

Project 316
February 2022

K-12 Saskatchewan Distance Education:

Digging Deeper Into 21st Century Classrooms During a Pandemic

Kelsey Shields

This research was partially funded through a grant from the McDowell Foundation. However, the points of view and opinions expressed in project documents are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Foundation.

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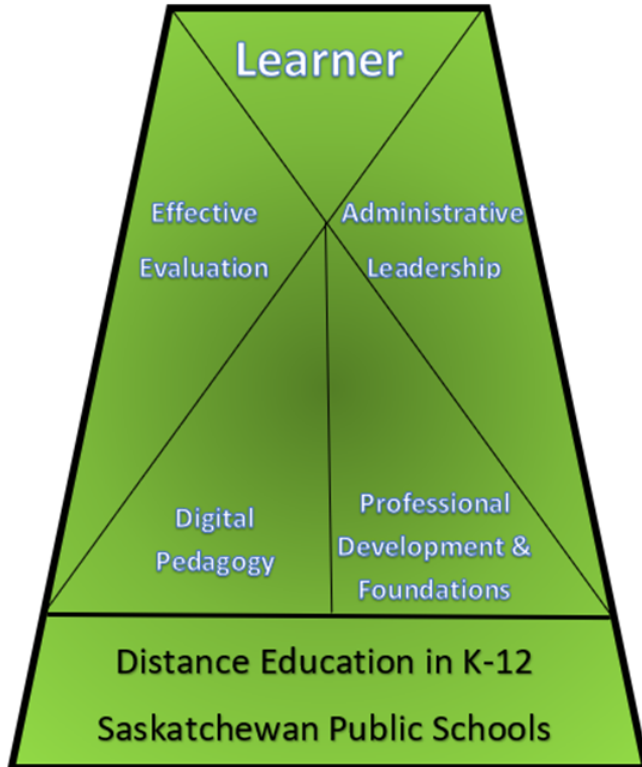
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K-12 SASKATCHEWAN DISTANCE EDUCATION: DIGGING DEEPER INTO 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOMS DURING A PANDEMIC

Kelsey Shields - Athabasca University; Good Spirit School Division

January 2022



PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION:

How do public school educators in Saskatchewan K-12 schools perceive the state of distance education in the province during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic?

RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS:

1. What are the positive/valuable experiences of public educators in K-12 distance education in Saskatchewan during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. What are the barriers public educators in K-12 distance education in Saskatchewan are facing during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What are possible steps for development that can improve access and opportunities within the formal education system for distance education in Saskatchewan?
4. What are possible steps for future research that can improve access and opportunities within the formal education system for distance education in Saskatchewan?

Inside the Report

RESEARCH METHODS

What strategies, processes, and techniques were used in the collection of data? p. 1-2

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ACTION PLAN

What steps need to be carried out to improve K-12 distance education in Saskatchewan? p. 5

FUTURE RESEARCH

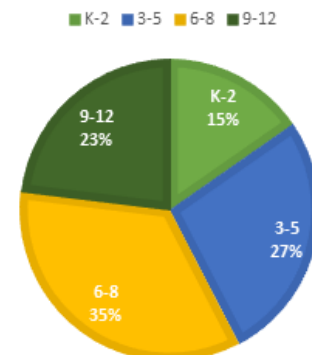
Building on this research, what areas of future research are suggested? p. 6

RESEARCH METHODS

In this pragmatic exploratory qualitative study, insider action research was used to gather the voices of 16 K-12 Saskatchewan public school educators through email interviews. Field notes and personal positionality also added to the collection of data.

