Exploring How the COVID-19 Pandemic Impacted Teacher Expectations in Schools

by

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Abstract

Expectations are beliefs that someone should or will achieve something. Expectations influence performance—positive expectations improve outcomes, whereas negative expectations worsen them. We know very little about how teacher expectations changed during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the impact of the COVID-19 public health measures on expectations in schools. Specifically, teacher expectations for students and for themselves, as well as teachers' perceptions of their administrators' expectations for them. Twelve teachers were purposefully sampled across Canada and interviewed in the spring of 2021. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using qualitative content analysis. Five categories were identified. Expectations for students and teachers changed. Students were still expected to do their best but what they were doing looked different. Participants set healthy boundaries and prioritized their well-being due to burnout looming. Administrators made some efforts to be supportive and realistic during this time; however, many participants felt it was not enough. Participants described it was more difficult to develop relationships with students and certain groups of students struggled more than others during the pandemic; both impacting how much teachers could expect of them. The findings contribute to the literature by providing suggestions for future research and proposing an expanded version of a conceptual model for expectations in schools. More importantly, the findings can inform school leaders on how to best support teachers, and how teachers can support and advocate for themselves, during high-stress situations or extreme circumstances, such as a pandemic.

Preface

This dissertation received ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board: "Exploring Teacher Expectations for Student Academic Achievement During COVID-19," No. Pro00104815, February 23, 2021.

Chapter 2 of this dissertation, "Exploring How the COVID-19 Pandemic Impacted Teacher Expectations in Schools" was submitted to the *Social Psychology of Education*. I was responsible for the design of the study, data collection, data analysis, and manuscript composition. Damien C. Cormier was the supervisory author and guided the study design and manuscript composition. Dr. Lia Daniels helped with the study design and manuscript composition. Dr. Melissa Tremblay assisted with the study design, data analysis, and manuscript composition.

all the friends I made through this program and who supported me through this journey. I have

had an amazing team of people who helped me reach this milestone.

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The role of teacher expectations in student learning has been well-established in the literature. Teacher expectations are defined as beliefs about what their student can achieve academically. For example, a teacher may expect some students to surpass their goals in reading and writing by the end of the school year, whereas for other students, a teacher may be happy when they show up to school and may not expect them to make much progress academically. Expectations influence student performance and academic success (Wang et al., 2018). High expectations that are appropriate, challenging enough, and realistic improve academic performance (Rubie-Davies et al., 2006). Low expectations that are not challenging enough reduce academic performance.

There are many reasons why teachers expect less from some students, albeit unintentionally. The evidence consistently shows that teachers tend to have lower expectations, and the effect is more pronounced, for marginalized students including those with disabilities, those from communities of colour, and those from low socio-economic status (SES) homes (Dandy et al., 2015; De Boer et al., 2018). These student factors cannot easily be changed. Teacher expectations are also influenced by characteristics of teachers themselves and the school environment; however, these have been less researched than student factors. An alterable and generally unexplored area is expectations of teachers: from themselves and their administrators; the current study adds to the limited research in this area. *Teachers' self-expectations* are a teacher's beliefs about what they can achieve in their role as a teacher. *Administrators' expectations* were measured from each teacher's perspective; therefore, it is defined as a teacher's perceptions of their administrator's beliefs about what they can achieve in their role as a teacher. Additionally, this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic so there are

contextual factors within the school environment that are atypical. No research to date has set out to explore how the pandemic impacted expectations in schools; however, at least one study has discussed it as a theme in their qualitative results (Rodriguez et al., 2022).

Another area explored in this study is the teacher-student relationship. Teachers behave and interact differently with students for whom they have high versus low expectations. Teachers create warmer climates, teach more material, call more frequently on, and give differential feedback to students for whom they have higher expectations (Rosenthal, 1994). Students perceive these differential behaviours as an indication of their relationship with their teacher, and whether it is positive or negative (Johnston et al., 2022). Teachers' perception of their relationship with students is positively related to their expectations for students: teachers who have a positive relationship with students will also have positive expectations for those students (e.g., Fowler et al., 2008). In general, relationships have been reported to be negatively impacted by the pandemic (Klusmann et al., 2022), which may have influenced how expectations changed during the pandemic. Therefore, the teacher-student relationship is another area of inquiry in this study.

Through interviews with teachers, this study is one of the first to explore how the COVID-19 public health measures changed teacher expectations in schools. This study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the role of expectations in the education system during a long-term stressful event and inform recovery to support teachers now, who are reportedly burnt out, and in future stressful events. A deeper understanding could lead to increased well-being, performance, and satisfaction at school for students, teachers, and school leaders. This study could also inform expectations and well-being of employees and their leaders in other fields.

In the following sections, I review the literature on teachers' expectations for students and themselves, as well as administrators' expectations for teachers. I also review the literature on teacher-student relationships and its association with expectations. Although, at the time of designing this study I found no research on expectations in schools during the pandemic, I describe why I hypothesize there had been a change. Next, I summarize what participants shared about the context of the pandemic in their schools and review the literature thus far on the impact of the pandemic on students and teachers. The final section includes information about the present study.

Teacher Expectations for Students

The influence and formation of teachers' academic expectations for their students has been explored in educational research for over five decades (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Researchers have continued to show the impact that teacher expectations have on students' academic performance: students of teachers who have high expectations of them achieve at higher levels than their underestimated peers (Rubie-Davies et al., 2020). In addition to influencing academic achievement, teacher expectations impact student psychosocial factors such as self-efficacy, self-concept, academic motivation, and behavioural engagement (Wang et al., 2018). Expectations research is important and continues to be explored because of implications for student equity (Rubie-Davies et al., 2020). Teachers are more likely to have low expectations for students from already disadvantaged backgrounds and the effects of expectations are more powerful for those students. The overall effect size is $d = 0.43$ for teacher expectations on student outcomes (Hattie, 2009), which is considered a small effect. However, Jussim and Harber (2005) reviewed 35 years of empirical research and concluded the effects of teacher expectations are much larger ($d = 0.63$ to 0.87; medium to large effects) for stigmatized

groups of students (e.g., from communities of colour, low-SES homes, with learning disabilities). Despite this history and the importance of this topic, there is still much more to learn and explore.

