those who agree to participate in the study. Please let one of the investigators know if you have any concerns.

What are the benefits of participating?

Participation in this study will contribute valuable data that could lead to greater public understanding of journal writing, social-emotional learning, eLearning, and distance learning. Participation could also contribute to the development and implementation of new teaching and learning practices. Participants have the unique opportunity to create primary sources that will be analysed and included in forthcoming academic publications.

How will my child's identity be protected?

Your child's privacy will be respected. Data will not be collected from students who decline to participate. All documents used in the study will be identified only by code number to anonymize all data and it kept in a locked filing cabinet and on an encrypted hard drive. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Information that discloses your child's identity will not be released without your consent, unless required by law. At any point in the study, if the researcher becomes aware that there has been abuse and/or neglect of a child (or that there is a risk of such occurring in the future) please be advised that the researcher must, by law, report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Conflict of interest:

Darhen Sing teaches and advises the Grade 6 and 7 students. This conflict of interest will be mitigated by having a third party, [Teacher 3] invite students to participate and collect consent/assent forms. This third party is a member of the School staff who is not directly involved in the daily routines of the Grade 6 and 7 class and who will not likely teach them in the future. Ms. Sing will not know who participated until June 11th when final report card comments and grades have been submitted.

A note about open access:

Ms. Sing's final Master's Thesis document will be available on UBC's cIRcle digital repository which provides open access to research materials to anyone on the web. The data that will be made available include journal entries and sections of self-recorded interview transcripts with all identifiers removed. Once this thesis becomes available to the public participants will not be able to withdraw their data. Findings that will be publicly available will be de-identified. We do not consider this a potential for risk now or in the future because all personal identifiers will be removed from the data and subsequent findings.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study? No.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact either the co-investigator or the principal investigator. Their names and contact information are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

If you wish to ask questions anonymously, please contact [Teacher 3] and she will anonymize and pass on the question to the researchers.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at _____ or if long distance e-mail _____ or call toll free _____

Please **return this form to** _____ within the next seven (7) calendar days, by Monday June 8th, 2020

Statement of Informed Consent
(copy to keep)

Please fill out the information below. Be sure to keep pages 1-4 for your own records and to return a signed copy of page 5 (Statement of Informed Consent) to Ms. [Teacher 3] as soon as possible.

I have read and understand the attached description of the project entitled: “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through (e)Journaling” I understand that, even if I consent to my child’s participation in the study, **I can opt them out of any part at any time.** I have kept the description of the project and a copy of the permission form (Statement of Informed Consent).

I consent / I do not consent (*circle one*) to my child sharing their journal entries, including posts, reflections, discussion threads, comments, recordings, and images.

I consent / I do not consent (*circle one*) to observations about my child during journaling activities to be included in this study.

I consent / I do not consent (*circle one*) to my child’s self-recorded interview being used for the research study.

I do / I do not (*circle one*) want to receive a copy of the thesis abstract. If ‘yes’, please include your email address below.

Printed name of the child

Ms. Darhen Sing (Advisor).

Printed grade and name of your child’s teacher

Parent’s or Guardian’s Signature

Date

Printed name of the parent or guardian signing above

Email address of the parent or guardian signing above

Statement of Informed Consent
(copy to return to researcher)

Please fill out the information below. Be sure to keep pages 1-4 for your own records and to return a signed copy of page 5 (Statement of Informed Consent) to Ms. [Teacher 3] as soon as possible.

I have read and understand the attached description of the project entitled: “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing.” I understand that, even if I consent to my child’s participation in the study, **I can opt them out of any part at any time**. I have kept the description of the project and a copy of the permission form (Statement of Informed Consent).

I consent / I do not consent (*circle one*) to my child sharing their journal entries, including posts, reflections, discussion threads, comments, recordings, and images.

I consent / I do not consent (*circle one*) to observations about my child during journaling activities to be included in this study.

I consent / I do not consent (*circle one*) to my child’s self-recorded interview being used for the research study.

I do / I do not (*circle one*) want to receive a copy of the thesis abstract. If ‘yes’, please include your email address below.

Printed name of the child

Ms. Darhen Sing (Advisor).

Printed grade and name of your child’s teacher

Parent’s or Guardian’s Signature

Date

Printed name of the parent or guardian signing above

Email address of the parent or guardian signing above.

