

WRITING FIRES: WRITING INSTRUCTION, STUDENT LEARNING PERCEPTIONS,
AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION IN THE AGE OF COVID-19

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought with it devastating and potentially long-lasting impacts to the world. From economic upheavals, political ramifications, and educational disruptions, COVID-19 has changed the face of many aspects of life, perhaps forever. The issue in this study is to ask how COVID-19 may have impacted the literacy development of undergraduate students through the use of emergency remote instruction. To begin investigating the issue, roughly 200 undergraduate students in writing-focused classes (first-year composition and upper-division writing courses) were surveyed to understand how they learned the rhetorical conventions and genre expectations of their discipline. Out of the 200 responses, 36 total were received. Through a mixed methods analysis of data collected through a survey, the goal was to uncover student perceptions of their literacy development by examining their thoughts on their development of their own rhetorical awareness and writing capacity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The creation of this document itself was a difficult and arduous process. Not least of which because of the subject matter involved. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many new and increasingly daunting challenges plagued the education system in the United States, already exacerbating long-standing issues such as burnout and exhaustion from college instructors and K-12 educators. I was one of these educators. And I as a navigate the K-12 environment, I am struck with the amount of pressure exacted upon other public educators as well; this even though educators are routinely overworked to make up for mounting workloads. COVID-19 has been the catalyst for many to leave the profession. My only question was, when beginning this study, was could the COVID-19 pandemic have traumatized students? Of course, given the nature of the question itself, I could not have answered this type of question in the scope of my discipline. So, I modulated the scope and scale of the project to better account for my discipline's aims. Presently, the chief research question then became how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the writing practices of undergraduate students at North Dakota State University. Literacy is an essential skill that all students must practice, and if the pandemic did change the way students practice literacy, it could have tremendous and far-reaching consequences across time if that is true.

DEDICATION

Thank you to my thesis advisor, Dr. Holly Hassel, for making all this possible. Additionally, I would like to thank my other two committee members, Dr. Lisa Arnold, and Carol Buchholz Holland, for always pushing me to keep moving forward. Lastly, I would like to thank my family for never letting me quit my daydream.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

COVID-19's Impact on Education

In December 2019, the virus that became colloquially known as COVID-19 was first detected in Wuhan, China (World Health Organization, 2021). In January of 2020, the first reported case of COVID-19 had been reported in the United States (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022). From there, the United States entered a period of lockdown that lasted several months in 2020, and in mid-April of 2020, most US states and territories had declared disasters due to spiking case numbers. In many ways, the initial shock of the pandemic itself was traumatizing. Having to quarantine for extended periods of time, away from extended family and friends for fear of spreading of the virus further, was mentally debilitating. In countless and incalculable ways, the virus took its toll, financially, emotionally, and most of all with it taking amounts of human life. I lost a family member to COVID-19, a great grandfather, and an aunt who both died alone. To say that their deaths were heartbreaking would be an understatement. Likewise, the effects that COVID-19 had on a nation already rupturing under the weight of political and economic unrest partly due to the virus was also catastrophic for many. Many have been impacted or continue to be impacted by this virus with approximately a million deaths from COVID-19 reported in the United States alone since the start of the pandemic. Yet, there are other considerations to think on with the COVID-19 pandemic, not only with how it killed millions, but how it impacted education in the United States, a nation which has already been notorious for its educational disparities among other first-world countries.

To understand the current context of American education, it is necessary to briefly look back and provide some insight on how the American education system originally took shape. Education was not always free in America, and prior to the 20th century, K-12 education—let

alone higher education—was not guaranteed (Stone, 2009). It was not until the efforts of Thomas Mann in the early 20th century that state taxes would be appropriated to use towards improving schools in the nation (Flores, 2017). And while in the mid 20th century, access to standard and free K-12 education was guaranteed for most White Americans, the same could not be said for other minorities, such as African Americans (Flores, 2017). At the time, segregation—under the guise of the legal doctrine of being separate but equal— had already paralyzed most of the American education system’s ability to adequately educate minority youths. As historian Carol Anderson (2017) enumerates time and again, there has been massive *resistance* to furthering the education of minority youth, particularly with Black children in America. In the 1930s, in the Deep South, teacher to student ratios for Black children were staggering at 82 students per a single teacher, whereas their white counterparts enjoyed a teacher to student ratio that was halved at 35 to 1 (p. 69). Because Black students did not have faculty and staff that could adequately serve them, Black schools faced huge systemic issues due to overcrowding which led to significantly shorter school days (p. 69). Per Anderson, “the long-term results of this widespread disparity in funding were that the U.S. educational system, despite the demands of parents craving high-quality schools, had deliberately produced a sprawling uneducated population that would bedevil the nation well into the twenty-first century” (p. 70). Historically, BIPOC students have been underserved, and as Anderson lists anecdotal evidence of the continued marginalization of black children in her work *White Rage*, it becomes abundantly evident that even with legislative successes of the Civil Rights of 1964, extensive damage had already been done, and perhaps, had left deep scars within the fabric of minoritized communities within the United States. The point in elucidating this information is that before COVID-19, educational disparities in the American K-12 and higher education institutions were prevalent.

Because of these previous disparities, it is important to consider how COVID-19 may have influenced the pre-existing disparities in education further, especially if COVID-19 may have dealt a potentially egregious blow to underserved students in the nation not only personally but academically.

To better protect children, their families, and faculty, schools throughout the United States were closed from K-12, along with higher education institutions, and teachers shifted their classroom learning from previously synchronous in-person instruction to asynchronous and/or synchronous emergency online only instruction (Leonhardt, 2022). Two years later, the true end of the pandemic is nowhere in sight. Some students have begun shifting to in-person instruction, whereas others are still totally online. Because of the amalgamation of instructional modes, it is vital to take a pause and reflect on how the mode of instruction can affect the learning of a student. To be sure, I am not disparaging the use of online instruction to teach students the requisite skills to graduate and succeed in a professional setting, as anecdotal evidence from differing students would no doubt insinuate. Online instruction is a useful and needed part of the curriculum if students need additional flexibility in attaining their goals. What I am seeking to investigate, however, is if students can succeed using emergency online remote instruction (EORI), a pedagogical tool used to rapidly shift instruction from planned online, hybrid, and in person settings to online-only contexts that are, at times, not fully planned. Some current scholarship has already pointed to some cause for concern with the efficacy of EORI.

Problems with Emergency Online Remote Instruction's Efficacy

Recent reports from Texas and Indiana show that students who learned remotely during the pandemic tested below average in math and reading against their peers who learned in-person (Herron, 2021) (Texas Education Agency, 2021). COVID-19 had a profound impact on student

learning. If reports, like the ones from Texas and Indiana, continue to circulate, it would call into question the efficacy of emergency online instruction as an effective pedagogical tool. This is not to mention the fact that emergency online instruction depends upon ready and reliable access to technology, something that underserved minority communities do not have ready access to. Given all these variables, it is necessary to question the pedagogical efficacy of emergency online remote instruction within the United States, simply because there is too much at stake.

One of the key areas for learning development for children is literacy, and according to the Office of Civil Rights (2021) in its recent comprehensive study on the effects of COVID-19 in education, in K-12 settings,

emerging evidence shows that the pandemic has negatively affected academic growth, widening pre-existing disparities. In core subjects like math and reading, there are worrisome signs that in some grades students might be falling even further behind pre-pandemic expectations” (p. iii).

Going further, the Office of Civil Rights also found that myriads of issues adjacent to academic success were exacerbated by the pandemic. These issues include but are not limited to: raising adequate support for ELL students in online environments, providing effective aids and services to disabled students learning from home to prevent learning regression, engaging and intervening on the behalf of LGBTQIA+ students to prevent stress and anxiety because of the loss of their affirming student organizations, marshalling resources needed to support student mental health, protecting victims of sexual harassment, abuse, and violence during the pandemic from household members and intimate partners and online harassment from peers, along with combatting identity-based harassment and violence targeted against Asian American and Pacific Islander students (p. iv). Furthermore, the Office of Civil Rights notes that “COVID-19 has

raised new barriers for many postsecondary students, with heightened impacts emerging for students of color, students with disabilities, and students who are caregivers, both for entry into higher education and for continuing and completing their studies,” this goes along with drops in enrollment at historically Black colleges and universities, Minority Serving Institutions, and Tribal Colleges and Universities (p. iv-v). Not only are their educational disparities but there are also social disparities being dramatically amplified further by the pandemic’s global scope. But, perhaps, what students in K-12 and postsecondary settings have lost most is their sense of community.

Students were isolated from each other and from their instructors, and it is this isolation that directly threatens a key aspect of composition instruction in postsecondary institutions. Joseph Harris (1987) writes that “we write not as isolated individuals, but as members of communities whose beliefs, concerns, and practices both instigate and constrain, at least in part, the sorts of things we can say. Our aims and intentions in writing are thus not merely personal, idiosyncratic, but reflective of the communities to which we belong.” (p. 12) Writing is dependent on community involvement. And as Harris articulates, students do not write in vacuums; rather, writing is a part of a student’s response to the community that they live, work, and participate in. COVID-19 has necessitated a rapid and abrupt change to many students’ community environments, causing them to be more isolated from each other than ever before. One of the position statements from the NCTE articulates that students write in a complex web of relationships (Fink, 2015). This is to say that students write in specific contexts with their readers who are in their community, not only in person but online. Furthermore, students can also write closely in relationships with their friends, coworkers, and families in the process too. These relationships can prove to be especially productive for student writers, but because of the

COVID-19 pandemic and how it forced people to stay apart, these once fruitful relationships may now suffer. Their communities could have been irrevocably altered by death or distance. So, if students are not in a community, the question now becomes how is their literacy development affected by the COVID-19 pandemic when students were not able to meet with their instructors physically in the classroom?

Research Questions

It is with these considerations that I turn to my research questions. These questions are thus:

1. *How do undergraduate students at NDSU perceive their literacy development and sense of community during the COVID-19 pandemic?*
2. *How did the mode of instruction affect students' perceptions of literacy development and sense of community during this time?*

The questions provided here are to ground the research and serve as anchor points to the rest of the study, but also to provide me as the researcher a continuous point of reflection throughout to ground my analysis. It is my hope that through this research, I will help illuminate and point to ways to support students in moments of crisis, but also to further elaborate on how, perhaps, students with differing backgrounds at North Dakota State University were adversely affected by the pandemic. My goals for this research, however, are not to provide a definitive solution, as I knew beforehand that a solution could not be adequately provided for a problem this complex. Rather, my goals are to simply investigate and disentangle what factors may have affected student learning during the pandemic. It is with these issues that I turn to the rest of the study with an eye towards what this study could hold for the future. While I cannot say that I hope to find a surefire way of eliminating student loss of learning development, it is my hope

that with this research, we could begin to understand and hopefully learn how students', at least in the context of North Dakota State University, may have been hampered by the pandemic—or how they could have persevered through it.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

COVID-19 presented many unique challenges to educators for the first time. But perhaps some of the greatest among these challenges were the fact that many students couldn't meet with their instructors in regular face-to-face instructional settings. Nonetheless, many students also attended classes virtually prior to the pandemic or did assigned coursework entirely online without ever meeting an instructor. Given these facts, what I am pressed to wonder is how these modes of instruction affect the literacy acquisition of students in the United States. But not only that, I take pause to wonder how students' interact with each other during the pandemic and how their level of interaction impacts their capacity to deepen their literacy, considering how students had to unexpectedly shift their learning from traditional in-person instruction or planned online environments to unplanned hybrid and online environments—shifts in instructional mode that could detrimentally impact student literacy learning because it forced them into unknown and foreign contexts.