Teacher expectations for students are influenced by several factors including student-, teacher-, and school-related factors. Although student-related factors have been well-researched, limited research exists on the other factors (Wang et al., 2018). For example, many studies have explored student-related factors such as students' prior achievement (Mistry et al., 2009), student effort (Jussim et al., 1998), ethnicity (Dandy et al., 2015), gender, SES, and learning disabilities (Wang et al., 2018). Only a few studies have explored teacher-related factors (e.g., teacher biases, teaching experience, teacher-student relationships) and school-related factors (e.g., student composition of the school including SES, ethnicity, and achievement level; Wang et al., 2018). A teacher- and school-related factor that has not been explored is the expectations *for* teachers. While some factors are not amenable to change, expectations of teachers are a modifiable variable, making them worthy of further exploration.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Teachers communicate their expectations to students through differential behaviours and interactions with students (Brophy, 1985; Rosenthal, 1994; Rubie-Davies, 2015). Harris and Rosenthal (1985) proposed a two-factor theory to highlight the major areas in which teachers' differential behaviour is evident to students. The first relates to the instructional environment, which includes the difficulty and amount of material provided, opportunities to respond to questions, and availability of support when they are having difficulty. The second relates to the psychosocial or affective environment, such as the amount and kind of encouragement, warmth of interactions, attention to students' interests and initiative, and nonverbal behaviours such as

nodding and smiling. Students perceive these behaviours as an indication of the relationship with their teacher and whether it is positive or negative (Johnston et al., 2022).

Studies have explored the link between expectations and teacher-student relationships through teachers' perception and, more recently, students' perception of the relationship. While some studies showed that teachers' perceived relationships with students are positively related to their expectations for students (De Koning & Boekaerts, 2005; Fowler et al., 2008; Hughes et al., 2005), Timmermans et al. (2016) found this association became non-significant when controlling for other factors (e.g., student achievement, gender, SES, self-confidence). However, more recent research has explored this link through students' perceived relationship with their teachers. Specifically, Johnston and colleagues (2022) explored students' perceptions of how teachers communicate their expectations and how these expectations affect them. The results indicated that students experience the effects of teacher expectations through caring relationships. In other words, students perceived their teacher to have high expectations for them when their teacher conveyed a desire to know them and develop positive relationships with them. In turn, students wanted to reciprocate their teachers' care and make them proud, through greater engagement in their learning and effort in their schoolwork. This is supported by other research showing that when students perceive their teachers as caring, they invest more academic effort and are more motivated and engaged (Engels et al., 2021; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). Overall, this research suggests it is worthwhile for teachers to invest their time in building relationships with their students, as this signals to students their teacher's belief in their abilities and high expectations for their success, which impacts student engagement and effort.

Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

A key component to understanding human development is accounting for context, including the people and relationships in a person's life, their home and learning or work environments, and the pandemic. Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) explains humans live in multiple, interconnected, socially integrated environments. He would argue it is important to consider and research teacher- and school-related factors to better understand and support students. While the focus of this study is on teachers, students are at the center of Bronfenbrenner's model because the overall aim of the current study is to indirectly support students' well-being and achievement at school. Teachers are nonetheless a major focus of this study because they are the most significant in-school factor affecting student achievement (Carey, 2004; Hattie, 2009; Rivkin et al., 1998). Bronfenbrenner suggests there are five systems of ecology, described below.

1. The microsystem includes people who have the most immediate and direct influence on the individual, such as parents, teachers, and peers, plus others at school, which could include administrators, coaches, and teacher colleagues. Proximal processes are the interactions between the student and the microsystem, for example, a student's relationship with their teacher, parent, peers, or coach.

2. The mesosystem represents the connections and interactions among those in the student's microsystem, such as a teacher's relationship with a student's parent, or with their administrators or colleagues.

3. The exosystem encompasses the indirect social systems that impact an individual, such as a parent's workplace, community organizations, extended family, government, COVID-19 restrictions, or a student's neighborhood. An example of how the exosystem could have an indirect impact on a student is a parent losing their job or having reduced hours at work

because of the COVID-19 restrictions, which would affect the child indirectly by increasing financial strain on the family.

4. The macrosystem represents the larger cultural, social, and historical context in which an individual lives, such as national policies, laws, and customs. This could include overarching cultural attitudes and norms, SES, ethnicity, and geographic location.

5. The chronosystem encompasses the time-related aspects of development, including how different experiences and contexts change over time. This would include the COVID-19 pandemic.

This model further emphasizes the importance of considering students' relationships at school, the classroom and school environment, and the pandemic context in research aimed to better support students. In the current study, teachers will discuss some of these systems in the context of expectations.

Teachers' Self-Expectations

In the interviews that I conducted with teachers, I defined teachers' self-expectations as the beliefs teachers hold about themselves regarding what they can achieve in their role as a teacher. The concept of self-expectations has been explored with students (Timmons, 2019) and with adults in other professions (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007), but it has not yet been explored with teachers. A teacher's job is multifaceted and I did not specify an area of their job to focus on when discussing their self-expectations as this is still a new topic with teachers. However, research conducted on teacher responsibility for student learning highlights some areas that teachers may consider when reflecting on their self-expectations. Teacher responsibility has been defined as an obligation or commitment to produce or prevent certain outcomes (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011), such as a teacher feeling responsible to produce positive student outcomes. I

presume there is a relationship between self-expectations and sense of responsibility. A teacher with high self-expectations would likely feel a great sense of accountability and responsibility for their students' achievement. Below, I summarize some of the literature on teacher responsibility which may inform teachers' self-expectations.

Teachers are responsible for many things, and some of these things would be considered above and beyond what is written in their job descriptions. In a qualitative study (Lauermann, 2014), elementary and secondary teachers in the United States discussed seven general areas they expect themselves to feel responsible for:

- teaching-related activities (e.g., prepare high-quality lessons, give their best constantly);

- student outcomes (e.g., student learning and engagement for all students);

- interactions with students (e.g., being a role model, caring and compassionate);

- positive classroom atmosphere (e.g., a comfortable and orderly classroom environment);

- interactions with others involved in students' education (e.g., parents, administrators);

- school policies and external regulation (e.g., following state and district standards); and,

- other duties and voluntary work (e.g., community involvement, feeding students).