Appendix D1: Student Assent Fall 2020



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Faculty of Education

Department of Language & Literacy Education
2013 – 6445 University Blvd
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: (604) 822-5788
Fax: (604) 822-3154
Email: lled.educ@ubc.ca

Statement of Student's Assent

Title of the project: “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through journaling.”

Researchers: Dr. Kedrick James, Principal Investigator, _____ and Ms. Darhen Sing, Co-Investigator, _____, from the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. Ms. Darhen Sing is conducting this study to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Arts thesis and as part of a professional development program supported by the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia (ISABC). Please contact the researchers if you have any questions: _____

Please **return this form of the Google Form to Ms. Darhen Sing** within the next seven (7) calendar days, by September 21st, 2020 _____

Please fill out the information below.

Ms. Darhen Sing has explained to me what I am going to do and for what purpose. I understand the purpose of the activities that I am going to take part in and I agree to participate.

I assent / I do not assent (*circle one*) to sharing my journal entries, including posts, reflections, discussion threads, comments, recordings, and images.

I assent / I do not assent (*circle one*) to observations about me during journaling activities to be included in this study.

I assent / I do not assent (*circle one*) to sharing the self-recorded response to interview questions.

I do / I do not (*circle one*) want to receive a copy of the final paper. If ‘yes’, please include your email address below.

Printed name of the student

Student's Signature

Date

Protocol for Obtaining Student Assent

1. Explaining the Research

- **SCRIPT:**

“Hi, my name is Ms. Darhen Sing. I teach Language and Literature, and Individuals and Societies to Grade 8 and 9. I’m doing a project to learn more about how journaling can impact students’ sense of community during this time of social distancing. As a Grade 6 or 7 student you are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your perspective and generate knowledge that could help other students like you. This study began in June 2020 and I want to extend it for another 8 weeks and get more people involved. It has full support from our Head of School who called it “an example of lifelong learning.”

If you say “yes” to being part of this project with me you give her permission to use your journal entries, discussion posts, comments as well as self-recorded interview statements in her research. Would it be “okay” or not “okay” for her to use these for her research?” Please remember that you can withdraw your consent to be a part of the study at any time while the study is ongoing. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, you can withdraw at any time without consequence, and not participating will not affect your marks.

2. Collecting Artifacts

- **SCRIPT:**

“If you say “yes” you give me permission to copy your journal and study it. Sections of it, without any way of identifying that you wrote it, may be shared in a publication or presentation so that other teachers can learn from this research and do similar projects with their own students.

“If you say “yes” to being part of this project, you give me permission to save your journaling work and analyze the documents.”

3. Observations

- **SCRIPT:**

“If you say “yes” you give me permission to use the observations of you she makes during journaling activities. These observations, without any identifiers, may be shared in a publication or presentation so that other educators can learn from this research.”

“If you say “yes” to being part of this project, you give me permission to use her observations of your behaviour and your interactions with other community members (classmates and teachers). She won’t know who said yes to the study or who said no until after the final reporting period.”

“You can say ‘yes’ to letting me use your journals and ‘no’ to the observations if you wish.”

4. Self-recorded interview:

- **SCRIPT:**

“If you say yes, you will also have the opportunity to submit a recorded response to interview questions. These recordings may be videos or just audio recordings. Are you interested in submitting your self-recorded interviews for the study? “yes/no”

“You can say ‘yes’ to letting me use your journals and ‘no’ to submitting the interview, if you wish.”

5. How will my journaling work be used? What are the benefits?

- **SCRIPT:**

“If you consent to participating in this study, I will save copies of your journal work after she submits your final grades. She will remove your name from the documents to make them anonymous then analyze this data (your journal work) to look for themes and patterns.

“If you consent to participating in this study, I will use this data to write, and hopefully publish, at least one research paper. By participating in this study, you will help generate new knowledge that will be shared with the education community.”

“My final Thesis document will be available online through the University of British Columbia website. The data that will be made available include journal entries and sections of self-recorded interview transcripts with all identifiers removed. Once this thesis becomes available to the public you will not be able to withdraw your data.”

6. Closing Statement

- **SCRIPT:**

“This study supports the POD mission of nurturing outstanding humans who feel well and connected to their communities during this time of social distancing. Please be aware that in order for you to participate in this study, you must get your guardian’s consent. Please make

sure that you return this assent form and your guardian's consent form to me directly by September 21st, 2020."