To adequately investigate how COVID-19 influenced present undergraduate student literacy development, my current study concerns itself with answering research questions that seek to understand how students engage with their coursework, classmates, and instructors during a time of crisis and how this could have impacted their literacy development. The difficulty with investigating these questions in this study is that there are multiple threshold concepts of writing studies at play. Central to the focus of this study are the key terms literacy, literacy development, and community; all are heavy and weighty terms within the discipline of writing studies that are *deeply* dependent upon a given context, as I will elaborate. But first, I will need to delineate the most salient term for my project, which is Emergency Online Remote Instruction, as it serves as the grounding focus for how I approach further, more abstract

concepts like literacy, literacy development, and community. I will, then, attempt to delineate a working definition of literacy to be used in this study, followed by the closely related but still distinct term literacy development, and then finally the term community in the context of writing in the classroom.

Emergency Online Remote Instruction

First, I turn to an articulation of the differences in communities with a differentiation between emergency online-instruction and online learning during the pandemic. Hodges et al. (2020) clarifies the difference between online learning and emergency remote instruction with the following:

In contrast to experiences that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students were abruptly forced to shift most of their learning (and literacy development) to predominantly online environments, in modes of instruction that were not fully intended to be permanent and were not fully planned, and as per Hodges et al. (2020) states, “the need to ‘just get it online’ is in direct contradiction to the time and effort normally dedicated to developing a quality course”. The communities that students were learning to read and write in was drastically altered by COVID-19, which then in turn, could affect the ways that students begin to learn and understand the genre conventions and rhetoric of their respective discipline, potentially crippling their ability to learn and adapt and adversely affecting their literacy development.

The educational efficacy of Emergency Online Remote Instruction was interrogated further by Aljouni and Jaradat (2021) and Jelinska and Paradowski's (2022) two studies on the effects of online only emergency instruction in crisis situations. For Aljouni and Jaradat, the main impetus of their study was to discuss the impact of students shifting into an exclusively online environment. Their quantitative survey-driven study concludes that of their respondents to their survey at a Middle Eastern University during the pandemic, isolation from peers, inadequacy of instructor feedback, and inadequacy of class learning materials, appears to be one of the key driving forces behind student dissatisfaction (p. 165). However, most respondents (66%) also alluded to the fact that online instruction was an effective way to deliver content. These findings are further expanded on and complicated by Jelinska and Paradowski's (2021) quantitative survey-driven study, whose aim was to gauge teachers' perceptions on whether students were able to succeed in a course using emergency online remote instruction. Their analysis concludes that teachers who were relatively inexperienced with teaching found emergency online remote instruction to be more challenging to students, whereas veteran instructors perceived that their instruction was no better or worse with emergency online remote instruction.

At the same time, too, what must be considered beyond students' feelings towards EROI is what instructors feel about the pedagogical mode as well. Online learning in writing classrooms has occurred widely for a decade now and juxtaposed to when it started appearing on the stage in the late 2000's and early 2010's, online writing instruction has come a long way. The Conference of College Composition and Communication reports in its 2021 executive summary of its standing committee on online writing instruction (OWI) instructors were simply leveraging face-to-face pedagogical procedures and integrating them into their online writing classrooms

when OWI was first introduced in 2011. In 2021, instructors were reporting that the process itself was much more collaborative and well-supported (Conference of College Composition and Communication, 2021). However, considering the new pedagogical circumstance that occurred with the COVID-19 pandemic, it may be worthy of a teacher's ability to collaborate with each other since COVID forced them apart from each other in ways not previously seen. Indeed also, what needs to be considered with an instructor's ability to collaborate with each other is how much work a teacher must take outside of their contractual hours to accomplish necessary tasks. Often, instructors detected an increase in workload because of the pandemic's new pedagogical environment (Giadorno et al, 2021). Because of these reasons, when dissecting and interrogating the effectiveness of EROI, considering instructor feelings and opinions on the matter is also integral for the continuance of any scholarly conversation on the matter.

Taken together, these trends in scholarship investigate and complicate the efficacy of EROI. EROI takes up a constellation of many forms, but the most important thing to consider about it in the context of this study is how students and the instructors feel that they are truly connecting with each other. For students, the most important issues to consider with EROI is how well they can understand and connect with peers, course materials, and instructor feedback. Whereas, with teachers, the main concern lies with how experienced they feel with technology and their pedagogy to make judicious decisions on how to impart content in an expedient manner and the time it takes outside of contracted hours to perform necessary functions. Situating these ideas in line with my study, it is then necessary to look closely into how well students can connect with each other and their instructors through an online only format.

Literacy

One of the most vexing topics that my study wishes to situate itself in is the intersection with literacy and literacy instruction. I say vexing because these two keywords of my study both are fluid concepts, and both have sharp variations that can be expanded upon in dramatically different ways in different contexts. As Chamberlain et al. (2020) shows in their ethnography of UK primary and secondary students, literacy and more importantly literacy instruction often looks vastly different in dissimilar contexts, especially given the pandemic's upheaval of previous learning environments that reshaped what instructors could do in their classrooms. During the pandemic, literacy learning was done, for many students, at home. And expansive ways of learning literacy were done during the pandemic, not just by learning in the classroom, but also through ways of learning through community. Given these new learning environments, students, parents, and teachers had to leverage new networks of resources to teach children reading and writing. Examples of these new pedagogical techniques include shared reading exercises over Zoom, using abandoned public places to showcase literacy activities, such as poster creation, and artwork to apply lessons learned in the classroom (Chamberlain et. al, 2020). Of course, the literacy activities that are exemplified in Chamberlain et al's analysis complicates a definition of what reading, and writing can look like. For my study, it is necessary to think of these new and emerging literacy practices to complicate the key terms that my study will work with the most: literacy and writing.

For Heath and Street (2008) a definition of writing is underpinned by 'those events and practices in which the written mode is still salient, yet embedded in other modes' (pp. 21-22). In other words, writing is undergirded by varying rhetorical situations not linked to the classroom, but still possessing the necessary exigencies to "write," or ways of signaling new meaning to the

readers or viewers on what the “writer” wished to convey beyond alphabetical texts. The point in illustrating the connection between the definition that Chamberlain et al prescribe to literacy and the definition that Heath and Street prescribe to writing is to foreground a necessary foundational concept that I sit my study in theoretically: while reading and writing can occur in “traditional modes,” that need not always be the case. Students can learn literacy in a variety of contexts outside of the classroom, and it is with these expansive definitions that I couch my study out of the necessity to make its measures and analysis more equitable.

These ideas connect with those of the New London Group. For this group of scholars, literacy pedagogy had previously been characterized as an exercise meant to uphold monolingual and classist standards of language learning. As the group writes, “Literacy pedagogy, in other words, has been a carefully restricted project—restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (pp. 61). While Chamberlain et. al show glimmers of hope that literacy pedagogy is heading towards a brighter future, in context with other voices, such as Carol Anderson, and in line with the events that are currently happening because of the COVID-19 pandemic, what the New London Group initially cast as a critical moment for literacy education in the 1990’s now comes full circle as I foresee a glimmer of hope within the New London Group’s assessment of literacy learning. That new pedagogy is defined by them as an awareness of context in a multicultural, linguistic, and culturally diverse environment that also bridges the plurality of texts and new burgeoning multimedia technologies (p. 61). The New London Group wants to expand a definition of literacy pedagogy to exist beyond text and more towards text that can exist in multimodal formats, but also expand literacy to include the ways in which we perceive ourselves as citizens in a complex world. This is a laudable and lofty ambition, but one literacy educators should strive for. Still, the key questions

that now present themselves after figuring these ambitions into how literacy pedagogies are, as the New London Group suggest, bridging the educational needs of minoritized students, such as African American students, indigenous students, disabled students, etc. and how these needs influence the way that they learn and or acquire literacy (p. 61).

To further complicate the idea of literacy even further, I turn to James Paul Gee in *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, Gee begins to problematize the definition of literacy beyond just reading and writing alphabetical texts by carefully and critically examining the phenomena of a “literacy crisis.” To clarify, a literacy crisis” can be roughly defined as a moment wherein an alarming amount of individuals are not able to perform an increasingly difficult set of cognitive tasks related to their reading ability (e.g. interpreting instruction manuals, locating and matching information on a page of text, and producing a letter of complaint for billing errors, etc.) (Gee 2008, 32). However, what should be noted about the term literacy crisis according to Gee is that it is, according to him, “a socially contested term” (p. 31). Lamos (2009) further supports Gee’s claim through his astute observation that “mainstream journalists, scholars, and politicians, would insist repeatedly during this time that U.S. students’ language and literacy abilities had precipitously declined as a function of late 1960’s and early 1970’s educational experimentation in general and race-based educational experimentation in particular.” (p. 126). As Lamos exposes poignantly here, the term literacy crisis (and by extension literacy) is a socially contested term that comes with it all the baggage of human society (racism included). The phenomenon of the “literacy crisis” helps to illustrate how monolingualism, racism, and classism converged with composition instruction to show how literacy was a polemical term that was influenced by stakeholders that wished to pursue their own agendas.

To further shake a simple definition of literacy away from reading and writing I turn to Elspeth Stuckey (1991) and her fiery book, *The Violence of Literacy*. Stuckey further comments on the interconnectedness of literacy, economics, and politics. Key to Stuckey's work is the belief that literacy is violent. This violence is not conceptualized as physical harm done, but rather the financial, social, and political disenfranchisement that occurs when minoritized individuals cannot access the same resources as their more affluent counterparts. This point is made when Stuckey references how "Literacy itself can be understood only in its social and political context, and that context, once the mythology has been stripped away, can be seen as one of the entrenched class structures in which those who have power have a vested interest in keeping it" (p. vii). The central crux of Stuckey's work is situated and focused on exploring how traditional views of literacy learning as an egalitarian, liberatory force elides the real, hard economic truths that many must confront when learning literacy—which is the violence of literacy.

Bleak prognostications aside, Deborah Brandt (1998) also further strengthens literacy's connection to the social and economic and political contexts of individuals. In *Sponsors of Literacy*, Brandt contextualizes how interactions between individuals and other larger institutions (sponsors) influence individuals' literacy development. For Brandt, sponsors are "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (166). These sponsors can take many forms, and they do not need to be individuals. But in broad strokes, they can be identified as the cultural, economic, societal, and agentive practices that influence students and their literacy development. An example of Deborah Brandt's concept of sponsors of literacy in action would be that of her ethnographic comparison of Dora Lopez, a second-

generation Mexican American maid and typist and Raymond Branch a white upper class computer programmer. While at first glance, Dora Lopez, and Raymond Branch share similarities in their life trajectories, being from the same midwestern town, attending the same schools (however briefly), and gaining exposure to computers within their formative years, the similarities end there. Their diverging life paths show how differing access to resources help to shape how a person becomes literate, which then affects their ability to learn and grow as professional individuals.

To condense these ideas down into a cohesive definition of literacy for this project, I turn to Lindquist and Seitz (2009) and the inroad they take to create a firm definition of literacy. In their words, “*literacy* is an abstract noun with no corresponding verb to tell us what range of actions might possibly be associated with it” (p. 7). Rather sardonically put, literacy is a loaded term, and as a threshold concept in the discipline of composition and rhetoric, its study is subject to a host of debate. More traditionally, literacy often is associated with reading and writing as a process to decode and inscribe alphabetic text (Lindquist 2015, 99). But to push back on that definition of literacy with the ideas of the New London Group and Chamberlain et al., a definition of literacy for this project involves reading and writing no doubt, as reading text remains a crucial aspect of literacy, but economics and societal institutions perhaps more so, dependent on the context. So, tentatively, for this study, a definition of literacy will be looked upon as the full realization of an individuals’ economic, linguistic, and other cultural identities, linked to their educational background, which creates (or breaks) their capacity to acquire resources (i.e., information).