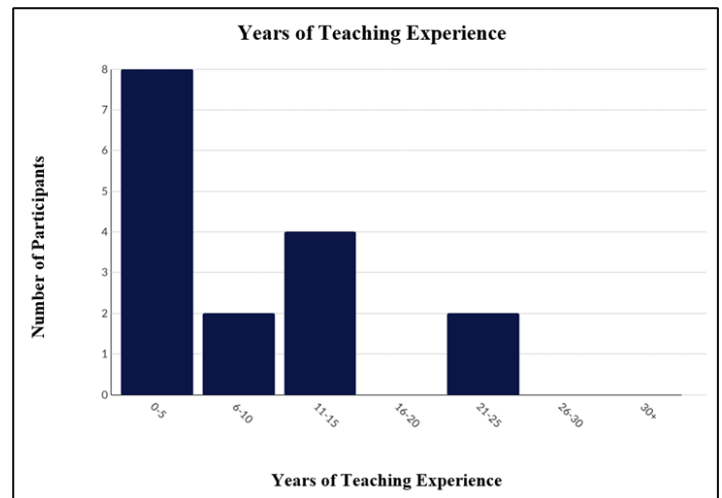
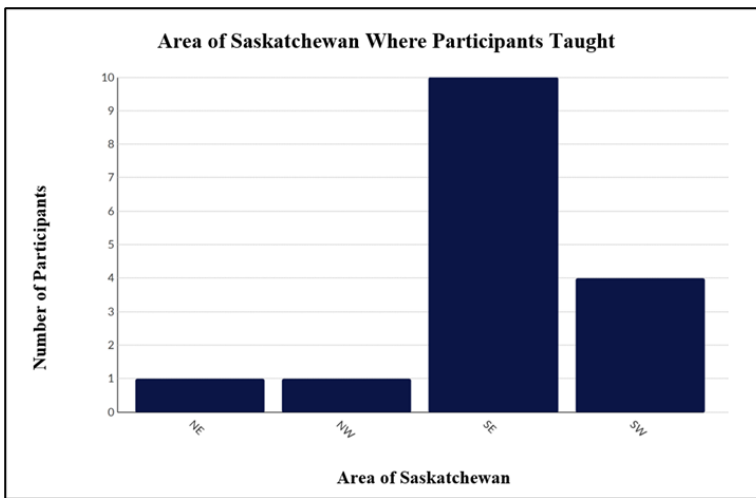
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GRADE TAUGHT BY PARTICIPANTS

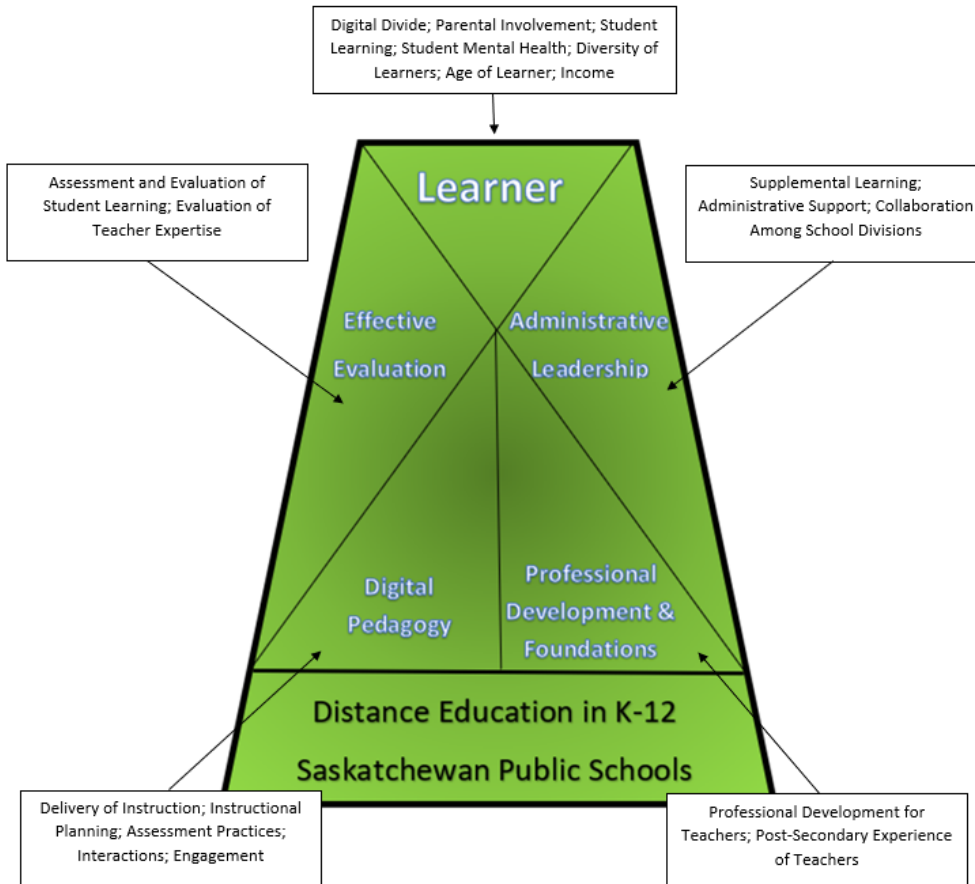


RESEARCH METHODS CONT.

The grade levels taught by participants, the area of Saskatchewan where participants taught, as well as their years of teaching experience were noted descriptors.



FINDINGS



The researcher's **Conceptual Framework** was used to identify the five main areas (**Learner, Administrative Leadership, Professional Development and Foundations, Digital Pedagogy, and Effective Evaluation**) that intersect and influence the quality of distance education in Saskatchewan.