Appendix D2: Student Assent Fall 2020 Google Form

Statement of Student Assent - “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through (e)Journaling”

Researchers: Dr. Kedrick James, Principal Investigator, and Ms Darhen Sing, Co-Investigator, from the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. Ms Darhen Sing is conducting this study to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Arts thesis and as part of a professional development program supported by the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia (ISABC). Please contact the researchers if you have any questions:

_____ and _____.

Please return this form to Ms Darhen Sing within the next seven (7) calendar days, by September 21st, 2020. _____.

Protocol for Obtaining Student Assent

1. Explaining the Research

SCRIPT:

“Hi, my name is Ms Darhen Sing. I teach Language and Literature, and Individuals and Societies to Grade 8 and 9. I’m doing a project to learn more about how journaling can impact students’ sense of community during this time of social distancing. As a Grade 6 or 7 student you are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your perspective and generate knowledge that could help other students like you. This study began in June 2020 and I want to extend it for another 8 weeks and get more people involved. It has full support from Ms McCulla who called it “an example of lifelong learning.” If you say “yes” to being part of this project, you give me permission to use your journal entries, discussion posts, comments as well as self-recorded interview statements in my research. Would it be “okay” or not “okay” to use these for research?” Please remember that you can withdraw your consent to be a part of the study at any time while the study is ongoing. You do not have to participate if you do not want to, you can withdraw at any time without consequence, and not participating will not affect your marks.

2. Collecting Artifacts

SCRIPT:

“If you say “yes” you give me permission to copy your journal and study it. Sections of it,

without any way of identifying that you wrote it, may be shared in a publication or presentation so that other teachers can learn from this research and do similar projects with their own students.

"If you say "yes" to being part of this project, you give me permission to save your journaling work and analyze the documents."

3. Observations

SCRIPT:

"If you say "yes" you give me permission to use the observations of you I make during journaling activities. These observations, without any identifiers, may be shared in a publication or presentation so that other educators can learn from this research."

"If you say "yes" to being part of this project, you give me permission to use my observations of your behaviour and your interactions with other community members (classmates and teachers)."

"You can say 'yes' to letting me use your journals and 'no' to the observations if you wish."

4. Self-recorded interview:

SCRIPT:

"If you say yes, you will also have the opportunity to submit a recorded response to interview questions. These recordings may be videos or just audio recordings. Are you interested in submitting your self-recorded interviews for the study? "yes/no"

"You can say 'yes' to letting me use your journals and 'no' to submitting the interview, if you wish."

5. How will my journaling work be used? What are the benefits?

SCRIPT:

"If you consent to participating in this study, I will save copies of your journal work. I will remove your name from the documents to make them anonymous then analyze this data (your journal work) to look for themes and patterns.

"If you consent to participating in this study, I will use this data to write, and hopefully publish, at least one research paper. By participating in this study, you will help generate new knowledge that will be shared with the education community."

"My final Thesis document will be available online through the University of British Columbia website. The data that will be made available include journal entries and sections of self-recorded interview transcripts with all identifiers removed. Once this thesis becomes available to the public you will not be able to withdraw your data."

6. Closing Statement

SCRIPT:

"This study supports the POD mission of nurturing outstanding humans who feel well and connected to their communities during this time of social distancing. Please be aware that in order for you to participate in this study, you must get your guardian's consent. Please make sure that you return this assent form and your guardian's consent form to me directly by September 21st, 2020."

Email *

Your email

Ms Darhen Sing used the script above to explain to me what I am going to do and for what purpose. I understand the purpose of the activities that I am going to take part in and I agree to participate. *

☐ Yes

☐ No

My full name is: *

Your answer

I am in Grade: *

☐ Grade 6

☐ Grade 7

I assent / I do not assent to sharing my journal entries, including posts, reflections, discussion threads, comments, recordings, and images. *

- ☐ I assent
- ☐ I do not assent

I assent / I do not assent to observations about me during journaling activities to be included in this study. *

- ☐ I assent
- ☐ I do not assent

I assent / I do not assent to sharing the self-recorded response to interview questions. *

- ☐ I assent
- ☐ I do not assent

I do / I do not want to receive a copy of the final paper. If 'yes', please include your email address below. *

- ☐ I assent
- ☐ I do not assent

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

Appendix E1: Guardian Consent Fall 2020



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
Faculty of Education

Department of Language & Literacy Education
2013 – 6445 University Blvd
Vancouver, B.C. Canada V6T 1Z2
Tel: (604) 822-5788
Fax: (604) 822-3154
Email: lled.educ@ubc.ca

September 14th, 2020

Informed Consent Form

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

We are writing to invite your child to take part in a research project on **“Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through journaling”** at your child’s school, conducted by Dr. Kedrick James, Principal Investigator and Ms. Darhen Sing, Co-Investigator from the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. This study began in June 2020 and researchers would like to extend and expand the study until November 20th, 2020.