Literacy Development

I seek to ground my framing of literacy development around another keyword in writing studies: ecology. Christian R. Weisser (2015) offers the most direct (but still opaque) definition of ecology needed for the present study. As Weisser writes, “ecology becomes a means of explaining the inseparability of writing and technology, of identifying systems of interaction inherent in the network” (70). More concretely, what Weisser is trying to explain is how technology and writing interact and how technology creates new locations and sites for rhetorical invention, for writing and literacy development. For McLean and Rowsell (2015), their study on how students utilize technology in the classroom helps impart fresh wisdom on how technology can be used to teach literacy through rhetorical awareness. As part of a qualitative ethnographic analysis of student multimodal work in the classroom, McLean and Rowsell sought to understand how technology and multimodal learning environments might give students new opportunities to understand academic literacy. The results of their study showed how students were supposed to interpret a literary text and focus on a central theme or character from that text to create a new artwork centered on photography. McLean and Rowsell concluded through a textual analysis of the students’ artifacts that students were able to fully and concretely conceptualize how to translate the theme from the written text into a work visual mode, further removing literacy development as happening only inside the classroom (p. 112).

But as much as technology can help students understand literacy, it can also be used to directly marginalize those who do not have access to it. Looking back at Anderson’s explanation of educational inequities and how it affects student learning, it would be a fair assumption to say that not all students have access to the same technology or have access to instruction that teaches them how to use it to its fullest extent. Technology and through it, ecology, are contentious

terms in the history of writing study, for the context of the student's learning environment determines how well they can acquire new literacies. As technology continues to evolve, new writing situations and rhetorical exigencies will be needed to meet those demands. What this means for literacy is a decentralization of a place where it is typically thought to be enacted (when reading alphabetical text) and a move towards realizing that literacy can be enacted when interacting with computers, other forms of technology and even relationships with other people. Literacy and technology, for Weisser, are ecological because they depend on and interact with each other. An ecological view of literacy learning has literacy take place not only in the classroom, but beyond in students' home environments, workplaces, *communities*, and relationships. This is what is meant by an ecological view of literacy learning.

To fully synthesize a working definition of literacy development for the context of this study, I wish to take the reader back to Chamberlain et al's ethnographic comparison of how different student groups were able to compose visual artwork from texts that they had read remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. When looking at how students were able to visualize content from their classrooms in their home environments, we begin to realize how this is a successfully implemented ecological view of literacy. Students were able to learn literacy beyond traditional classroom contexts and were able to grasp and redefine rhetorical situations. What I seek to question, however, in the context of my own work, is how teachers and instructors in post-secondary environments leveraged their technological resources and help students learn literacy through a sense of rhetorical awareness during COVID-19. All classrooms are not alike, and different institutions had differing responses to the pandemic, so it is fair to conjecture that students would have differing experiences when it comes to literacy learning in the classroom. Rather than viewing literacy learning as strictly occurring in the classroom,

literacy learning should as, Chamberlain et al and Brandt would implicitly say, as a process that is learned ecologically in concert with other factors, including but not limited to socioeconomic status.

Community

Still for the present study, which concerns how students learn and develop their literacies in new, emergency online only environments, more concepts will need to be clarified. One of them is the keyword community, another key word in writing studies. Like all other keywords in writing studies, community is also highly contentious and again, deeply tied to context. Joseph Harris (1987), David Bartholomae (1985), begin to flesh out what community means in the study of writing, but I follow David Bartholomae as my first lead into defining the key word for my project. As he begins “Inventing the University,” every time a student sits down to write for us, he has to invent the university for the occasion—invent the university, that is or a branch of it.” (160) I take this quote to signify it is possible to not only clarify what community can mean for this study, but also how we can begin to connect all other keywords and ideas discussed thus far into the project. Unpacking David Bartholomae’s initial suggestion further, we must define community in this study to mean the present university context.

Prior to the pandemic, there was a spectrum of access for students to choose to learn in either in person synchronous classes, asynchronous courses, or hybrid formats for their coursework. More students had the flexibility to choose what mode of learning they wanted to suit their educational needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning environments of students rapidly shifted to another constellation of formats that heavily leveraged online modes of content delivery and instruction. Bartholomae writes of how students must invent the university each time that they are sat down to write, in these moments students must be able to

understand the context that they are writing in, what these contexts are the specific technological, cultural, social, and environmental spaces that students occupy when they compose. COVID-19 changed the environment that students were writing and developing their literacies in. Because of this shift in instruction, students may have been put at a disadvantage because of their educational situation.

COVID-19 changed the landscape of post-secondary writing instruction, forcing a change in the communities that students learn. Drawing on both Bartholomae and Harris as my center for my understanding of community in the study of writing, I wish to define community for the sake of my study as the place where writing and literacy is put into action, but also the place where students encounter outside stakeholders (teachers, parents, technology, sponsors etc.). Viewing all the current scholarship from a bird's-eye standpoint, then, EROI may be an effective pedagogical strategy, for some, but not for all. And with COVID-19 being the one variable that forced itself center-stage within these constellations of variables, it is necessary to take a pause and consider how COVID-19 forced students to adapt in learning environments they are not familiar with. Students' communities to write in changed significantly. The key consideration that this study takes into consideration with the community is how effectively students were able to leverage their writing course's content with their new learning environment, and whether instructors were able to meet the needs of their students.

Taken altogether, the terms literacy, literacy development, and community all intermingle together in this study to offer a possible way of understanding how student literacy learning may have been affected. Once again, I reiterate that literacy is more than reading and writing. Students' communities for learning were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, shifting their sites of invention for writing to environments that haven't been seen before. It is the goal of

this study to uncover how literacy, literacy development and finally, community all make or break a students' ability to learn the rhetorical and genre conventions of their discipline, which could impede or strengthen future academic success for students.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGIES

Proposed Methodology

Since my study adds to scholarship centering around student reactions to COVID-19 by investigating questions related to 1) how undergraduate students at NDSU perceive their literacy development and sense of community with their instructors and peers and 2) how the mode of instruction affected students' perceptions of literacy development and sense of community, there were various routes to constructing an adequate methodology to answer these questions. At the crux of the issue, though, was the need to survey a large swath of an institutional population to detect larger patterns in each population. As discussed at length in the literature, literacy is difficult to decipher because it is a highly personal endeavor, and no two persons experience it the same way. Because every individual has different experiences with literacy development, a study of a larger sample size was the most advantageous option because it would allow me, as a researcher, to detect larger trends in a population.

As a researcher, I wished to use a qualitative methods approach, which is favored because of my study's focus on the lived experiences of students during an event of major upheaval. The overall purpose of the study is to investigate how students feel about their learning during the pandemic, but also cross-tabulating that information across the demographics present at NDSU to further investigate how minority students may have been affected by COVID-19. Since the framework surrounding my analysis is sensitive to student identities, I included demographic information because it was vital to track how students may have been impacted by the pandemic because of other contingent factors.

Furthermore, I believe a survey to be a good first-step to identify populations that have had profoundly negative experiences learning during the pandemic—but also to identify students

who may have had positive experiences during the pandemic. This initial data could be further elaborated and expanded upon with interviews with representative members of these populations for later research, if needed. But I chose to focus on students' writing experiences because NDSU's undergraduate population is clustered in first-year and upper-division writing classes across campus, since these classes are general education courses. Because students in these classes would have taken other writing-focused courses prior to entry at NDSU, the selection of this sample was based on prior experiences at either two-year institutions or other university courses prior to transferring into NDSU, or from prior classes taken at the high school or equivalent level of secondary education.

While students' at NDSU form a homogenous population of a majority white, middle class background, many of them still have valuable experiences to offer for the sake of this project, because literacy experiences are not the same across the board. Also, since students in classes at NDSU are exposed to the same curriculum based on rhetorical awareness, questions can then be crafted on students' writing capacity based on their confidence with rhetorical concepts, which answers how students acquire literacy. Furthermore, because students at NDSU experienced writing instruction through various modes (e.g., in-person, hybrid, and hyflex), their reflections on a broad range of modes of instruction can be investigated with questions aimed at gauging the effectiveness of their instruction, thus answering the second research question. My survey, then, primarily focuses on how students' writing capacity could have been potentially impacted by the COVID pandemic through questions that seek to gauge students' comfort with rhetorical conventions and genre expectations in their discipline's writing situations along with their reflections on the effectiveness on the mode of instruction.

Survey Design

The survey design was based on sets of three question blocks meant to gauge the three major aspects of the project: perception of literacy development, perception of the pedagogical mode's efficacy, and finally demographic questions meant for students to self-identify which demographic group students belonged to. The question blocks themselves are as follows:

Table 1: Initial Question Block (Q0).

Informed Consent
Demographic Question: What is Your Age? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less than 18• 18-25• 26-35• 36-45• 46-55• 55+
Demographic Question: During which of the following years were you a student in a writing-focused class, where a large portion of the assignments are formal written papers? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2019• 2020• 2021• 2022

The initial question block (referred to as Q0) was meant to be the initial intake portion of the survey. By design, it served as a “bouncer” for the rest of the survey itself. The first question that students would be confronted with was the informed consent form, as required by IRB requirements. If students did not consent to participate in the study, they would be immediately taken to the end of the survey. The next question in the block asked students their respective age.

If students answered that they were less than 18, they would be immediately taken to the end of the survey. I did this to preclude underage students from participating in the study, as they were not the target focus of the project. The last question asked during which years students were involved in writing-focused courses; this would encompass the years of 2019, 2020, 2021, and finally 2022; this question allowed for multiple answers. The purpose of asking these questions was to get a full range of student responses surrounding the years of the pandemic and the years adjacent to it, in the hopes that this would reveal all definitive trends in student responses.

Full Demographic Questions

The second block is a series of questions that prompts more detailed reflection from students on various parts of their identity, ranging from university standing to their racial identity. Once students pass through the initial intake questions, the full demographic questions are meant to further develop a profile of the student body so determinations can be made about how their identities impact their learning in a writing classroom. Students' academic history was also addressed across the full years of the pandemic to inquire how COVID-19 may have adversely affected their learning as well by comparing non-pandemic years (2019) against the pandemic years (2020-2022)

Table 2: Full Demographic Questions

<p>Demographic Question: What is your current university standing (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate, professional, non-degree seeking)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Freshman• Sophomore• Junior• Senior• Graduate• Professional• Non-Degree Seeking
<p>Demographic Question: For each of the following academic years, describe your attendance status during the COVID-19 Pandemic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2019<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Not Enrolled in School○ In High School or Equivalent○ At a Two-Year Institution○ At a Four-Year Institution• 2020<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Not Enrolled in School○ In High School or Equivalent○ At a Two-Year Institution○ At a Four-Year Institution• 2021<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Not Enrolled in School○ In High School or Equivalent○ At a Two-Year Institution○ At a Four-Year Institution• 2022<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Not Enrolled in School○ In High School or Equivalent○ At a Two-Year Institution○ At a Four-Year Institution

Table 2: Full Demographic Questions (continued)

<p>Demographic Question: Please select a response that best characterizes your racial and/or ethnic identity. Select all that apply.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• African American or Black• American Indian or Alaskan Native• Asian• Latin American or Hispanic• Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander• White• Prefer not to say• Prefer to self-describe<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ _____
<p>Demographic Question: Please select a response that best characterizes your gender identity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Man (Cisgender)• Woman (Cisgender)• Trans Man• Trans Woman• Non-binary• Prefer not to say• Prefer to self-describe <p>_____</p>

The third block asks students on their reactions to content and practices within the writing classrooms that they attended during 2019-2022. The block does this by guiding the student through various prompts that explains what terms like engagement and mode of instruction mean in this context before answering these questions. Just as in the demographic question dealing with academic university standing, these questions ask students to identify what kind of instruction took place in their writing classrooms along with their level of engagement. The goal of asking this question was to interrogate how the mode of instruction may have directly impacted their learning.