The second phase of the Conceptual Framework was to organize, analyze, and interpret participant responses creating **emerging themes**. These themes emerged from identifying participant responses and their frequencies.

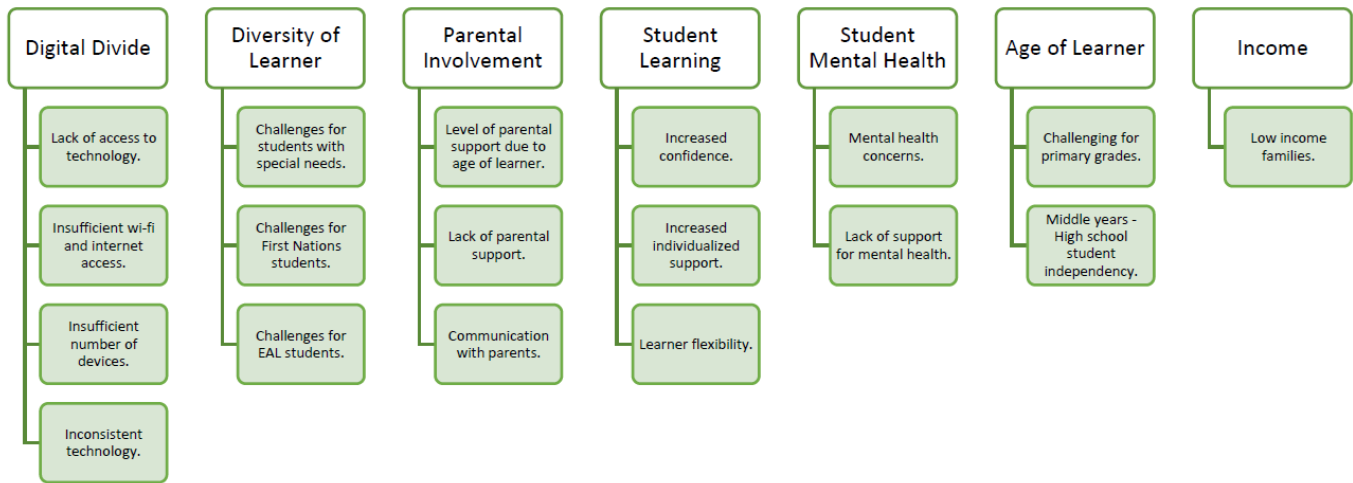
The themes that emerged are represented in this graphic. Each of the themes are further broken down into **sub-themes**.

*"The pandemic has widened the gap between students with means and opportunity and those without."
- Participant 3*

FINDINGS CONT.

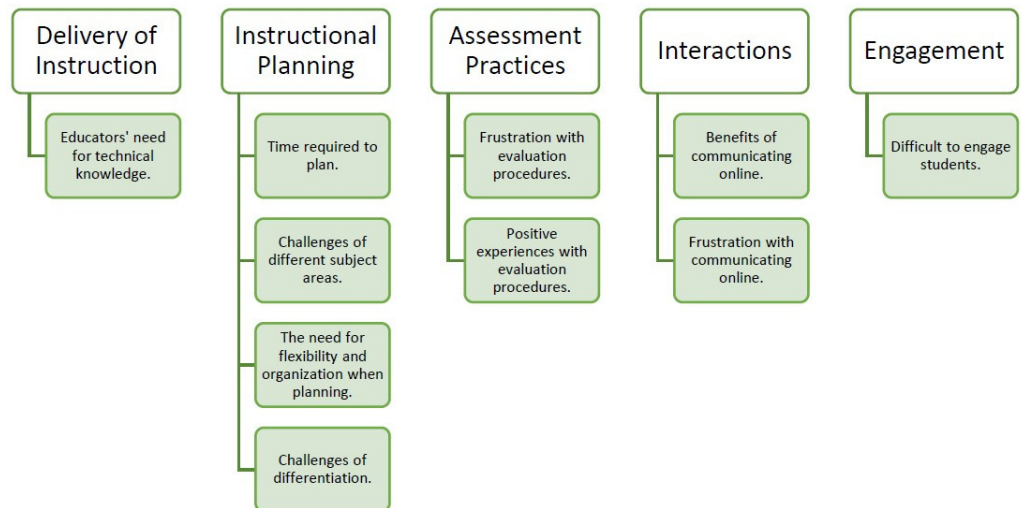
The Learner, the central focus on the Conceptual Framework, not surprisingly was referenced more than any other theme. The sub-themes that emerged are represented below, describing descriptors and barriers faced by the Saskatchewan K-12 Learner during the pandemic.