The scope of what teachers expect to feel responsible for is quite broad, which could make it difficult for teachers to determine boundaries and set priorities (Lauermann, 2014).

Various circumstances determine how much responsibility teachers take on, and I think many of these circumstances could also determine how much they expect of themselves. Barriers to teachers' sense of responsibility include a lack of time and supplies, resources to reach all students, parent involvement, time for communication with parents, and support and guidance from administrators and colleagues (Lauermann, 2014). Determinants of teachers' sense responsibility include teachers' characteristics, such as their intrinsic motivation, work ethic, and

perseverance; their level of skills, training, and experience; and their personal life outside of school including their health and personal hardships (Lauermann, 2014). I suspect these are all characteristics and circumstances that can also inform whether a teacher will have high self-expectations or not.

An increase sense of responsibility comes with both positive and negative consequences (Lauermann, 2014). Negative personal consequences may include the demands of hard work, lack of sleep, and reduced time with family. Positive personal consequences may include increased job satisfaction, a longer career, reduced stress, and respect and recognition from students, parents, and colleagues. Positive consequences in other areas may include improved student academic success, a positive classroom atmosphere, and positive relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. When teachers experience positive consequences, it will likely reinforce their behaviours and self-expectations.

Researchers have established a connection between the concept of teacher responsibility and teacher expectations for their students. Studies have shown teachers who have low expectations for their students tend to perceive themselves as less responsible for their student's academic outcomes compared to teachers who have high expectations (Diamond et al., 2004). Based on this information, I would posit that teachers who have low expectations for their students also have lower self-expectations. Research on teacher self-expectations is needed to better understand this concept, distinguish it from similar concepts, and know how it relates to expectations for students, which impacts student outcomes.

Administrators' Expectations

The research on teacher expectations has mostly overlooked the organizational context in which teachers work, specifically the expectations of school administrators. Administrator

expectations for teachers is defined similarly to those defined prior: what administrators believe their teachers can achieve in their role at work. Administrator expectations can be communicated to teachers through competency requirements or professional standards created by school boards, and through specific goals or missions decided on by each school's administrators.

For example, Alberta Education (2023) has a Teaching Quality Standard that includes six competencies and indicators all teachers are expected to uphold. These include a) fostering effective relationships with students, parents/guardians, peers, staff, and professionals in the community; b) engaging in career-long professional learning, which involves learning from other teachers; c) demonstrating a professional body of knowledge for planning and designing learning activities, for engaging students in meaningful learning, and for assessment and evaluation; d) establishing an inclusive learning environment—a welcoming, respected and safe space for everyone; e) applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, Inuit; and, f) adhering to legal frameworks and policies including those under the Education Act. These are examples of what administrators in Alberta expect from teachers in their schools.

While limited, a few studies have explored the relationship between the school context and teacher expectations for students and their sense of responsibility. Diamond and colleagues (2004) showed that the school context and leaders have a mediating effect on the relationship between teacher expectations for students and their sense of responsibility for student learning. In other words, when administrators communicate high expectations for their staff and the school context is positive and collaborative, teachers are more likely to have high expectations for their students and have a greater sense of responsibility for student learning. Saebo and Midtsundstad (2018) conducted focus groups and case studies with teachers from two different schools and explored how teacher expectations are influenced by organizational expectation structures. They

found the amount of responsibility teachers take on (which I associate with self-expectations) is guided by the school's expectation structures. In other words, school leaders play an important role in creating conditions under which teacher expectations are formed, for their students and likely themselves.

Researchers also speak of another important characteristic of schools called *collective responsibility* for student learning (Diamond et al., 2004; Saebo & Midtsundstad, 2018). Collective responsibility means all staff members share a commitment to the success of each student in the school, not just students in their classroom (Hirsh, 2010). Examples of collective responsibility include working collaboratively as a team toward the same goal, sharing successes and challenges with colleagues to learn from each other, providing emotional and instructional support to colleagues, and establishing teacher-to-teacher trust (Whalan, 2012). A high degree of collective responsibility in schools is influenced by administrator expectations (Diamond et al., 2004) and is positively related to student achievement gains (LoGerfo & Goddard, 2008).

A concept closely related to collective responsibility is known as *collective teacher efficacy*. According to John Hattie, who has synthesized the findings of over 800 meta-studies related to achievement, collective teacher efficacy is the number one influence on student achievement, with an effect size of 1.57 (Hattie & Zierer, 2019). Collective teacher efficacy refers to the shared belief among teachers that they can positively impact student learning outcomes through working together and holding high expectations for themselves and their students. Important to note, both collective responsibility and collective teacher efficacy are considered characteristics of the school as a whole; therefore, school leadership must cultivate, model, and encourage these among their staff (Hattie & Zierer, 2019).

The COVID-19 Context

General Description of COVID-19 Restrictions

In March 2020, to reduce the risk of infection, governments in many countries imposed lockdowns, including school closures that forced teachers to change from in-person to remote learning. During the 2020-2021 school year, most schools returned to face-to-face teaching, while some classrooms or schools isolated based on positive cases. Vaillancourt and colleagues (2021) emphasized that while the pandemic has been challenging for children and youth, it has also been challenging for teachers, principals, and other school staff to keep up with all the changes while also trying to keep students engaged and motivated. The rest of this section summarizes the COVID-19 context and major changes at school for the participants in the current study.

From April to May 2021, teachers in the current study discussed the significant and constant changes made that year at school based on the public health directives related to the COVID-19 pandemic. One teacher articulated that, rather than the changes themselves, the most difficult elements were short notice for implementation and continuous change throughout the school year.

The most talked about change was the logistics around safety-related protocols such as sanitizing, cleaning, masking, tracking, and physical distancing. These new protocols took time from students' learning, eating, and socializing, and teachers' preparation time and break time. For many interviewees, physical distancing in the classroom meant desks were separated into rows and teachers were encouraged to stay at their desks or in the front of the room. These restrictions impacted the way teachers were allowed to teach: small group work was discouraged, many did not use manipulatives because of sanitizing rules, and field trips and special visitors

were cancelled. This resulted in needing more preparation time to redesign activities and come up with creative solutions, which made many teachers feel like a first-year teacher again. Most participants' schools implemented cohorts and two-week isolation periods. Many teachers were expected to provide online learning while their students isolated, which was a steep learning curve for many. In addition to the safety-related protocols, some teachers faced curriculum changes as well.