Table 3: Engagement and Mode of Instruction Block.

Please Read the Following Below:

Engagement in a writing course relates to how well you connected with your instructor, your peers, TA's etc. and other campus resources to help support your success.

Describe your engagement within your writing-focused class during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years. If you did not have a writing focused class during a specific academic year or were not in school, select N/A.

- 2019
 - Engaged
 - Slightly Engaged
 - Neither Engaged nor Disengaged
 - Slightly Disengaged
 - Disengaged
 - N/A
- 2020
 - Engaged
 - Slightly Engaged
 - Neither Engaged nor Disengaged
 - Slightly Disengaged
 - Disengaged
 - N/A
- 2021
 - Engaged
 - Slightly Engaged
 - Neither Engaged nor Disengaged
 - Slightly Disengaged
 - Disengaged
 - N/A
- 2022
 - Engaged
 - Slightly Engaged
 - Neither Engaged nor Disengaged
 - Slightly Disengaged
 - Disengaged
 - N/A

Table 3: Engagement and Mode of Instruction Block (continued)

Please Read the Following Below:

The mode of instruction for your class relates to how your class's meetings were held (if any were held at all). The mode of instruction can be asynchronous online only, where no scheduled meetings was held, synchronous online only where class meetings are held over video conferencing software (such as Zoom), synchronous in-person where you meet in a physical classroom regularly, or a hybrid combination of all three of these options.

Describe the modes of instruction used in your writing-focused classroom.

- 2019
 - Synchronous Meetings In Person
 - Asynchronous Meetings Online Only
 - Synchronous Meeting Online
 - Hybrid
 - N/A
- 2020
 - Synchronous Meeting In Person
 - Asynchronous Meetings Online Only
 - Synchronous Meeting Online
 - Hybrid
 - N/A
- 2021
 - Synchronous Meeting In Person
 - Asynchronous Meetings Online Only
 - Synchronous Meeting Online
 - Hybrid
 - N/A
- 2022
 - Synchronous Meeting In Person
 - Asynchronous Meetings Online Only
 - Synchronous Meeting Online
 - Hybrid
 - N/A

This final block asks students to definitively check whether writing instruction in their classroom was effective/ineffective because of the classes they took during the pre-pandemic and pandemic years. This question utilized broad language and did not aim to elucidate what variable may have been a detriment to their learning development. However, students would also have a chance at explaining their learning development through two open-ended questions at the end of the survey, giving them space to voice their concerns about practices within the classroom or their lives outside of the classroom, which may have interfered with their ability to learn. Finally, a question that asked specifically about the mode of instruction was constructed to ask students to interrogate how the pedagogical environment may have impacted their writing development.

Table 4: Reflection Block

<p>Do you feel your writing capacity has improved because of these writing-focused classes? Please answer for each of the following academic years (if you were not in a writing-intensive class during an academic year, select N/A)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 2019<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Definitely Not○ Somewhat Not○ Neutral○ Somewhat Yes○ Definitely Yes○ N/A• 2020<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Definitely Not○ Somewhat Not○ Neutral○ Somewhat Yes○ Definitely Yes○ N/A• 2021<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Definitely Not○ Somewhat Not○ Neutral○ Somewhat Yes○ Definitely Yes○ N/A• 2022<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Definitely Not○ Somewhat Not○ Neutral○ Somewhat Yes○ Definitely Yes○ N/A
<p>Describe your experiences while in writing-intensive classes with assignments, your peers, your instructors, or in your life outside of being a student. Do you think these experiences helped you as a writer? If so, why? If not, why not?</p>
<p>Do you think your writing class's mode of instruction affected your capacity to succeed as a writer? Please explain.</p>

Recruitment Plan

The goal of this study was to provide a large sample size of the student population that would provide a large, but still manageable data set to give rise to (hopefully) generalizable results to NDSU's undergraduate student population. Recruiting 200 students, then, was the goal, as this would be roughly equivalent to 10 sections of upper-division and first-year writing courses—a large but still practicable data set to work with. Since the instructors for these courses were contingent and tenured faculty members of the English department, a department that I was a part of, sampling this population was desirable because of its convenience and the population's exposure to the rhetorical concepts that I wished to measure. To access gain access to the students that were in these courses, a department listserv email was sent to all tenured faculty members, contingent faculty, and graduate teaching assistants, who, after consenting to allow their students to participate, would then distribute a shareable link or QR code to the survey either in class, or post a message on their learning management system's announcement page, allowing students' access to the survey and time to complete it on their own schedule.

I administered surveys during a two-week period beginning during the final weeks of the spring semester of 2022 at North Dakota State University. I recruited 12 instructors to participate in the survey. These instructors included 10 first-year writing instructors, and 2 upper division writing instructors. The general department listserv email was sent out to North Dakota State University's English department that encouraged all faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and lecturers to participate in the survey. But unfortunately, no further instructors were recruited beyond the initial 12 despite the department listserv. It should also be noted that while instructors at NDSU in first year and upper division (FYI and UDW, respectively), not every single student was able to participate, since undergraduate students often “unofficially withdraw” from a course

by the end of the semester. So, while 12 course instructors did release a link to the survey in their course Blackboard pages—which roughly would have yielded up to 264 total responses, not all students responded. In addition, instructors were directed not to stress that students take the survey. In total, only 36 total responses across all 12 courses were collected from the survey. This would mark the total response rate at 13.8%.

Analytical Methods

The plan to code and analyze all data was based on a process referred to by Creswell and Creswell (2017) as a convergent one-phase design (127). Borrowing this method of analysis from a mixed method methodology, a convergent analysis of the data allowed me to compare the qualitative data gathered from the students' open-ended responses and compare it against the quantitative data collected from the other questions in the survey. By comparing the qualitative data against the quantitative data, I hoped that it would elaborate further on all patterns seen in the survey's closed-ended questions, while at the same time preserving the students' agency and ownership of their experiences in the classroom. While quantitative data in the form of demographics and students' close-ended responses to questions regarding their engagement can be illuminating, their open-ended answers provide the most expansive set of data to work with, since the data from these short-written responses yields further insight into not only students lived experiences in their classroom, but also how complex their lives may have gotten because of the pandemic.

To code the open-ended questions, I followed a segmentation process that separated all students' responses to the sentence level. For a graphic representation of the coding process, see the table below:

Table 5: Representation of Coding Process.

Initial Raw Data Set	Rule	Segmented T-Unit
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I struggled a lot with online English classes during the pandemic so I feel like the experiences during the pandemic didn't help me as a writer at all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on Writing Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any T-Unit in which a participant reflects and remarks on the process of their writing etc..... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I struggled a lot with online English classes during the pandemic.”

Table 6: Plan for Cross Tabulation

Demographic Question: What is Your Age?
Demographic Question: During which of the following years were you a student in a writing-focused class, where a large portion of the assignments are formal written papers?
Demographic Question: What is your current university standing (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate, professional, non-degree seeking)?
Demographic Question: For each of the following academic years, describe your attendance status during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
Demographic Question: Please select a response that best characterizes your racial and/or ethnic identity. Select all that apply.
Demographic Question: Please select a response that best characterizes your gender identity.
Engagement Question: Describe your engagement within your writing-focused class during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years. If you did not have a writing focused class during a specific academic year or were not in school, select N/A.
Engagement Question: Describe the modes of instruction used in your writing-focused classroom.
Writing Capacity Question: Do you feel your writing capacity has improved because of these writing-focused classes? Please answer for each of the following academic years (if you were not in a writing-intensive class during an academic year, select N/A)
Describe your experiences while in writing-intensive classes with assignments, your peers, your instructors, or in your life outside of being a student. Do you think these experiences helped you as a writer? If so, why? If not, why not?
Do you think your writing class's mode of instruction affected your capacity to succeed as a writer? Please explain.

The plan for cross tabulation was to first tabulate the demographic information, excluding the two remaining demographic questions, dealing with any students' minority identities. These two demographic questions were then compared against students' overall engagement with the classes that they were in, in general, along with how their writing capacity improved in and how their lives outside of being a student may have been impacting their ability to learn in the classes as well. Since the literature seems to suggest, theoretically, that there may be a correlation between students' identity and how they learn in the classroom through access to resources which may be denied to them because of minoritization. Additional tabulation was considered against the mode of instruction and how students' perception of the modes of instruction affected their capacity to succeed as a writer.

Methodology and Methods Practiced

Some changes had to be implemented during the distribution of the survey because of unexpected occurrences. But it should be stated that there were no major changes that needed to be made between the methodology initially planned and then one carried out. Even with the small sample size that participated, which stood at 13.8%, the plan for tabulation and cross tabulation did occur unmodified. No changes in methods were made as well, since despite the small sample size, it would not hinder the process of analysis. There were some initial complications coding the data however, since not all students wrote substantial responses when prompted to answer the open-ended questions. For instance, some students simply wrote “no” or “yes” in response, which were difficult to code. Because of this unique difficulty, certain responses were unable to be coded because of brevity. Some additional problems also arose during the implementation of the survey. Namely that some students were left confused on question three of the survey, which erroneously did not allow students to choose multiple years

involved in a writing course, or to automatically root out students based on an answer of N/A. In further retrospect as well, the study could have benefited from possibly expanding the academic years questioned to go back beyond 2019. But this was not pursued as well because of concerns over the amount of data this would engender. Beyond these concerns, no other points of concern were identified in the creation of the study or analysis.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Surveys were administered during a two-week period beginning during the final weeks of the spring semester of 2022 at North Dakota State University. 12 Instructors were recruited to participate in the survey. These instructors included 10 first-year writing instructors, and 2 upper division writing instructors. A general department listserv message was also sent out to North Dakota State University's English department that encouraged all faculty, graduate teaching assistants, and lecturers to participate in the survey. But unfortunately, no further instructors were recruited, despite the department listserv. It should also be noted that while instructors at NDSU in first year and upper division (FYI and UDW, respectively), not every single student was able to participate, since undergraduate students often “unofficially withdraw” from a course by the end of the semester. So, while 12 course instructors did release a link to the survey in their course Blackboard pages—which roughly would have yielded up to 264 total responses, not all students responded. In addition, instructors were directed not to stress that students take the survey to preserve students' right to withhold their consent. In total, only 39 total responses across all 12 courses were collected from the survey. This would mark the total response rate at 14%. Given that the response rate to the survey was low, any broad generalizations about the sample population could not be safely produced. But the data is still valuable because it is from students who did live and learn from the pandemic. While the data cannot be used to extrapolate too broadly across a large student population, it can be used to give an initial window into how students learned writing and literacy during the pandemic.

To be clear as well, when it comes to the differentiation between the years selected for students to reflect on, I use 2019 as a control year, meaning that I asked students to reflect on their progress throughout all four years in question for this study. Data from 2019 was used as a

base to ground my observations on and ground my analyses further. And this process went for all question blocks, including in part on the demographic questions.

