Introduction: Graduate Students Navigating the COVID-19 Pandemic

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The COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying restrictions and challenges impacted everyone differently. In addition to universal stressors like job security, childcare, and health worries, graduate students faced additional pandemic-related challenges related to our roles as student-researchers. The combination of these obstacles (e.g., a sudden shift to working from home, disconnecting from colleagues, limits on in-person data collection, reduced access to important research tools and spaces) led to notable disruptions in research for over 75% of Canadian graduate students (Suart et al., 2021; Toronto Science Policy Network, 2020). These circumstances can be devastating in graduate school, where conducting research and generating publications are often crucial to immediate and future success, such as financial security or obtaining a job after graduation. It is thus unsurprising that the vast majority of graduate students have experienced a decline in their mental health (Chirikov et al., 2020; Toronto Science Policy Network, 2020) and a growing number are experiencing financial instability (Zahneis, 2020), exacerbating their already precarious situations. However, in the face of what is clearly an incredibly challenging situation, graduate students have showcased their resourcefulness and resilience (Brammer et al., 2020). Students adapted to telecommunication to maintain their productivity, supported one another through engaging in virtual activities like online yoga, poetry and cooking, and strived to find the "silver linings" of the pandemic (Brammer et al., 2020; Cénat et al., 2020). Ultimately, research persisted.

We were privy to our fellow graduate students' resilience. While challenges and struggles were common topics during Zoom calls or emails with colleagues, so too were innovative approaches to data collection and strategies for mental health and wellness. These experiences are what have given rise to this special issue. While many studies have acknowledged the challenges that graduate students have faced during this difficult time, fewer have showcased the innovations in research and practice that have helped graduate students to overcome these new barriers in their professional and personal lives. For that reason, we invited the authors featured in this special issue to not only share how their research was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to detail how they have adapted and thrived. In short, we wanted to highlight and celebrate the creativity and resiliency that we have witnessed from graduate students on a daily basis throughout the pandemic.

This creativity and resiliency can take many forms, interconnected with the needs and goals of each individual graduate student. In terms of research, graduate students may have adapted research questions to the new pandemic context, brainstormed new ways to collect data when schools and workplaces were closed, or taken advantage of increasingly sophisticated online tools. Beyond research practices, adapting personal practices could also lead to graduate students seeking out new self-care methods and dealing with the realities of being a graduate student during the COVID-19 pandemic. New routines and habits for personal wellness and maintaining relationships with friends and colleagues were created. These adaptations and innovations were created in direct response to the pandemic, yet they may also be relevant long after the pandemic is over. This special issue, therefore, offers new suggestions and lessons for graduate students looking for ways to promote their own wellness in challenging circumstances, or wondering how to create blended online/in-person programs to reach participants in rural and/or international locations. The relevance and impact of the briefs included in this special issue extend beyond the pandemic and will have enduring lessons for graduate students.

What is a Research or Practice Brief?

In the Emerging Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Graduate Research in Education and Psychology (EPIGREP) journal, a research brief is an opportunity for authors to share an interesting aspect of a research project they have completed, or a brief summary of their completed/in-progress study, without reporting on the whole findings of the study. In this special issue, authors were invited to write a research brief detailing a summary of pandemic-related research, or a brief that focuses specifically on a particular aspect of their research that was impacted by the pandemic, such as data collection. A practice brief is an opportunity for authors to share an interesting aspect of teaching or psychology clinical practice that they have encountered in the field. For the purposes of this special issue, with its focus on graduate student adaptations and resiliency, practice briefs may also highlight personal practices of students as researchers during the pandemic. Additionally, we would like to note that in some of this issue's briefs, research and practice are so closely intertwined that clear categorization as a research or practice brief is not feasible. The editors would like to acknowledge and celebrate these tensions as they emerge on our journeys as graduate students.

Overview of the Papers

This special issue includes research and practice briefs that span across the disciplines of education and psychology. The authors draw from published literature as well as their own personal experiences to bring to light both the challenges and the innovations of graduate research during the pandemic. In each brief, the authors offer lessons learned and suggestions for graduate students and post-secondary institutions who may find themselves in similar situations or dealing with comparable challenges.