These restrictions translated to limitations for students, teachers, and staff in terms of time and space to socialize, and in the variety and choice of individuals with whom to socialize. Students were not allowed to walk around freely or spend time with friends in other classes. Many staff rooms were closed, and others had specific times they could be used. Teachers had to physically distance themselves from their colleagues and staff meetings were online. Teachers discussed how this negatively impacted the overall work environment.

Participants also spoke of increased stressors in their personal lives because of the pandemic and a fear of getting sick. One teacher reported being immunocompromised and consequently fearful of getting COVID-19 at school. Another teacher mentioned having a fear of getting COVID-19 and passing it along to an elderly family or community member. A few participants had their school-aged children at home, which added another layer of worry.

Impact of COVID-19 on Students and Teachers

Much of the research on the impacts of COVID-19 restrictions in schools has focused on the impacts on students. There were increases in students' depressive and anxious symptoms (Samji et al., 2022), declines in academic achievement, chronic attendance problems, and disengagement (Hargreaves, 2021). The impact was even greater for students already at-risk before COVID-19 (Hargreaves, 2021). Restrictions and school closures also impacted the food

security of children, detection and reporting of child maltreatment, social isolation, loneliness, and in some cases caused lengthy separations from extended family and community networks (e.g., teammates, coaches, counsellors, spiritual leaders; Hargreaves, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on teachers as well, as evidenced by the experiences shared by the teachers in this study and in other research as well. Characteristics of teaching during this period include an increase in workload, emotional exhaustion, stress, and social isolation, described below. These factors have greatly affected the well-being and effectiveness of educators (Hargreaves, 2021), highlighting the need to address the challenges faced by teachers during this time.

Increased Workload. Teachers adopted new tasks, without lessening their usual duties, and had to completely re-design class routines and learning content because of the restrictions (Klusmann et al., 2023; Kupers et al., 2022). Data also show that some felt an overwhelming workload even before the pandemic, with comments about not having enough time to get work done or feeling pressure to work long hours (Hargreaves, 2021). Thus, for those with a heavy workload before the pandemic, one can imagine how much was added, logistically and emotionally, due to the pandemic.

Burnout and Emotional Exhaustion. An increased workload on top of teachers' regular duties, and on top of the additional stressors experienced during the pandemic, inevitably increase the chances of emotional exhaustion, which is a core symptom of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Researchers have found high levels of emotional exhaustion among teachers compared to before the pandemic (Chan et al., 2021; Klusmann et al., 2023) and these symptoms continued to increase over the course of the pandemic (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020). Teachers and principals from a recent study experienced their work during

the COVID-19 pandemic as "predominantly stressful" (Klusmann et al., 2023). Over 90% of educators reported feeling stressed in a study with over 2,500 participants (Alberta Teachers Association, 2021). Many of these teachers were concerned about getting COVID-19 and about the mental health of themselves or their students. The same survey with Alberta teachers showed that over 93% reported feeling exhausted at the end of each day. In addition to increased stress and exhaustion, many teachers reported that they lacked the skills to cope (Canadian Teachers Federation, 2020).

The impacts of the pandemic were more challenging and stressful for certain groups of teachers, such as those who were chronically ill (Santamaria et al., 2021), females, and younger. One study showed that teachers between the ages of 30-39 were overrepresented in feeling worried or stressed during the pandemic (Kupers et al., 2022). Another found female teachers were more stressed and exhausted on average than their male colleagues. More specifically, younger, female elementary school teachers experienced more stress and exhaustion compared to others (Stang-Rabrig et al., 2022). This could be explained by another study showing that women disproportionately carried the increased childrearing demands because of the lockdown (Zamarro & Prados, 2020).

Social Isolation. There has been less socialization because of the pandemic-related restrictions, which comes at a cost. Research has shown that forming social relationships at school is a cornerstone of both students' and teachers' growth and well-being (Collie et al., 2015; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2020). Before the pandemic, teachers, students, and parents met each other daily at school and fostered connection through formal and informal contact (Klusmann et al., 2022). The pandemic led to restrictions that made it more difficult to connect with others. Support from colleagues and administrators is also important and positively related to job

satisfaction and negatively related to stress and exhaustion (Stang-Rabrig et al., 2022). Klusmaan and colleagues (2023) found pandemic-specific health concerns and additional workload were positively, and social support negatively, related to emotional exhaustion. These relationships are consistent with literature before the pandemic as well (e.g., Collie et al., 2016; Sokal et al., 2020; Yildirim, 2014). As a result of the COVID-19 restrictions, fewer formal and informal opportunities exist to socially connect with others, impacting outcomes such as teachers' job satisfaction and emotional well-being.

Expectations in Schools During the COVID-19 Pandemic

At the time of writing, no research was found that explored the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher expectations in schools. However, there are several reasons for believing teacher expectations for students and for themselves are likely lower now than they were pre-pandemic. The first reason is related to the relationship between chronic stress, teacher motivation, and teacher-student relationships. Chronic stress among teachers is linked to decreases in teacher motivation and engagement, both of which lead to burnout (Brackett and Cipriano, 2020) and likely lowered self-expectations. Teachers who are burnt out have poorer relationships with students and are less likely to model healthy self-regulation (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020). As described above, studies have shown the quality of teacher-student relationships to be positively related to teacher expectations for students (e.g., De Koning & Boekaerts, 2005). The second reason is related to the relationship between teacher self-efficacy and the ever-changing classroom rules. During COVID-19, almost all schools were transformed into something quite unlike what they were previously. Teachers may have been confident to teach their content in the classroom; however, this confidence could differ with teaching online or in socially distant classrooms. This confidence in teaching can be referred to as self-efficacy,

which has also been linked to teacher expectations. Teachers with lower self-efficacy make more negative predictions of students' academic achievement (Tournaki & Podell, 2005). Research in the field of leadership has shown that low self-efficacy impacts the relationship between self-expectations and performance (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007).