Demographic Distribution

Working with the initial demographic questions asked at the beginning of the survey, the initial findings from each question asked yields a population that is relatively small and homogeneous. The information yielded a total pool of participants that were all in the same demographic group. Most students surveyed (38/39) identified as white, with a notable exception of 1 identifying as African American. Furthermore, all students who responded to the survey were in the same relative age group (18-25), with one notable exception being in the next age group 26-35. This, combined with the fact that all students surveyed identified as cisgender and most of the respondents of the study identified as women, yields a small and relatively homogenous population to work with for the study—which would foreclose a broad generalization of the student population at North Dakota State University. But in keeping with North Dakota State University’s enrollment data, the demographic distribution of the data from the study seems to be roughly in line with North Dakota State’s enrolled student population. Out of the total student population in all NDSU 81% identify as White. 2.78% identify as Black, and 6% are international students from various student populations. What should be noted as well is that most freshman at NDSU identify as cisgender white men and women. Those who are BIPOC make a smaller portion of NDSU’s population, standing at about 314 students for the Black population, 191 Asian students, 58 American Indian, and 6 Hawaiian students. Biracial students stand at 383. Hispanic students made up about 346. However, with these numbers in mind, what should be noted about the population represented in this survey is that the survey is

representative of NDSU’s current population because most of the sample size was white; this even though the sample size is so small.

To further elaborate on the sample size, I provide a full breakdown of the data collected from initial question block can be found in Tables 7 and 8 listed below:

Table 7: Demographic Distribution of Student Participants by Age (Q2)

Ages of Participants	Number of Students	Percentage of Occurrence
Less than 18	2	0.051%
18-25	36	92.307%
26-35	1	.026%
36-45	0	0%
46-55	0	0%
55+	0	0%

Table 8: Years in which Students Were in a Writing-Intensive Course (Q3).

Years	Number of Students	Percentage of Occurrence
2019	9	13.04%
2020	14	20.29%
2021	14	20.29%
2022	32	46.37%

What can be noticed in the above tables is that most students who did respond were traditional students, and most were in writing-intensive courses during the pandemic years (2020, 2021, 2022 etc.) The limitations that a data set like this would yield is that any interpretations

would be limited to the experiences of traditional students (ages 18-25). This data set largely forecloses upon the experiences of non-traditional students (e.g., those above the age of 25) which could have provided a valuable insight to the project since non-traditional students have experiences outside of the classroom that are not typical traditional students, such as managing a household, caring for dependents, etc. Even without these populations present, however, the data set with its majority of traditional students can provide useful insights since no students' experience inside or outside of the classroom is identical to another. While NDSU does not present these populations regularly in our student populations, given the age gap in the student population, more exploration can be done on other campuses and education sites where non-traditional students are more present.

Engagement Level

After students entered in their information for all demographic sections, students would then respond to the engagement questions. The results of the questions are then detailed below:

Table 9: Exact Figures for Engagement Levels Per Year

Engagement Level	Rate of Occurrence							
	2019	%	2020	%	2021	%	2022	%
Disengaged	1	2.7%	5	12.7%	7	18.4%	4	10.4%
Neutral	3	7.6%	3	7.6%	2	5.2%	2	5.2%
Engaged	25	64.09%	21	56.16%	21	55.21%	29	76.20%
N/A	8	20.5%	7	19.44%	8	21.0%	1	2.7%

In 2019, 70.27% of students reported attending courses synchronously and in person. This number greatly decreased in 2020 to only 13.89% of students reported being involved in a writing course in person. In 2021, 19.44% of students reported attending class synchronously and in-person. Finally, in 2022, 38.89% students reported attending courses synchronously and in-person. Looking at the data more closely, however, we can begin to see that the most popular form of instruction during the pandemic at NDSU was hybrid instruction. In 2019, 13.51% of students reported attending classes asynchronously. This number increased in 2020, to be at a figure of 19.44%. And in 2021, this figure shrank down to 11.11% in 2021. Finally, in 2022 this number only stood at 2.78%. Moving forward, for synchronous online meetings, 8.11% of students reported meeting via some online platform. In 2020, this number jumped to 22.22%. This number decreased to 13.89% in 2021 and further decreased again to 16.67% in 2022. But by far the largest and most populous number of students were those who took hybrid courses, which stood at about 8.11% in 2019, but grew dramatically from there in 2020 to 44.44%, again to 55.56% in 2021, but subsided to 41.67% in 2022. To move forward with the analysis of the data, then, what is needed to analyze how the mode of instruction may have impacted student learning is by focusing here, at least in the case of students at NDSU, on the efficacy of hybrid instruction. Hybrid instruction seems to be the one form of instruction that appears to be the most heavily leveraged in the classroom, so paying particular attention to how students' needs are met will be particularly necessary for this study.

Mode of Instruction

After students answered the questions related to engagement, they then answered the question related to mode of instruction. The results of this question are demonstrated below:

Table 10: Representation of Mode Instruction

Mode of Instruction	Academic Year			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Asynchronous Online	5	7	4	1
Hybrid	3	16	20	15
Synchronous Online Meeting Only	3	8	5	6
Synchronous Meetings In-Person	26	5	7	14

In 2019, 70.27% of students reported attending courses synchronously and in person. This number greatly decreased in 2020 to only 13.89% of students reported being involved in a writing course in person. In 2021, 19.44% of students reported attending class synchronously and in-person. Finally, in 2022, 38.89% students reported attending courses synchronously and in-person. Looking at the data more closely, however, we can begin to see that the most popular form of instruction during the pandemic at NDSU was hybrid instruction. In 2019, 13.51% of students reported attending classes asynchronously. This number increased in 2020, to be at a figure of 19.44%. And in 2021, this figure shrank down to 11.11% in 2021. Finally, in 2022 this number only stood at 2.78%. Moving forward, for synchronous online meetings, 8.11% of students reported meeting via some online platform. In 2020, this number jumped to 22.22%. This number decreased to 13.89% in 2021 and further decreased again to 16.67% in 2022. But by far the largest and most populous number of students were those who took hybrid courses, which stood at about 8.11% in 2019, but grew dramatically from there in 2020 to 44.44%, again to 55.56% in 2021, but subsided to 41.67% in 2022. To move forward with the analysis of the data, then, what is needed to analyze how the mode of instruction may have impacted student learning is by focusing here, at least in the case of students at NDSU, on the efficacy of hybrid

instruction. Hybrid instruction seems to be the one form of instruction that appears to be the most heavily leveraged in the classroom, so paying particular attention to how students' needs are met will be particularly necessary for this study.

Student Feedback on Learning

Lastly, I turn to the last question block that reveals how students thought of their own writing courses throughout the academic years of 2019-2022.

- Do you feel your writing capacity has improved because of these writing-focused classes? Please answer for each of the following academic years (if you were not in a writing-intensive class during an academic year, select N/A)
- Describe your experiences while in writing-intensive classes with assignments, your peers, your instructors, or in your life outside of being a student. Do you think these experiences helped you as a writer? If so, why? If not, why not?
- Do you think your writing class's mode of instruction affected your capacity to succeed as a writer? Please explain.

These questions, again, were largely aimed at gauging the students' own satisfaction with their performance in the course and how they felt about their progression in writing within these classes. The question results presented below:

Table 11: Student Responses to Q10

	Academic Year			
	2019	2020	2021	2022
Definitely No	1	2	0	1
Definitely Yes	3	4	5	13
Neutral	17	14	9	1
Somewhat Not	3	3	4	2
Somewhat Yes	12	12	16	18

To express what these findings represent broadly, what appears to be occurring thus far in the data set now is that most students experience an increase in engagement level as the pandemic years progressed. And above all, as the pandemic years progressed from 2019 to 2022, students began to shift their feelings towards education more strongly. As in, from 2019 onwards students who felt neutrally about their level of education dropped off dramatically compared to what it was at the end of the pandemic with only students feeling neutrally about their education. Most students who responded to the survey felt positively about their writing instruction.

Open-Ended Results

The results to the open-ended question were mixed and varied, but this was to be expected to a degree. The codebook used to help analyze the data from the open-ended questions is provided below that shows the trends in the emergent codes that the data set provided:

Table 12: Codebook

<p>Experiences in a Writing Classroom</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any T-Unit in which a participant expresses positive regard to either their overall involvement in the course (completing assignments and writing papers) or how they view their own writing practices.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any T-Unit in which a participant expresses negative experiences with their writing or their involvement in the course (completing assignments and writing papers or how they view their own writing practices).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any T-Unit in which a participant reflects on their overall perspective with the instructor’s pedagogy. These remarks can focus on negative aspects of an instructor's pedagogy, such as lack of direction or communication, or it can also reflect on positive aspects of the instructor’s teaching practices, such as the way assignments were scaffolded around written assignments.
<p>Community and Academic Influence</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mode of Instruction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any T-Unit that explicitly demonstrates the students’ thoughts on the mode of instruction for a writing-intensive course. Remarks can be positive, where the participant believes that the mode of instruction did benefit their writing capacity, or they can be negative, where students believe that the mode of instruction was a detriment to their learning. Remarks can also be neutral where participants believe that mode of instruction had no impact on their writing capacity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on Writing Practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Any T-Unit in which a participant reflects and remarks on the process of their writing. These remarks can signal changes in their writing process or reflect the fact that no changes or improvements in their writing process have been made. Self-reported changes can be either positive, where students feel more confident in their writing, or they can be negative where students feel less confident in their writing.

Furthermore, the rate of appearance for these codes is also provided below:

Table 13: Rate of Occurrence for Codes

Dimension	Axial Code	Rate of Appearance	Percentage of Occurrence
Experiences in a Writing Classroom	Teaching Practice	8	24%
Academic and Community Influences	Reflection on Writing Practices	10	29.4%
Experiences in a Writing Classroom	Positive Engagement	13	38.2%
Experiences in a Writing Classroom	Negative Experience	1	2.9%
Academic and Community Influence	Mode of Instruction	2	5.8%

To show readers how student responses were coded and to show axial codes were derived from the qualitative data, I offer some of the following quotes to show how those very codes were derived:

Table 14: Example of Coding Process for the Teaching Practice Code.

Initial Raw Data Set	Segmented T-Unit	Rule	Axial Code
<p>“I think the biggest factor to improving as a writer would be communication and feedback from professors. Online writing courses weren't very difficult for me. I honestly prefer online; this allows me to work on my own time and stop into office hours via zoom to get my questions answered when needed. I don't think it matters what the mode of instruction is, as long as the instructor does a good job teaching and giving the proper materials needed to succeed as a student.”</p>	<p>I think the biggest factor to improving as a writer would be communication and feedback from professors.</p>	<p>Any T-Unit in which a participant reflects on their overall perspective with the instructor's pedagogy. These remarks can focus on negative aspects of an instructor's pedagogy, such as lack of direction or communication, or it can also reflect on positive aspects of the instructor's teaching practices, such as the way assignments were scaffolded around written assignments.</p>	<p>Teaching Practice</p>

Table 15: Example of Coding Process for the Reflection on Writing Process Code.