Jhonattan Bello, Cong Luo, Suyeon Cho, and Siyin Liang draw upon their own experiences in their brief, *Living through Covid-19 Pandemic as International Students in Canada:*

Collaborative Autoethnography of Struggles and Resilience. They explore how their intersecting identities as international students affected their experience of the pandemic, how systemic barriers made it difficult to conduct research, and the ways in which systemic inequities became even more pronounced during the pandemic. They also suggest some strategies for building resiliency, including building relationships with mentors, colleagues, and friends.

Next, Michelle Bence Mathezer and Miriam Ramzy take us into the online kindergarten classroom in their brief titled *Pivoting from In-class to Online Early Literacy Instruction and Contributing Critical Insights.* Rather than cancelling their planned kindergarten literacy program when the pandemic made in-classroom research impossible, they shifted the program online. This required them to brainstorm new ways to support embodied cognition and engagement with physical materials, virtually. Despite limits of the online environment, the authors were successful in creating online engagement and opportunities for the students to engage with hands-on manipulatives though pre-packaged material kits.

Online program delivery took place not only in formal K-12 education settings, but also in informal learning contexts including summer programs, as Sukyoung Lee, Didem Erman and Tanvir Chowdhury Turin detail in their brief, *Adapting to the New Normal During a Pandemic: Innovative Approaches in Virtual Teaching and Research for Youth Engagement.* In order to engage immigrant and refugee youth in an online health education summer program, the authors designed innovative online activities including a virtual human library, simulations, and game-based learning, which were supported by video conferencing and other virtual tools. These virtual activities allowed for deeper engagement and access for the program's youth participants.

Helen Pethrick explores stories of university student resiliency during the pandemic in her brief titled *Mirrored Resiliency: Exploring University Student Narratives of the COVID-19 Pandemic.* Reflecting before her first online participant interview, she wondered "What will this be like? And what could it have been?" As she continued to conduct her research, she found her own experiences and resiliency as a graduate student mirrored in the narratives of her participants. In this way, she argues for the power of narrative learning and mirrored resiliency to imagine new possibilities for well-being and hope, even in such challenging times.

The reality of collecting data during a pandemic is front and centre in Chelsea Reaume, Madeleine Alie, and Kristel Thomassin's brief, *Creative Approaches to Mixed-Methods Data Collection in the Context of COVID-19: Investigating Families, Emotions, and Collective Coping in a Prospective Sample.* Interested in understanding how the pandemic affected families' emotional socialization processes, these researchers reached out to participants from a previous study and adapted their assessment methods to include virtual surveys and video recordings from parents. They did so while maintaining an emphasis on participants' security and privacy. The authors also noted possible inequitable impacts of recruitment during difficult times.

Lisa Taylor writes about the intertwinement of identity, pedagogy, and practice in her brief, *Supporting Student Wellness to Enable Resiliency During the COVID-19 Pandemic.* In order to balance her needs and responsibilities as a mother, instructor and doctoral student, she draws upon her understanding of wellness from her years of experience as a physical health and education

teacher. Her strategies of listening to course content rather than reading it, dedicating specific time to physical activity, and spending time outdoors helped her to remain resilient and manage the stress created by the pandemic.

Finally, Rae Ann Van Beers discusses letting go of previous research plans and adapting to the "new normal" in her brief titled *Pan(dem)ic at the (Middle School) Disco: Navigating Data Collection During Quarantine.* Her plan to have middle school youth engage in duo-ethnographic explorations of fair trade within their schools was challenged when schools shut down and she lost contact with her original participants. However, strong connections with teachers and the clever use of online video tools allowed her to reunite with her students and accept her research for what it had become in the face of the pandemic.

Conclusion

There are several experiences, adaptations, and lessons learned highlighted in this special issue. This speaks to the wealth of experience and reflection drawn upon by each author. We hope that in sharing these briefs, graduate students may feel connected in their struggles, celebrate the work of their peers, and learn about creative solutions to problems they may be experiencing as the (post-)pandemic context evolves. The editorial team from this special issue would like to thank each of the authors for their incredible work on these briefs, as well as the reviewers who volunteered their time and expertise to develop the authors' ideas. We hope you enjoy this special issue presented by EPIGREP.

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