Present Study

Given these gaps in the expectation literature and the lack of research in this area during the COVID-19 pandemic, this study aimed to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 restrictions on expectations in schools through interviews with teachers. Specifically, I explored the impact of COVID-19 on teacher expectations for students and themselves, teacher-student relationships, and teachers' perceptions of their administrators' expectations of them.

Following three pilot interviews, I completed 12 virtual interviews with teachers from six Canadian provinces, who taught grades five to eight, mostly in person. Data were collected from April to May 2021. I used member-checking strategies to verify participants' responses: by summarizing what participants said during the interviews and by having a follow-up meeting after initial coding. I examined interview data using content analysis, with an inductive approach to gaining understanding, described by Hsiu-Fang and Shannon (2005).

This study contributes to the existing literature on expectations in schools by focusing on two areas that have received limited attention: expectations for teachers and teacher-student relationships. Furthermore, this is one of the first studies to explore and discuss the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic context on expectations in schools. The results of this study can inform how to best support teachers in schools now, and during other high-stress situations (e.g., starting a new job, working with challenging colleagues or students, or personal situations) as well as extreme circumstances (e.g., a global pandemic, environmental crisis like a wildfire or flood).

Gaining insight into the ways teachers cope with difficulties—and their needs—during times of crisis and stress, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is crucial. This understanding can inform the development of effective support measures and assist teachers in managing the emotional strain associated with these circumstances, often filled with increased uncertainty and stress. That said, the impacts of the pandemic continue; therefore, the results are still relevant during this time.

Researcher Reflection and Positionality

I am a psychology student pursuing a Ph.D. from a program accredited in school and clinical psychology. I am not a teacher; however, I have experience working in schools as a researcher or assistant on numerous projects and as a student-practitioner through practicums in Alberta and an internship in British Colombia. My research interests generally entail helping children and adolescents, especially those put at risk, reach their full potential in various areas. I have done this by conducting research directly with children, their parents, and teachers, with research outcomes including academic, psychological, emotional, and social.

My interest in school and clinical psychology stemmed from my master's degree at the University of New Brunswick, where I worked on a First Nations literacy initiative. As part of the initiative, I worked on the literacy activity development team and the assessment team where I traveled to First Nations communities in five Canadian provinces. This experience had a significant impact on my life. First, I realized how little I knew about Indigenous peoples, and I learned a lot from the individuals in these communities. Second, witnessing the level of poverty in many of these communities and the trauma many of the children and their families have experienced was eye-opening. Despite all the hardships, many of the students I worked with were bright, happy, and curious, and they loved to engage in conversation. I made extra efforts in these communities to encourage each child I worked with to keep trying their best. I built rapport

and spent time with these students, despite a busy schedule, and I communicated high hopes for them.

After moving to Edmonton to start the School and Clinical Child Psychology program, I wanted to continue working with Indigenous children as I really enjoyed the work I had been doing. However, I had just moved to a new province and city, and I did not have established relationships with local communities, which take time to develop. Therefore, given the limited time allotted to design a study at the master's level, I chose a more indirect route of hopefully helping and supporting these populations. These circumstances led me to the topic of expectations and working with teachers.

My master's research (Flanagan et al., 2020) explored the impact of implicit prejudice on Alberta teachers' expectations for students. The results showed teachers have higher expectations for Asian students, and lower expectations for Indigenous students, compared with Caucasian students. This research and knowledge base helps me to be aware of my own implicit biases and the ways they can impact behaviors unconsciously. As a result, through reflective practice and supervision, I have been made aware of my actions, beliefs, reactions, and thoughts. I check these before, during, or after meetings with clients. I make efforts to have high expectations and hopes for all my clients, knowing these can also be communicated non-verbally. This is something I continue working on.

Through my practicums and internship experiences I have gained more of an understanding of what a teacher's job entails, the working systems of a school, and the impact school members can have on the school environment. I also gained respect and empathy for teachers, administrators, and other school staff, many going above and beyond to support their students. During my internship in the Surrey Schools district in British Colombia throughout the

2021-2022 school year, I was also able to see what it was like to work in schools during the

pandemic. This also gave me a unique perspective.

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CHAPTER TWO: EXPLORING HOW THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACTED TEACHER EXPECTATIONS IN SCHOOLS

The role of teacher expectations in student learning has been well-established in the literature. *Teacher expectations*, defined as beliefs held by educators what their students can achieve academically, impact student performance and academic success (e.g., Wang et al., 2018). Many factors influence teacher expectations for students, and some have been more researched than others. A teacher- and school-related factor that has received limited research attention is expectations placed upon teachers, by themselves and their administrators. *Teachers' self-expectations* are defined as a teacher's beliefs about what they can achieve in their role as a teacher. *Administrators' expectations* for teachers are beliefs about what their teachers can achieve in their role as teachers; this was measured from each teacher's perspective. Expectations are communicated through differential behaviours and interactions. The types of interactions between two people characterize the kind of relationship they have. When a teacher has positive interactions and relationships with students, they have positive expectations for those students (e.g., Fowler et al., 2008). Therefore, another area explored in this study is the teacher-student relationship.

This study was designed during the 2020-2021 school year, which was the first full school year of the COVID-19 pandemic. That school year was characterized by ever-changing rules, increased public health measures, increased workload, emotional exhaustion, and social isolation. This is one of the first studies to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted expectations in school. When exploring a relatively new topic during a unique period, qualitative research can be a useful method to learn about participants' experiences.

Through interviews with 12 teachers, the current study explored the impact of the COVID-19 public health measures on expectations in schools, specifically, teacher expectations for students and for themselves, and teachers' perceptions of their administrators' expectations for them. The research findings contribute to the literature by providing suggestions for future research and a proposed expansion of a conceptual model related to expectations in schools. More importantly, the findings can inform school leaders on how to best support teachers, and how teachers can support and advocate for themselves during high-stress situations or extreme circumstances, such as a pandemic.