Context and Purpose

This study is to investigate how journaling can maintain a sense of classroom community during a time of social distancing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ms. Darhen Sing is conducting this study to fulfil the requirements for a Master of Arts thesis and as part of an Action Research professional development program endorsed, funded, and facilitated by the Independent Schools Association of British Columbia. She has the full support from the School’s leadership team and Head of School, who called this study “an example of lifelong learning.”

In light of the social distancing practices in place, this study will be conducted remotely, using the School Online Learning Track (BOLT) framework to communicate with participants and collect data.

What are we doing in this study?

We are exploring the impact journaling has on students’ sense of community during a time of social distancing. This quick-response research study consists of gathering data about the impact of journaling interventions on Grade 6 and 7 students from the POD.

What will happen if your child agrees to participate in the study?

All POD students, whether in the study or not, will engage in the same journaling activities but research data will not be collected from students who do not wish to participate. If your child agrees, their work will be collected as data.

One of the multimodal journaling activities involves an activity where all students self-record a response to a series of interview questions about the journaling experience during COVID-19. These questions will prompt students to reflect on the journal writing tasks, the process, the skills they practiced, and their experience documenting and communicating their experiences with their community. They will have a choice to record their responses in either an audio or audio/video format, which will take approximately 20 minutes.

One example of a journaling task would be writing about their experience using Google Hangouts to attend classes, compared to classes in the school building, or outside on a field trip in the community. One example of an interview question would then ask them to reflect and elaborate on the impact of writing a journal entry and how it helped them feel connected to the community.

How will the data be used and how will the results of this study be shared?

Data from journals, recordings, and researcher's observations of student behaviour and interactions with their community and place will be analysed using qualitative methods. Ms. Sing will study the data, looking for patterns and common themes. She will attempt to collate and cultivate a narrative of the adolescent experience of social distancing and the impact on the school community they felt during this global pandemic. Participants will have the opportunity to check any findings before they are shared. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time. The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. Participants and their families will have an opportunity to receive a copy of thesis abstract. Findings may also be shared within the education community during professional development workshops and conferences.

Is there any risk involved in participating in this study?

We do not think there is anything in the study that could cause harm. The journal tasks are designed to promote the growth of students' observational and reflective skills, attempting to foster a sense of community while practicing social distancing. Journaling activities will be done as part of normal learning activities that all the students are doing, not only those who agree to participate in the study. Please let one of the investigators know if you have any concerns.

What are the benefits of participating?

Participation in this study will contribute valuable data that could lead to greater public understanding of journal writing, social-emotional learning, eLearning, and distance learning. Participation could also contribute to the development and implementation of new teaching and learning practices. Participants have the unique opportunity to create primary sources that will be analysed and included in forthcoming academic publications.

How will my child's identity be protected?

Your child's privacy will be respected. Data will not be collected from students who decline to participate. All documents used in the study will be identified only by code number to anonymize all data and it kept in a locked filing cabinet and on an encrypted hard drive. Participants will not be identified by name in any reports of the completed study. Information that discloses your child's identity will not be released without your consent, unless required by law. At any point in the study, if the researcher becomes aware that there has been abuse and/or neglect of a child (or that there is a risk of such occurring in the future) please be advised that the researcher must, by law, report this information to the appropriate authorities.

Conflict of interest:

Ms. Sing is not teaching the Grade 6 and 7 students this year, therefore, there is no conflict of interest.

A note about open access:

Ms. Sing's final Master's Thesis document will be available on UBC's cIRcle digital repository which provides open access to research materials to anyone on the web. The data that will be made available include journal entries and sections of self-recorded interview transcripts with all identifiers removed. Once this thesis becomes available to the public participants will not be able to withdraw their data. Findings that will be publicly available will be de-identified. We do not consider this a potential for risk now or in the future because all personal identifiers will be removed from the data and subsequent findings.