The Learner



Digital Pedagogy

The second most-discussed theme represented was **Digital pedagogy**. Participants identified the many challenges they had in teaching in an online environment, but also identified some of the positive changes the digital world provided.



*"It was hard enough to engage students with in-person learning, it is easily ten-times harder behind a screen."
- Participant 1*

*"Another factor was that the distance learning in the spring of 2020 was 'optional' for students and we were not using their work during this time for formal evaluation purposes. If this was to change and activities were being used for formal evaluations on report cards, I would also feel less confident in distance teaching."
- Participant 32*

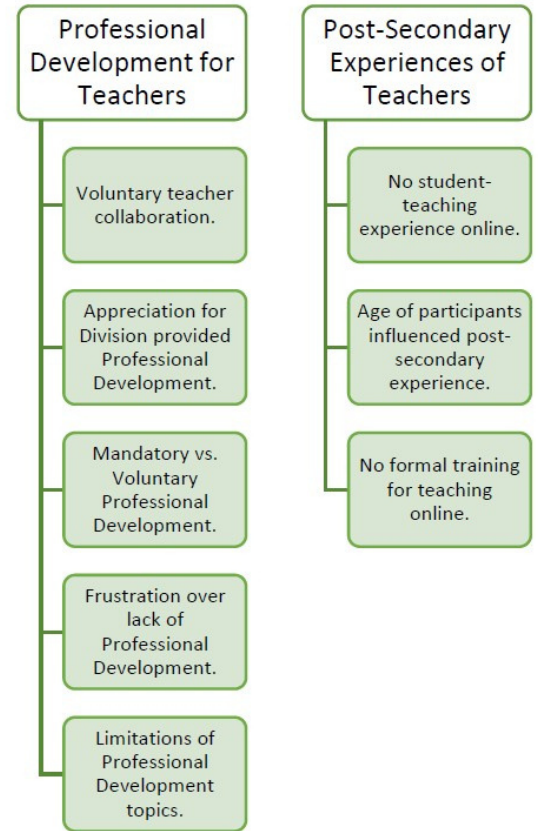
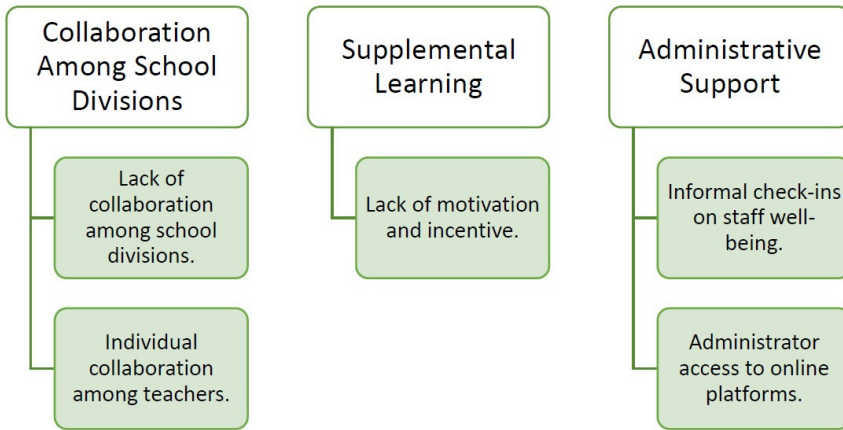
FINDINGS CONT.

Professional Development & Foundations

Two themes emerged within **Professional Development & Foundations** focusing on the Professional Development and the Post-Secondary Experiences of Teachers.

Administrative Leadership produced three themes focusing on the Collaboration Among School Divisions, the negative effects of Supplemental Learning, and Administrative Support.

Administrative Leadership

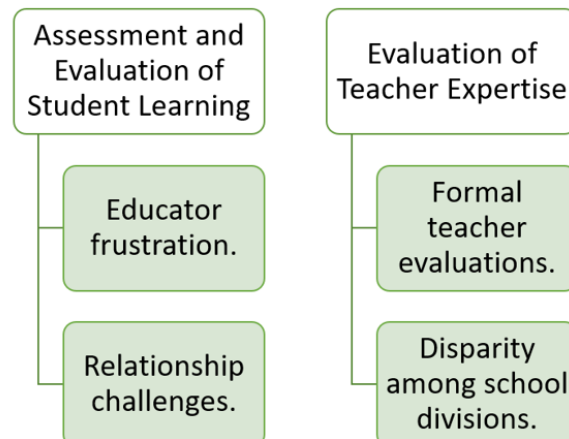


"Overall, the majority of students had low motivation to learn while online. In my opinion, I believe this was largely because grades were frozen as of March 17th, 2020, and online learning was not made mandatory."
 - Participant 17

"They would do daily or minimum weekly check-ins with each of us staff members (including EAs, administration assistants, etc.) to ensure that we were taking care of ourselves first and foremost, that we knew that we weren't bad teachers, and to see if we needed anything."
 - Participant 9

Effective Evaluation was the least discussed component within the Conceptual Framework. Two themes emerged including Assessment and Evaluation of Student Learning, and Evaluation of Teacher Expertise.