Teacher Expectations for Student Academic Achievement

Since the seminal study *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968), an increasing number of studies have established that teacher expectations for student academic achievement have a significant impact on students' performance—high expectations improve academic performance and low expectations reduce academic performance (e.g., Friedrich et al., 2015; Rubie-Davies et al., 2006; Timmons et al., 2022). The average effect size of teacher expectations on student outcomes is 0.43 (Hattie, 2009); however, the effect can be more powerful (up to 0.87) for stigmatized groups of students (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Teacher expectations for students are amenable to positive change, which is supported by intervention research (e.g., De Boer et al., 2018; Rubie-Davies et al., 2015).

Teacher expectations for students are influenced by many factors including student-, teacher-, and school-related factors. Although student-related factors have been a focus in the literature (e.g., factors such as students' prior achievement, student effort, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status [SES], learning disability status), limited research exists on other contextual factors (Wang et al., 2018). Teacher- and school-related factors have not been well-

attended to in terms of their breadth and depth. Some factors that have begun receiving attention include teaching experience (Whitley, 2010), teacher bias (Brault et al., 2014; Van den Bergh et al., 2010), teacher-student relationships (De Koning & Boekaerts, 2005; Hughes et al., 2005), and student composition of the school, including SES, ethnicity, and achievement level (Ready & Wright, 2011). Many of these factors, however, need more research to allow stronger conclusions. Relatedly, a teacher- and school-related factor that has not been extensively explored is expectations placed upon teachers, by themselves and by their administrators.

Teacher expectations for students are communicated through teachers' differential behaviours and interactions with students (Brophy, 1985; Rosenthal, 1994; Rubie-Davies, 2015). For example, teachers are more likely to call on, have friendly and warm interactions with, and adequately challenge students for whom they have higher expectations. Some research confirmed when a teacher has positive interactions and relationships with students, they have positive expectations for those students (e.g., Hughes et al., 2005). From the point of view of students, they understand their teacher's expectations for them through their perceived interactions and relationship with their teacher. Johnston and colleagues (2022) found when a teacher conveys a desire to know their students and to develop positive relationships with them, students perceive their teacher has high expectations. In response, students reciprocate their teacher's care and make more effort on their schoolwork. The opposite of this was found to be true as well: when a teacher does *not* demonstrate an interest in developing a positive relationship with their students, students perceive their teacher has low expectations for them (Johnston et al., 2022). Therefore, expectations are communicated to students through behaviours and interactions, and students notice them through relationship quality, making teacher-student relationships important.

The information reviewed above is represented in Brophy and Good's (1970) model explaining the association between teacher expectations, teacher behaviours, and student achievement. The cycle begins with a teacher's beliefs and knowledge about each student, which impacts the teacher's expectations, behaviours, and interactions in the classroom. Students notice this differential behaviour, which impacts their motivation, and subsequently their academic achievement. The resulting outcomes feed back into the beginning of the cycle. There is also other research that links teacher expectations to student psychosocial outcomes such as self-efficacy, self-concept, academic motivation, and behavioural engagement (Wang et al., 2018).

While Brophy and Good's (1970) model helps describe how teacher expectations impact student academic achievement, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (2005) emphasizes the importance of considering the impact of the ecological context to better understand and positively impact these outcomes. Brophy and Good's (1970) model would be described as *proximal processes* in Bronfenbrenner's model, which are the interactions between students and their teacher. However, there are other people (*microsystems*; e.g., parents, school administrators, teacher colleagues); relations and interactions among those people (*mesosystem*); indirect social systems (*exosystem*; e.g., stressors in a teacher's personal life that may impact well-being or motivation or self-expectations); cultural context, attitudes, and norms (*macrosystem*; e.g., gender, geographic location); and environmental changes over time (*chronosystem*; e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic) that are important to consider, as well. These theoretical underpinnings lead us to consider other people directly involved in a child's life, relationships at school, the classroom and school environment, as well as the context of the pandemic in research aimed to better support students.

Expectations Placed on Teachers

Teacher Self-Expectations

Teacher self-expectations are the beliefs teachers hold about what they can achieve in their role as a teacher. In the field of education, no research was found that explores teacher self-expectations. However, self-expectations have been explored in research with other populations, including students in schools and adults in the field of leadership and management. Positive self-expectations are associated with a myriad of positive outcomes. Studies about student self-expectations showed high self-expectations to be positively related to self-regulation, early reading, and vocabulary outcomes (Timmons, 2019); higher test scores (Froiland & Davison, 2016); and entering and graduating from college (Trinidad, 2019). In the field of leadership and management, high self-expectations among employees are associated with improved performance at work (Carmeli & Schaubroeck, 2007; Eden, 1990). In brief, high self-expectations, for both students and adults, are associated with improved performance, well-being, and relationships.

I anticipate that when a teacher has high self-expectations, they also feel a strong sense of accountability and responsibility for their students' achievement. *Teacher sense of responsibility* is a term that refers to a teacher's commitment to produce or prevent certain outcomes from happening (Lauermann & Karabenick, 2011). Research on teacher's sense of responsibility has shown that teachers feel responsible for many things in their role (Lauermann, 2014), such as preparing high-quality lessons, engaging all students in learning, interacting positively with all students and those involved in their education, creating a positive classroom environment, following district standards, etc. However, many may also feel responsible for things that are considered above and beyond what is written in their job description, such as feeding their

students, organizing clubs or other extracurricular activities, providing extra academic support to students during breaks and lunch, and attending events in the community to show support for students. Increased sense of responsibility can result in positive outcomes including increased job satisfaction, reduced stress, positive class environment, and positive relationships with students, parents, and colleagues (Lauermann, 2014). I reference this literature here and below as it may inform and be related to the concept of teachers' self-expectations.

Administrator Expectations for Teachers

Administrator expectations for teachers is defined similarly: what administrators believe their teachers can achieve in their role at work. This may be communicated to teachers through professional standards or competency requirements established by school boards, and any additional specific expectations decided on by individual school administrators. This is also communicated and supported through the school climate and environment.