Initial Raw Data Set	Segmented T-Unit	Rule	Axial Code
<p>Writing in these classes and communicating with peers has given me a new insight and perspective on my writing, allowing me to do self-reflection. Peers were somewhat helpful, as they helped me with the flow and structure of my papers. I found professors and instructors to be the most helpful because they are experienced professionals and have given me proper feedback on what I should and should not include in my writing. Aside from peers and instructors, sometimes I would read my writing to my mom or dad. They aren't very experienced in the technical aspect of writing at all, but sometimes the positive feedback and support is a good feeling.</p>	<p>Aside from peers and instructors, sometimes I would read my writing to my mom or dad. They aren't very experienced in the technical aspect of writing at all, but sometimes the positive feedback and support is a good feeling.</p>	<p>Any T-Unit in which a participant reflects and remarks on the process of their writing. These remarks can signal changes in their writing process or reflect the fact that no changes or improvements in their writing process have been made. Self-reported changes can be either positive, where students feel more confident in their writing, or they can be negative where students feel less confident in their writing.</p>	<p>Reflection on Writing Practice</p>

Table 16: Example of Coding Process for the Positive Engagement Axial Code

Initial Raw Data Set	Segmented T-Unit	Rule	Axial Code
I think these experiences helped me as a writer because I found ways that I was better able to communicate my ideas and thoughts. Also, having peer reflection really helped with my thought process and development of my pieces.	I think these experiences helped me as a writer because I found ways that I was better able to communicate my ideas and thoughts.	Any T-Unit in which a participant expresses positive regard to either their overall involvement in the course (completing assignments and writing papers) or how they view their own writing practices.	Positive Engagement

Table 17: Example of Coding Process for the Negative Engagement Axial Code

Initial Raw Data Set	Segmented T-Unit	Rule	Axial Code
I am extremely less motivated as a student with online and hybrid options. I think it has negatively affected my capacity to succeed as a writer. There is no incentive or motivation to do well in my classes.	I think it has negatively affected my capacity to succeed as a writer.	Any T-Unit in which a participant expresses negative experiences with their writing or their involvement in the course (completing assignments and writing papers or how they view their own writing practices).	Negative Experience

Table 18: Example of Coding Process for the Mode of Instruction Axial Code

Initial Raw Data Set	Segmented T-Unit	Rule	Axial Code
I am extremely less motivated as a student with online and hybrid options. I think it has negatively affected my capacity to succeed as a writer. There is no incentive or motivation to do well in my classes.	I am extremely less motivated as a student with online and hybrid options.	Any T-Unit that explicitly demonstrates the students' thoughts on the mode of instruction for a writing-intensive course. Remarks can be positive, where the participant believes that the mode of instruction did benefit their writing capacity, or they can be negative, where students believe that the mode of instruction was a detriment to their learning. Remarks can also be neutral where participants believe that mode of instruction had no impact on their writing capacity.	Mode of Instruction

What should be noted here is that with the rate of appearances for the codes above, it does reveal that most of this group of students' concerns was clustered around the teaching practices of the instructor, which seemed to be the strongest and most telling factor predicting the rate of which students in the writing classroom would succeed.

However, at the same time, students reported positive feelings engagement for most of the codes extracted from the data set. So, again, on the outset from the data, what can be noticed is that most students had positive experiences within their writing courses. As well, what appears to be the greatest point of note for this section of the dataset is that, again, there is no true definitive point of evidence that shows that there was a true negative impact on student learning (NDSU English Department, 2022). But moreover, the data set does not contain a single set of isolated variables, rather it contains multiple different and codependent variables that interact with each other. This will be expanded upon further in the discussion. However, this, in turn,

informs how the unexpectedly positive turn in the dataset where the students' reported growth in their overall writing capacity. Again, as stated above, student successes often are related to each other. There are no one-size fits all solution.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

To ground the discussion of my study, I wish to look at the most salient themes that appeared from analyzing the data. Taking a closer look at these themes will be the primary themes found from the study seem to incorporate multiple strands of experiences centered around their experiences in the classroom. Looking closely at what the study portends thus far, I wish to further examine the following themes that came up during the analysis with their following dimensions:

- Experiences in a Writing Classroom—Positive Engagement
- Academic and Community Influences—Reflection on Writing Practices
- Experiences in a Writing Classroom—Teaching Practice

These three codes were the categories that most of the information fell into. It should be noted that my initial hypothesis at the end of the study was based on the notion that because of COVID-19, students' feelings about their own literacy development would be remarkably negative. This may not be the case entirely as most codes gathered were from the positive engagement category (as 38.2% of respondents fell into this category). However, at the same time, I believe it to be counterproductive to allow simply viewing the code rates of occurrence to dictate how a conclusion of the study should be processed. As such, for the sake of the discussion of the data, I wish to look at each of the major codes (the codes with the highest rates of occurrence) with the minor codes of the study (the codes with the lowest rates of occurrence) and begin to analyze how the themes from the student responses also informs the quantitative data from the study as well. Looking at the themes against what is represented in the close-ended data would be the best way of interrogating how student responses inform an inquiry into student literacy practices.

Furthermore, when looking at the data, I had the following hypotheses in mind when it came to approaching responses as initial hunches to be proven or disproven. My initial hypothesis for the data were that

1. Students would have mostly negative experiences because of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. These negative experiences would be due to students' inability to connect with their peers and their instructor
3. Because of these negative experiences, students would be hard pressed to leverage the resources available them to acquire further literacy skills

It should be noted that these hypotheses were not meant to guide the analysis of the data. Rather, these hypotheses are meant to offer initial expectations of myself as a researcher, and to be proven or disproven upon further analysis.

Major Themes (Positive Engagement, Teaching Practices, Reflection on Writing Practices)

The major codes found in the study incorporated were how students found their positive engagement, teaching practices, and reflection on writing practices. In table 17, in the occurrence of code rates, the overall code rates for the positive engagement code were the largest, standing at about 38.2%, making this the greatest occurring code in the entire dataset thus far. As stated above, this point in the dataset seems to outwardly contradict my initial hypothesis that students would have more negative experiences during their time learning within the context of the pandemic. Looking more closely at each individual student's responses yields the following ideas, though, yields a more nuanced picture of why the positive engagement code was assigned to their response.

The following student responses were recorded under the positive engagement category:

Table 19: Participant Quotations (Participants 1-4)

Participant Number	Quotations from Q11
1	Yes, I think they got me more used to writing on a whim, and also making sure to have a writing assignment done on a deadline
2	Yes, I have gotten many useful discussions from my experiences
3	Yes, it helped me improve as a writer
4	Writing in these classes and communicating with peers has given me a new insight and perspective on my writing, allowing me to do self-reflection.

Looking at these quotations from Q11, what should be noted is that while the student responses in and of themselves did not go into too much detail with their reasoning on why they felt the way they did, one comment seems to at least lend support with my initial hypotheses that students would benefit from a sense of community during the time of the pandemic, which is with respondent number 4. Their response points to the fact that writing and communicating with peers seems to be the key to their success. Looking back on participants numbers 1, 2, 3, however, it is also possible to tie in participant number 4's response to the other student's response in this group because this students' positive experience in their writing classroom informs, possibly, why these students had such a positive experience as well. Community could be a vital part in informing how and why these students did well in the writing classes they were in during the years of the pandemic.

However, there are a few student responses that, in part, directly contradict what the previous group of students seem to be insinuating that it was their own grit that pulled them through emergency online remote instruction. Below in table 22, the participant numbers said the following:

Table 20: Participant 5

Participant Number	Quotations from Q11
5	I am a very individual learner and do not interact with students or my teachers unless need be. I feel that the content I learned, and my study practices have made me a better writer.

In this participant’s quote above, we can see that it was not exactly a sense of community that helped the student survive through pandemic learning, rather it was because of their own individual grit that got them through what they needed to do to succeed in class. This would seem to contradict the previous students' response that connected their peer connections to their level of success. So, what this student response seems to insinuate is that community connections can appear to help students, but not always. Again, partly contradicting my hypothesis.

Building on these ideas more is the fact that literacy acquisition itself is a complex beast to understand as the data above seems to suggest. With the small amount of data already analyzed, it appears, at least in part, differing variables each affect a student on an individual basis—depending on their individual practices, and as appears further in a few other student responses, their instructors’ capacity to leverage online resources, and the students’ access and capacity to utilize those resources. A few student responses seem to indicate that the efficacy of the resources themselves also plays a factor into how they succeeded. For one participant

(participant number 6), it did not seem to matter what mode of instruction the class was in, rather what was most important to them was the “that the instructor does a good job teaching and giving the proper materials needed to succeed as a student.” What is of particular interest here is what the student means by “materials needed to succeed.” Not only is the instructor’s efficacy at issue, but it also appears that the materials that they use are key to influencing student success. Further study could be done on what these materials could mean, as the student response leaves it open as to if these were extra resources used in the classroom to help students grasp concepts or if these were electronic resources meant that students could use at home and outside the classroom.

The theme present and undergirding the students’ response—that the instructor must be able to leverage the necessary resources to engage with student needs—was also substantiated in a student who wrote that their writing intensive course “wasn't overly difficult but it was efficient in telling us core aspects to writing a good paper.” When this student mentions how their online writing intensive course was efficient in telling the core aspects of a good paper, they are implicating further that curricular structure appears to be another deciding factor in how the student progresses in a writing-intensive class. Connecting these ideas with the literature, we can see how this connects with thoughts from Chamberlain et al. While the essence of Chamberlain et al.’s article gives us pause to consider how to use multimodal projects in the classroom to acquire further literacy, it can also be used to help educators consider what good course design looks like. Actively investing in curriculum that helps students reach their fullest potential is one of the keyways to retain student engagement, but to also be sure that they are better served in the future to help students grow and thrive.

There were also some possible negative outcomes that were further noted while coding as well. There were a few students that seemed to struggle with learning in online environments. For this student, when writing-intensive classes were online, “these classes tended to hinder my writing.” This student’s response was further echoed in other participant answers. Notably the following: “I struggled a lot with online English classes during the pandemic. When the classes were in person however I did improve.” What can be noticed with how these students seem to dislike their writing-intensive coursework when it was completed in an online environment, it again can further substantiate how students, when disconnected from writing communities that they were commonly used to in-person writing instruction, can be impeded by novel situations that they are not readily equipped to learn in. COVID-19 radically changed and altered the landscape of when and where students were able to learn. When looking at how students in the previous responses often felt better able to grasp concepts in writing through their peers, they were more likely to succeed. The same line of reasoning goes for students who best work independently. Students will thrive in this environment that best suits them.

But what seems to be the most important factor most of all for determining student success—at least in the case of the group of students surveyed—was the instructor. The evidence to support this conclusion is derived from one student who wrote that “Hybrid was a little bit more challenging as I felt the level of guidance and instruction was not what it was.” Here the student references how while they felt that the instructor themselves was impactful to their learning by directly stating that they did not receive the adequate guidance necessary to gain the fullest understanding of the course. Another student wrote in “yes, the more instruction I was given the more I understood the assignment.” While they found their writing-intensive course to be

impactful towards their learning, it was again because of the instructor’s ability to leverage their instruction in the mode of instruction desired by the student. Another student wrote that “it depended on the instructor and if I clicked with them.” Again, suggesting that it was up to the instructor’s style of teaching that helped dictate how they could achieve the specific learning outcome for the student. In Q12, the total rate of emergence for this code was at 20.5%. What can be gleaned from this point in the data is that a key factor in their literacy development is, of course, that the teacher and how they leverage their instruction to best suit the student’s needs at that given moment.

Combining these ideas with those found in the close-ended questions, the following patterns also reveal further information about how COVID-19 shaped the efficacy of literacy instruction. First, what must be noticed is that there was seemingly no definitive or significant change in engagement level between the years that students were enrolled at North Dakota State University. For further reference, the engagement level for students enrolled in a writing intensive course were at the following levels during the pandemic across 2019-2022.