Effective Evaluation



ACTION PLAN

As the barriers far outnumbered the valuable experiences, there is room for development that can help to improve access and opportunities within the formal education system for distance education in Saskatchewan. We can learn from the pandemic experience and work towards a positive change. The pandemic has shone a light on distance education in our province and it is the job of those of us in education to take this opportunity to move forward and continue to build the education pillar stronger in Saskatchewan, not only for current students but for the students of the future as technology will only grow stronger with time.

These five **Action Plan** items represent necessary changes that need to occur to help strengthen distance education in Saskatchewan.

“Most teachers were trained in a way to successfully teach students in a classroom. Most teachers did not receive formal training for teaching students online. Due to the pandemic, many teachers were forced to teach their students online.”
- Participant 3

K-12 SASKATCHEWAN DISTANCE EDUCATION: DIGGING DEEPER INTO 21ST CENTURY CLASSROOMS DURING A PANDEMIC

How do public school educators in Saskatchewan K - 12 schools perceive the state of distance education in the province?

ACTION PLAN ITEMS...

DECREASE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

The lack of access to technology, insufficient wi-fi and Internet access, insufficient numbers of devices for multi-student homes, and inconsistent technology are hurdles.



PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND RELEVANT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR EDUCATORS



Provide professional learning for educators through networking (PLCs, COP, MOOCs) to address digital pedagogy and unique obstacles of online learning.

INCREASE POST-SECONDARY EXPERIENCES FOR NEW EDUCATORS

Developing courses that address digital pedagogy and providing pre-service teaching experiences in distance education will help build capacity in new educators.



EDUCATE EDUCATIONAL LEADERS ABOUT THE COMPLEX WORLD OF ONLINE LEARNING



Ensure educational leaders have the knowledge and model behaviour that empowers teachers to provide quality distance education.

PROVIDE PARENTS WITH OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT DISTANCE EDUCATION

Developing programs and resources to educate parents will provide interested families with an opportunity to grow and strengthen their ability to support their children online.



Learner Views



In future research, repeat with a focus on the learner. Shift the research questions to focus on the experiences and voices of the K-12 students of Saskatchewan.

Parental Perception



Exploring parental perception and the impact the pandemic had on the lives of parents is an area of future research.

2020-21 DE Educators

Explore the voices of educators who were involved in distance education during the 2020-21 school year. The removal of supplemental learning could provide a perspective shift.



TRC's Calls to Action

Using distance education to respond to the TRC's Calls to Action is an opportunity to expand the need to educate and commitment to implement the recommendations of the TRC.



FUTURE RESEARCH

This study worked to present the **voices of Saskatchewan teachers** during a very challenging time in education. Being a teacher in Saskatchewan during the COVID-19 pandemic threw educators into what many felt was an unstable, online environment. One area that may be explored in future research would be to repeat with a **focus on the learner** as opposed to educators. By shifting the research questions to focus on the experiences and voices of the learners, a different insight would be given into the experience of learning online during the COVID-19 pandemic. The voice of the learner has the potential to add a variety of themes to what has already been identified.

Parents of children in K-12 experienced the stressors of the pandemic in a variety of ways. COVID-19 impacted parents of school-aged children throughout the multiple challenging roles they played. Exploring parental perception and the impact the pandemic had on the lives of parents is an area of future research. Adding a voice to parental stressors and coping skills will help to provide a different viewpoint of how the pandemic has placed a burden on the people of Saskatchewan.

Another future research area to explore would be to delve into the **voices of educators** who were involved in distance education during the **2020-21 school year** where many schools provided mandatory distance education opportunities based on the threat of the COVID-19 virus. The removal of supplemental learning and movement into mandatory online learning could provide a shift in perspective from educators who have already had the experience with supplemental learning.

Researching further into how the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* can be met using distance education is another possible future research topic to explore. Using distance education to respond to the Calls to Action is an opportunity to expand the need to educate and commit to implementing the recommendations of the TRC. Using a challenging time in education during a pandemic to gather the information that has the potential to have a positive, profound effect on the future of Saskatchewan students is a valued research opportunity.

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