While limited, a few studies have explored the relationship between administrator and teacher expectations, which demonstrate the important role school leaders play in influencing teacher expectations. A qualitative study, using interviews and observations at five elementary schools, found that when administrators communicate high expectations to their staff, and when the school context is positive and collaborative, teachers are more likely to have high expectations for their students and an increased sense of responsibility (Diamond et al., 2004). This was echoed by another study through which focus groups and case studies were conducted with teachers from two schools, finding teachers' sense of responsibility were guided by the schools' expectation structures (Saebo & Midtsundstad, 2018). In these studies, administrators' high expectations for teachers were reflected in teachers working hard; supporting all students not only academically but also socially regardless of circumstances; engaging in collaborative

opportunities among staff to support, reflect, learn, and connect with each other; and in schools where these messages were clearly communicated verbally and nonverbally through banners and posters. Taken together, school leaders play a role in creating conditions under which teacher expectations are formed, both for their students and possibly for themselves. Unreasonable expectations placed upon teachers by others or themselves can lead to negative outcomes including shame, guilt, frustration, anxiety, burnout, and compassion fatigue (WISE, 2023). Instead, expectations that are challenging, realistic, and attainable lead to many positive outcomes described above and these are the kinds of expectations we should aim for.

COVID-19 Pandemic Context and Impacts

In March 2020, to reduce the risk of spreading COVID-19, governments in many countries imposed lockdowns, including school closures that forced teachers to change from in-person to remote learning. During the 2020-2021 school year, most schools returned to face-to-face teaching, while some classrooms or schools isolated based on numbers of positive cases. As a result of the pandemic, many changes were made to school environments, and teachers and staff needed to be prepared to adapt to the ever-changing public health directives. Changes at school experienced by participants in the current study are summarized in the Methods section.

While research on the pandemic impacts has focused primarily on student outcomes, the pandemic has had a significant impact on teachers as well. Elevated adverse characteristics of teaching during this period included an increase in workload (Klusmann et al., 2023; Kupers et al., 2022), emotional exhaustion (Chan et al., 2021; Canadian Teachers Federation, 2020, 2022; Sokal et al., 2020), stress (Alberta Teachers Association, 2021; Santamaria et al., 2021; Stang-Rabrig et al., 2022), and social isolation (Klusmann et al., 2023). These factors, associated with burnout, demonstrate how the pandemic greatly affected the well-being and effectiveness of

educators. Teacher burnout also has negative effects on students, including higher levels of chronic stress (Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016), lower academic performance, reduced feelings of support from teachers, and lower school satisfaction (Arens & Morin, 2016). The negative impact on teachers, and subsequent impact on students, highlights the need to support and address the challenges faced by teachers during this time.

At the time of writing, we know very little about the impacts of COVID-19 on expectations in schools. Learning how the pandemic impacted teachers and their expectations is important in determining appropriate responses to its lingering impacts and addressing future high-stress situations. Given these gaps in the expectation literature and the lack of research in this area during the pandemic, this study aimed to investigate the impact COVID-19 restrictions had on expectations in schools, through interviews with teachers, and to provide recommendations for practice.

Methods

A qualitative research approach is most appropriate for this study because it is often used to explore new areas of research, to make sense of complex situations, and to learn about participants' experience in detail (Richards & Morse, 2007). The current study explores participants' experience with newer topics in expectation research during a unique period, the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, I employed a descriptive qualitative approach, which involves providing a comprehensive summary of the findings as participants communicated them (Sandelowski, 2000). This straightforward description of participants' experiences is important for those whom the research pertains to as it increases the likelihood of the results being easily understood and used in practice (Doyle et al., 2020; Sandelowski, 2000). This method was also chosen because it appropriately answer the research questions. The theoretical framework that

aligns with my assumptions, views, and with the chosen methodological approach is social constructivism. More information about how that framework fits within this study is provided in Appendix A.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the University of Alberta's research ethics board (Pro00104815). Specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion of participants were established prior to the outset of data collection. I included teachers in Canada with at least three years of teaching experience, who taught grades four to eight throughout the 2020-2021 school year[1], teaching mostly in person rather than online. Including teachers with at least three years of teaching experience ensured participants had at least one full year of teaching before the pandemic started, which they could use to compare to their pandemic teaching experience. Including teachers who taught grades four to eight was specified because, at the time, high schools were more likely to provide online learning or a hybrid of in-person and online learning, while younger learners (up to grade three) were thought to experience more pronounced learning shortfalls (Betkowski, 2020) and this was later confirmed (Lewis & Kuhfeld, 2022). As a result, the experience of high school and early elementary school teachers are likely to differ more significantly from the norm and I would anticipate more extreme responses from those teachers. Finally, the inclusion of teachers who primarily taught in-person was expected to be more like the pre-COVID-19 teaching environment, and perhaps the post-COVID-19 environment, which may impact the relevance of this study's results and recommendations. Also, the experience of teachers who taught online appeared to be markedly different than the experience of teaching in person. Including only one of these teaching modalities was desired to reduce some variability in participants' experiences.

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[1] The 2020-2021 school year will often be referred to as "that year" or "that time."

Participant Recruitment

      I used a combination of purposeful sampling strategies for this study, which Palinkas and colleagues (2016, p. 2) characterized as being "widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest." Snowball sampling was used by sharing a poster with my connections, who in turn shared with their contacts. The poster was also shared widely on Facebook, including teacher groups. Interested teachers emailed me and I gave them information about the estimated time commitment, an information letter and consent form, as well as a demographic questionnaire with questions about the inclusion and exclusion criteria that also included a reflection activity (Appendix B). I received interest from 27 teachers. I selected interested teachers based on the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Additionally, I used "maximum variation" strategies by intentionally selecting a diverse sample to reflect some of the diversity of the population and to gain multiple perspectives on the phenomenon, adding to the richness of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I planned to interview at least 12 participants due to the diversity of the sample and to add more if new information continued to be provided. However, by the last few interviews, the information provided started feeling redundant, which is an indication of data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). I decided to stop gathering data after 12 interviews because of this as well as the time constraints involved in the study.