Table 21: Engagement Level per Year

Engagement Level Per Year							
2019	Percentage of Occurrence	2020	Percentage of Occurrence	2021	Percentage of Occurrence	2022	Percentage of Occurrence
25	64.09%	21	56.16%	21	55.21%	29	76.20%

With the data above, while there was a slight dip in student engagement levels, the data itself seems to show that though students recovered from COVID-19 affecting their engagement

levels, students were able to bounce back from their pre-pandemic engagement levels, and again, exceed it. Cross-referencing this against data found in another question from the survey, dealing with the mode of instruction, referenced in table 14, we can see that most students during the pandemic year of 2022, the last year of the pandemic were in either hybrid instruction or in synchronous in person instruction, with those figures being at 15 students in hybrid classes and 16 students being in synchronous classes respectively, so these points in the data seem to insinuate that students benefit from being in environments where they do have more direct forms of contact with their instructors.

So, in total, what can be noticed from looking at parts of the data set dealing with the engagement of students is that students do appear to best—at least by looking at the small survey group studies—when they are directly engaged with peers either through a hybrid class, or by engaging them directly through a synchronous online only class. However, it should also be noted that some students operate independently on their own, as with the case with participant 5. This is to show that while some students can better operate in an environment with others, other students are best suited to more individual work time. So in essence, the main conclusion I am gleaning from looking at this data set is that while plenty of students were able to succeed in environments where they are in contact more often with peers and professors, some students still do well in online courses, mainly because in 2022, with students presenting the highest levels of engagement that they have had in years (in relation to the start of the pandemic 2019), they had a choice to choose which type of instruction worked best for them. Which in this case, was the wider availability of all four modes.

Major Themes (Teaching Practice)

There is also another variable that seems to impact student capacity to acquire further literacy, and that is the instructor's impact on their learning. The code "teaching practice" emerged 8 times across multiple student responses when looking at question 11 specifically when looking for this theme. For one of these occurrences, a notable student response said the following: "I think these experiences helped me as a writer because of my instructors and also the assignments that were provided for me to do because I feel like my skills as a writer have grown over the last few years." Here, notably, the student is making note of how the instructor, using their pedagogy, helped build their skills as a writer. Notably, the instructor leveraged assignments that helped the students practice the rhetorical skills, as noticed above when the student references how the instructor's assignments helped them to become better equipped as writers. This theme is further substantiated with another student who wrote that while the class itself "Seems like a lot of busy work," ... [the instructor] has it set up though that the busy work is actually helping with your paper." So, while the student may feel that the work in their writing-intensive course was, perhaps, monotonous, they still helped build up to the larger writer assignments, so in that way, they were effective. Whether or not the student believed that these assignments in and of themselves helped build their rhetorical awareness, however, remains to be seen. But what these students seem to signify in their responses is that their sense of growth also depends on how they value the work itself. When a student does not view the work as entirely consequential to their professional or academic development, their sense of growth in writing may, perhaps, be impacted; or at least their ability to reflect on their progress as writers.

On the next open-ended question, question 12 dealing with how students were impacted by the mode of instruction offers up some additional information on another theme that seems to

emerge from the data concerning teaching practices. Perhaps the most important lesson to learn from this study is that the instructor seems to be the single most important factor in deciding how the students react to how they feel about the course's efficacy. One student wrote that "Hybrid was a little bit more challenging as I felt the level of guidance and instruction was not what it was." Here the student references how while they felt that the instructor themselves was impactful to their learning by directly stating that they did not receive the adequate guidance necessary to gain the fullest understanding of the course. Another student wrote in "yes, the more instruction I was given the more I understood the assignment." While they found their writing-intensive course to be impactful towards their learning, it was again because of the instructor's ability to leverage their instruction in the mode of instruction desired by the student. Another student wrote that "it depended on the instructor and if I clicked with them." Again, suggesting that it was up to the instructor's style of teaching that helped dictate how they could achieve the specific learning outcome for the student. In this question, the total rate of emergence for this code was at 20.5%. So, what can be gleaned from this point in the data is that a key factor in their literacy development is, of course, that the teacher and how they leverage their instruction to best suit the student's needs at that given moment.

In terms of how this all connects with the quantitative data from the study, it appears that student responses to their engagement level in question 10 seems to be yielding the best results so far to understanding how students were engaged according to the mode of instruction. When students answered question 10 dealing with how they perceived the mode of instruction as affecting their learning, it seems that students who believe that the mode of instruction impacts their learning firmly in the direction of the mode of instruction matter deeply for them. For instance, there was a shift in students who felt about the mode of instruction for their classes.

During 2019-2022, the number of students who felt neutral fell from 17 to 1 in 2022. And the number of students who felt that the mode of instruction determined their level of success shot up from 3 to 13 in the yes category. Given this information, it appears that students themselves seem to be more acutely aware now that the mode of their writing intensive classes has become important to how they process through their learning. Furthermore, it also appears that the mode of instruction combined with the instructor's efficacy seems to be tied with how well students learn.

Major Themes (Reflection on Writing Practices)

The final major theme to be discussed is the students' reflection on their own writing practices. Looking at the data, what I sought to find was how students were able to reflect on the progress that they made in their writing, and whether there was a net positive or a net negative impact based on the various factors that were impeding their academic progress. From looking at the data presented in the students' open-ended reflections in question 11 and question 12, it appears that students were able to find a new sense of voice and sense of rhetorical awareness, at least in the case of participant 6, they found that "I had to develop a different sense of voice in my Writing in the Sciences class instead of more of a storyteller's voice in my English 120 class." Looking closely at this students' response, it becomes more readily apparent that this student had to develop a more nuanced and deeper understanding of the rhetorical tools available to him during the pandemic. This interpretation would, again, seem to contradict my initial hypothesis that most students would have mostly/entirely negative experiences during the pandemic, which would potentially hinder their sense of rhetorical awareness during the pandemic.

Still, there were some people who did record some negative experiences during the pandemic, and in terms of how it affected their writing ability, the following would be participant 8 who wrote “Kind of not really still writing the same as always.” While the reasons why this student wrote this response is not entirely known, it does raise some further questions on that student’s instructor or perhaps the students’ own individual habits for maintaining their level of success in their courses. But what this quote also helps to insinuate and realize is that there will always be outliers inside student populations who simply do not enjoy the class or do not engage in it regardless of mode or instructional strategies. As illustrated by another student who wrote in “I don’t like writing.” All of this is to show that, again, not all students will learn equally the same. Some students, as demonstrated above, seem to be acutely aware of their newfound sense of rhetorical awareness. Whereas others seem to be hyper reticent to even comment on any new or interesting thing that turned up during their studies, because they either find the material to be unengaging or not worth the effort.

Taken altogether, what could be noticed about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected student learning is that it did not affect everyone the exact same way. In hindsight, this perhaps should have been obvious, given that as mentioned in the literature, not all students are from the same background which could have cushioned or further exacerbated disruptions to their academic development. Whereas others struggled, others appeared to fare no worse or no better. But at the heart of the issue, these three themes remain as a locus of nodes that student experiences gravitate around:

- an instructor’s efficacy as a teacher,
- the students’ own motivation for their learning which is affected by not only the instructor but also the learning community that a student becomes involved in

- The efficacy that the curriculum provides for the student.

What is not openly discussed at this point are the finer details of what constitutes efficacious instruction, materials, and community resources for each student. In future work, this can be probed further, but what must be addressed now is that when looking back on my initial hypotheses, what seems to become clearer is that out of all the deciding factors for how a student responds to a global pandemic, the greatest impact on a students' learning is the instructor's efficacy, as this variable bleeds into and interacts with all other variables.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Implications for Practice

When looking at the full totality of the data itself, what appears in front of me is a constellation of varying factors that affect student lives. However, I turn back to Deborah Brandt's thoughts on the *Sponsorship of Literacy*. When reflecting on Deborah Brandt's extended analysis of Raymond Branch and Dora Lopez, a student's literacy sponsor can have profound impacts on their life trajectory. A student's life trajectory is often predicted by the resources and most importantly, the instructors that have a profound impact on a student's education (p. 170). Combining Deborah Brandt's reasoning with those found in studies on the efficacies of EROI, perhaps the greatest literacy sponsor that can be noticed is the instructor's efficacy. Looking back on the student responses as well, it seems that this conclusion is further corroborated with what was found in the study. The question now is, what needs to be done now?

Perhaps, the first of my recommendations extends to Carol Anderson's (2017) ideas in her historical research on education. Anderson's work lets us reflect on the fact that education has never been equitable. And COVID-19 has brought profound changes to the educational environment across K-12 and also in higher education, and it forced instructors to leverage the resources necessary to help students succeed most in the classroom. Given the data witnessed, not all instructors were efficacious when it comes to employing those resources it seems, given the responses to the survey. This is not to say that this was due to an instructor's negligence. Not all teachers are made the same. Each instructor has their areas for growth. But given the fact that education is one of the single most important determining factors for how a student will continue to develop in the future, professionally, and academically, what needs to be considered is how

instructors are able to develop professionally and are able to leverage their professional experiences to better help students.

Putting these ideas into context with the data collected from the study, I have a few possible recommendations for faculty to better help students learn during times of crisis. Of course, while I cannot make broad generalizing conclusions about how all students learn, what should be said now with the information on the table is that there is one fundamental truth that should be acknowledged: no one student learns the same as another. But turning to the student data at large, what should be noticed is that one of the most important factors contributing to student success was the instructor's efficacy in their learning. Either through ingenuity, proper classroom management, or proper foresight, an instructor's capacity to structure their curriculum carefully to account for student's varied interests and their preferred method of studying and progressing academically is perhaps the key to limiting any loss of literacy learning in the classroom. Because of this need, more professional development may be needed for teachers to diversify their teaching practices to help the understand the varying needs of their students.

Placing my study into context with other scholars in the field of composition studies, I can see how this aligns with the work of Chamberlain et al (2020), as their work centered around shifting literacy instruction away from literacies that happens solely in the classroom, to instruction that can occur in multiple different spaces online or in larger communities. While I have yet to fully understand what kinds of factors detract from student literacy experiences in the classroom beyond those directly relating to the instructor in some circumstances, a future study could begin to unravel and unpack the various types of activities that can strengthen and grow student literacy practices. At the same time, however, the efficacies of certain literacy practices taught in the classroom should be further interrogated to differentiate those which are effective

for online emergency remote instruction, and those which are more effective for person-to-person classrooms. From my understanding of what students are suggesting throughout the open-ended questions, a one-size fits all pedagogy does not work. Students have their various interests and needs that do in fact need to be met in the classroom, and it is the teacher's duty to fully realize them. Of course, I recognize that I may be in fact preaching to the choir, as I am simply trying to lay out and define best practices, which every efficacious teacher should know. But at the end of the day, it is the teacher's duty and onus to think adequately and effectively on what type of instruction is the most effective for their sections, specific class, and specific students.

Still, I am not completely foregrounding all the blame to be on the instructor. Emergency Online Remote instruction was a difficult task to pull off, and the current environment in higher education with "adjunctification" on the rise, places additional stress on non-tenured faculty, giving them far fewer support than necessary to adequately take on the challenge of Emergency Online Remote Instruction. What I will say too, on the side of the instructor, is that more and more work needs to be done on how instructors themselves are under supported across higher-education (and also K-12). Learning the best practices behind effective hybrid and emergency online remote education are crucial, but it is also crucial to understand the importance of acknowledging how under-resourced teachers are.