Is there any compensation for participating in this study?

No.

Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact either the co-investigator or the principal investigator. Their names and contact information are listed at the top of the first page of this form.

If you wish to ask questions anonymously, please contact [Teacher 3] and she will anonymize and pass on the question to the researchers.

Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at _____ or if long distance e-mail _____ or call toll free _____.

Please **return this form or the Google Form to Ms. Darhen Sing** within the next seven (7) calendar days, by September 21st, 2020.

Appendix E2: Guardian Consent Fall 2020 Google Form

Informed Guardian Consent - “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through (e)Journaling”

Dear Parent(s) or Guardian(s),

We are writing to invite your child to take part in a research project on “Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through (e)Journaling” at your child’s school, conducted by Dr. Kedrick James, Principal Investigator (email), Ms Darhen Sing, Co-Investigator (email), from the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. This study began in June 2020 and researchers would like to extend and expand the study until November 20th, 2020.

Please complete within the next seven (7) calendar days, by September 21st, 2020.

* Required

Please fill out this field.

Email *

Your email

I have read and understand the attached description of the project entitled: "Maintaining Community in a Time of Social Distancing through (e)Journaling" I understand that, even if I consent to my child's participation in the study, I can opt them out of any part at any time. I have kept the description of the project and a copy of the permission form (Statement of Informed Consent). *

☐ Yes

☐ No

My child's full name is: *

Your answer

My full name is: *

Your answer

I consent / I do not consent to my child sharing their journal entries, including posts, reflections, discussion threads, comments, recordings, and images. *

☐ I consent

☐ I do not consent

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to observations about my child during journaling activities to be included in this study. *

- ☐ I consent
- ☐ I do not consent

I consent / I do not consent (circle one) to my child's self-recorded interview being used for the research study. *

- ☐ I consent
- ☐ I do not consent

I do / I do not (circle one) want to receive a copy of the thesis abstract. If 'yes', please include your email address below. *

- ☐ I consent
- ☐ I do not consent

A copy of your responses will be emailed to the address you provided.

Submit

[Clear form](#)

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

Appendix F: Sample of Journaling Prompts

Journal Task #1 (Gr 6)

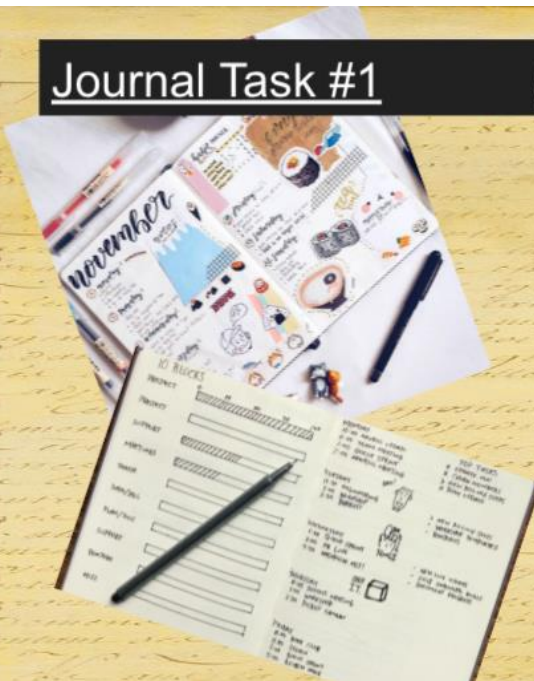
September 17th, 2020



What does this artwork make you think of?

Journal Task #1

September 14th, 2020



How does it feel to be (back) at Brockton?

- First impressions
- New safety measures
- New classes
- Excited? Worried?
- Compare this year and last year

Brainstorm: Make lists, draw pictures...

Aim for 5 full sentences minimum.

Journal Task #2 (G7) September 21st, 2020



What is *friendship* to you?

Use the jot notes you took in Ms MacRae's class about friendship to help develop and extend your thinking.

Have you or a friend ever faced **conflict**? How did you overcome it?

Journal Task #4 (Gr 6) October 15th, 2020

What are the Approaches To Learning (ATL) Skills?

Explain what each of these words means to you:

- Social
- Communication
- Self-management
- Research
- Thinking



Make as many connections as you can!