If I can end this study on a small note of hope, however, I will say that students are resilient. Again, while the data set is small, what I have seen from it is that students can show remarkable strength, if they are given the resources and motivation to succeed. Looking at some trends in the data, I can see that there was a sharp increase in student belief that their writing classroom was efficacious for their literacy acquisition from 2020-2022, according to question 12 where students tried to identify whether they thought that they're writing courses mode of

instruction was efficacious, a majority of respondents replied within the affirmative. They did feel that writing intensively did help them succeed. But looking at specific responses, such as the following one from a student: "I do think so. It wasn't overly difficult, but it was efficient... As an analogy, rather than giving us a "here's a recipe now do it" it was more "here's the ingredients, now apply them" Inferencing upon this data further, what I am gathering is that students have more resilience than I thought, because they are able to function in more and more isolated environments without being completely derailed. But to reiterate once more, it is up to the teacher as well to understand the efficacy of their instruction in line with their students' needs.

Implications for Future Research

As a final note, I will offer some final exploratory recommendations on where to go with future research. What can be said now is that rather than proving or disproving my original hypotheses, I believe I have found a middle ground of sorts. While some students were not able to succeed in their writing classroom, COVID-19 was not the sole cause for any harm done to student literacy. Rather, it was because of a multitude of differing factors, not the least of which was because of a struggle to connect with content based on the students' specific learning needs. So, now, a new question to begin a new journey in understanding student learning in times of crisis is how instructor efficacy and how their needs can be met most efficiently under the most extreme circumstances. And what are the most positive instructor attributes that will help a student succeed. Turning to these questions will, then, help students continue to learn, engage, and thrive as COVID-19 continues to reshape the direction education is heading.

In the future, what new directions that research can endeavor to undertake is parsing through and thinking through possible ways that students can learn under different pedagogical modes, while paying particular attention to the instructor's efficacy. I also recommend,

furthermore, that more intensive work be done with student populations, such as performing more sustained methods of questioning with students concerning their learning during the pandemic. Interviewing students (and possibly also instructors) would seem to be the best bet for understanding learning concerns more deeply, as the data from earlier seems to insinuate that, again, a constellation of factors—not a single concerning one—seems to be the reason why students are not successful in online writing classes during a pandemic. Interrogating which specific factors may be in play for each student would be the next best possible way forward for this project.

I turn, again, to Carol Anderson's thoughts on how the American education system has been influenced by systemic instances of oppression. As Anderson enumerates, various actors throughout the decades have directly or indirectly contributed to the miseducation of thousands of BIPOC and minority youth (p. 70). COVID-19 was but one of those instances where these prolonged and protracted differences in the quality of education amongst various populations could have become more pronounced. However, given the results of the study, and also the institutional environment that this study was performed in, a definitive conclusion for how COVID-19 may have affected literacy learning levels—and by extension point to any forms of systemic remnants of oppression within their previous experiences with post-secondary, secondary, and primary education—remains to be seen. Reflecting further on the research process, what I recommend any further scholarly work to be done on this project is to find not only a large and less homogenous survey population, but also to use more sustained and meticulous methods (such as interviews) to help understand how students were impacted by larger, society wide instances of oppression and upheaval.

As I reflect on my new career as a K-12 educator, I am further confronted by a vastly different environment that as a previous post-secondary instructor I was not familiar with. In contrast to a post-secondary institution, secondary students often have to live in and work with various networks of support and other stakeholders that constantly measure and assess their academic progress for the sake of collecting data to affirm their credentials in the eyes of public interest (parents, political groups, etc.). Students at my district are expected to be tested regularly through district formative assessments, benchmark tests, along with other content-related exams to gauge and assess whether students are growing and to gauge teacher efficacy as well. What I wonder, as a former collegiate instructor, is how does the data being routinely extracted from these exams directly benefit students, and how, at least in the case of the ELA assessments that I am asked to administer, actively measure literacy? While secondary students are not the main object of this study, taking this information learned from a study done in a post-secondary setting and applying it to a secondary setting presents a new avenue for research. Directly interrogating district formative assessments and benchmark testing in a secondary setting could be uniquely beneficial in illuminating how secondary schools are preparing students to ready them for a post-secondary institution.

However, the question of understanding literacy itself in a post-secondary setting is a vexing one to say the least, but one that can be answered if more time is spent with individual students in a more protracted manner so it is easier to uncover how student learning could have been impacted. A survey in and of itself does not seem to be the most opportune way of collecting data for understanding literacy instruction during times of crisis, largely because of the way that it leaves gaps in understanding how other factors inside and outside the classroom could have affected student academic progression. But the data presented in the study now is still

valuable for at least an initial foray into looking into the topic of student literacy acquisition because, in large part, the open-ended results help give insight into how students felt about their literacy development. While the population itself was still small and relatively homogenous, each individual student still had their own experiences that showed how they were able to cope (or why they failed) during COVID-19. For future research, it would be beneficial to see how the fabric of student lives were interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

"Writing Fires: Surveying Undergraduate Students about Emergency Online Instruction, COVID-19, and Academic Literacy Development"

This consent form is designed to inform you about the study you are being asked to participate in. My project, "Writing Fires: Surveying Undergraduate Students about Emergency Online Instruction, COVID-19, and Academic Literacy Development" focuses on students' experiences with writing-focused classes in secondary and higher education programs. I am looking for participating students who a) completed coursework in writing-focused classes wherein most of the coursework is formal written papers and b) attended an institution of higher education or secondary education (high school or equivalent) between the years 2019-2022.

My project intends to investigate the following research questions: 1. How do undergraduate students at NDSU perceive their literacy development and sense of community during the COVID-19 pandemic? 2. How did the mode of instruction affect students' perceptions of literacy development and sense of community during this time?

Why am I being asked to take part in this study? What will I be asked to do?

This study will ask participants to reflect on their experiences on writing courses during the years of 2019-2022. Participants will complete a questionnaire that will guide them through the reflection on these classes.

Where is the study going to take place, and how long will it take?

The survey is to take entirely online and should only take 10-15 minutes at most. What are the risks and discomforts? There is no physical risk to participating in this project. Participants could potentially reflect on challenges in their writing-focused class that may feel uncomfortable to discuss. All data will be anonymous, and any personally identifiable information will not be collected.

What are the expected benefits of this research?

Societal Benefits: The findings of the project may improve undergraduate writing classrooms and how they instruct students on writing and their key course learning outcomes.

Who will have access to my information?

Because of the quantitative nature of this study, participants will be guaranteed confidentiality, but cannot be guaranteed anonymity because participants may unintentionally provide identifying information. While no personal identifiers will be collected (e.g. full names), participants may provide information that can lead others to deduce their identities.

Will I receive any compensation for participating in the study?

You will not receive any compensation to complete this survey at this time.

What are my rights?

Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigators in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail Isaac Sullivan at isaac.sullivan@ndsu.edu and Holly Hassel at holly.hassel@ndsu.edu. By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason. Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

You have rights as a research participant. All research with human participants is reviewed by a committee called the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions about your rights, an unresolved question, a concern or complaint about this research you may contact the IRB office at 701.231.8995, toll-free at 855-800-6717 or via email (ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu).

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Signing this form means that 1. you have read and understood this consent form 2. you have had your questions answered, and 3. you have decided to be in the study.

Information about us:

Isaac Sullivan is currently a Master's Student at North Dakota State University researching how COVID-19 may have impacted the literacy acquisition of students. He also teaches AP Literature and Honors English at Eastmark High School in Mesa, Arizona.

Holly Hassel has taught for 15 years at a two-year campus in Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin-Marathon County. In 2018, Holly joined the North Dakota State University Department of English. Holly has served as editor of Teaching English in the Two Year College since 2016 and Joanne served as program chair for the first national TYCA conference this year and will continue in that role for the 2020 conference in Milwaukee, WI.

APPENDIX B. SURVEY

Start of Block: Question Block 1

Q0 Informed Consent Form

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- I have read the consent form and wish to participate (4)

- I do not wish to participate in this study (5)

Q1 What is your age?

Less than 18 (1)

18-25 (2)

26-35 (3)

36-45 (4)

46-55 (5)

55+ (6)

Skip To: End of Survey If What is your age? = Less than 18

Q2 During which of the following years were you a student in a writing-focused class, where a large portion of the assignments are formal written papers?

2019 (1)

2020 (2)

2021 (3)

2022 (4)

End of Block: Question Block 1

Start of Block: Demographic Questions

Q3 What is your current university standing (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, graduate, professional, non-degree seeking)?

- Freshman (1)
- Sophomore (2)
- Junior (3)
- Senior (4)
- Graduate (5)
- Professional (6)
- Non-Degree Seeking (7)

Q4 For each of the following academic years, describe your attendance status during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

	Enrollment Status
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2019 (1)	▼ Not Enrolled in School (1 ... At a Four-Year Institution (4)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2020 (2)	▼ Not Enrolled in School (1 ... At a Four-Year Institution (4)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2021 (3)	▼ Not Enrolled in School (1 ... At a Four-Year Institution (4)
2022 (4)	▼ Not Enrolled in School (1 ... At a Four-Year Institution (4)

Q5 Please select a response that best characterizes your racial and/or ethnic identity. Select all that apply.

- African American or Black (1)
 - American Indian or Alaska Native (2)
 - Asian (3)
 - Latin American or Hispanic (10)
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (4)
 - White (5)
 - Prefer not to say (7)
 - Prefer to Self-Describe (8)
-

Q6 Please select a response that best characterizes your gender identity.

- Man (Cisgender) (1)
 - Woman (Cisgender) (2)
 - Trans Man (7)
 - Trans Woman (8)
 - non-binary (3)
 - Prefer not to say (5)
 - Prefer to self-describe (6)
-

End of Block: Demographic Questions

Start of Block: Diagnostic English Classroom Questions

QX Please Read the Following Below:

Engagement in a writing course relates to how well you connected with your instructor, your peers, TA's etc. and other campus resources to help support your success.

Q8 Describe your engagement within your writing-focused class during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years. If you did not have a writing focused class during a specific academic year or were not in school, select N/A.

	Level of Engagement
2019 (1)	▼ Engaged (1 ... N/A (6)
2020 (4)	▼ Engaged (1 ... N/A (6)
2021 (5)	▼ Engaged (1 ... N/A (6)
2022 (6)	▼ Engaged (1 ... N/A (6)

QX Please Read the Following Below:

The mode of instruction for your class relates to how your class's meetings were held (if any were held at all). The mode of instruction can be asynchronous online only, where no scheduled meetings was held, synchronous online only where class meetings are held over videoconferencing software (such as Zoom), synchronous in-person where you meet in a physical classroom regularly, or a hybrid combination of all three of these options.

Q9 Describe the modes of instruction used in your writing-focused classroom.

	Mode of Instruction
2019 (1)	▼ Synchronous Meetings In-Person (1 ... Hybrid (4)
2020 (4)	▼ Synchronous Meetings In-Person (1 ... Hybrid (4)
2021 (5)	▼ Synchronous Meetings In-Person (1 ... Hybrid (4)
2022 (6)	▼ Synchronous Meetings In-Person (1 ... Hybrid (4)

End of Block: Diagnostic English Classroom Questions

Start of Block: Literacy Related Questions

Q10 Do you feel your writing capacity has improved because of these writing-focused classes? Please answer for each of the following academic years (if you were not in a writing-intensive class during an academic year, select N/A)

	Definitely not
2019 (1)	▼ Definitely Not (1 ... Definitely Yes (5)
2020 (4)	▼ Definitely Not (1 ... Definitely Yes (5)
2021 (5)	▼ Definitely Not (1 ... Definitely Yes (5)
2022 (6)	▼ Definitely Not (1 ... Definitely Yes (5)

Q11 Describe your experiences while in writing-intensive classes with assignments, your peers, your instructors, or in your life outside of being a student. Do you think these experiences helped you as a writer? If so, why? If not, why not?

Q12 Do you think your writing class's mode of instruction affected your capacity to succeed as a writer? Please explain.