Participant Demographics and Study Context

      The sample consisted of 12 teachers, 10 females and two males, with a range of years of teaching experience (three to 30 years; mean = 9.4 years) and ages (25 to 53 years old; mean age = 33.75 years old). In terms of ethnicity, 10 participants were Caucasian, one was First Nations/Caucasian, and one was Ashkenazi Jew. Teachers were in Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario,

Quebec, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Two teachers taught at rural schools, one teacher taught at a charter school, two teachers taught specialized programs, and the rest taught regular programs at public schools within an urban setting. Participants taught grades five to eight. A few teachers taught split classes, or they taught several different grades, with at least one grade fitting within the inclusion criteria. Two teachers helped with school leadership and worked closely with their administrators. In terms of in-classroom time lost due to the COVID-19 pandemic, one teacher was on a stress leave for two months, three teachers did not have to teach online at all that school year, two teachers taught online for one week, and the other half of the sample taught online for not more than two weeks total. Five teachers had children at home and one teacher cared for her elderly parent. Eight participants had a bachelor's degree in education, three of those participants were either a master's student at the time or registered to begin that spring, three participants had a master's degree, and one participant had a PhD. Appendix C provides a breakdown of each participant's demographics to help characterize the quotes provided in the results.

Describing the context of this study is important because it is quite different from anything we have experienced in recent decades. Interviews were conducted virtually in April to May 2021 during the first full school year of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants were asked to describe changes made at school due to COVID-19 public health orders and restrictions. In short, clearly there were significant changes and teachers were overwhelmed by the seemingly never ending need to adapt in their roles. In addition to their already demanding teaching workloads, the added presence of public health directives in the school and classrooms required teachers to monitor and maintain new safety protocols, attend to personal protective equipment for themselves and their students, engage in extra handwashing and disinfecting, create and

maintain socially distanced classrooms, adapt to curriculum changes and redesign learning activities, and, as a result, have less time to be social and collaborative. Teaching during the pandemic posed additional stresses and logistics for many, but particularly for teachers with their own children at home requiring a balance of their professional responsibilities with the demands of supporting their own children's learning.

Data Collection

The main data collection method used was one-on-one semi-structured interviews, typical of this study's qualitative description design (Sandelowski, 2000). A general interview guide was created (see Appendix D) prior to the start of data collection. I received feedback on the guide from my supervisory committee members and three pilot interviewees, and it continued to be modified as I completed interviews. The guide promoted discussion around the research questions, while also allowing for follow-up questions, probes, and natural communication. The other data collection method used was photo elicitation (Glaw et al., 2017; Thomas, 2009), which involved getting participants to take a picture or draw an image prior to the interview to engage in reflection and to generate discussion during the interview about the impact of COVID-19 on their expectations.

Interviews ranged in length from 45 to 90 minutes; eight of the 12 interviews were between 60 and 75 minutes. I met with participants individually a second time to engage them in member checking, described below, and data analysis. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Interviews were completed via Zoom, which allowed participants to complete the interview in a comfortable and private space. Following the initial interview, participants were given $20 for their participation.

Data Analysis

  Data analysis was iterative and occurred throughout data generation, which is important for the qualitative research process (Mayan, 2009; Sandelowski, 2000). Following each interview, I made notes in a research journal about my initial thoughts and impressions, how I might change things to improve the next interview, and main points or themes that stood out. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, either by me or a transcriptionist. I checked each transcript for accuracy by listening to each audio file again while simultaneously correcting the transcripts. This allowed for further immersion in, and familiarity with, the data.

  I examined interview data using the conventional approach to qualitative content analysis described by Hsiu-Fang and Shannon (2005). This is an inductive approach to gaining understanding which is typically used in studies where the aim is to describe a phenomenon that has received limited attention in the literature (Hsiu-Fang & Shannon, 2005). After becoming familiar with the data, I identified initial codes manually by providing a brief label to segments of data related to the research questions. Subsequently, I used NVivo Release 1.7 (QSR International, 2022) to aid in organizing the initial codes, which then were sorted into initial categories based on how codes were related. Throughout this process, I wrote notes, reflection questions, and decisions on codes and categories in my research journal. Once the initial codes and categories were generated, I defined the overarching categories and subcategories, followed by discussions with colleagues and my supervisory committee to refine them.

  I prepared for member checking by creating a document that summarized the main points from each interview, to check for accuracy of my interpretations, and to ask follow-up questions. While I incorporated a form of member checking in my interviews by summarizing much of what participants said, I did this more formally in June and July 2021. Participants confirmed the

accuracy of my summaries through a virtual meeting or their review of a write-up. When analysis and writing were completed, I sent a summary of the findings to participants who indicated they wanted them. These participants were invited to review the findings, to share feedback, and to request a more thorough overview of the findings if they wanted.

To enhance trustworthiness, this research used the criteria for rigour defined as a process of verification throughout a research study that ensures reliability and validity (Morse et al., 2002). Verification strategies used in this study included researcher responsiveness, peer debriefing, concurrent data collection and analysis, audit trail, member checking, and adequate sampling.

Findings

The findings of this study are reported in five main categories: (i) Expectations for students and most teachers changed. (ii) Expectations for some teachers remained high. (iii) Unreasonably high expectations for teachers had a negative impact on their well-being. (iv) Student groups were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and, consequently, by expectations. (v) Relationships were negatively impacted, which could explain the change in expectations. Participants were given pseudonyms to ensure anonymity.

Category 1: Expectations for Students and (Most) Teachers Changed

Expectations for Students

Many teachers felt they continued to have high expectations for their students, but participants always included a caveat when they talked about it: "I still have high expectations for my students in these ways, but...." Four main reasons or explanations for the change were identified. For some teachers, the caveat was a response to changed beliefs about what their students could handle at that point in the pandemic. Anna explained this further:

I don't want to say I'm lowering my expectations for my [students] because I'm still expecting them to come and to do their best... but on the flip side, I'm also looking at the reality of what some of their… minds are facing... How can I expect them to learn the same way they used to with all these extra stresses and no skills to cope with them.

Their changed beliefs were also in response to changed student achievement. Participants still expected their students to do their best, but "their best" looked different, "success" looked different, or students' progress was slower compared to participants' previous groups of students.

Others talked about how expectations changed for individual students and their circumstances. Participants described individualizing expectations more than usual and taking more time to meet students where they were at, not only academically but also emotionally. Some students could be challenged academically whereas other students were being challenged enough by being at school in this environment:

The biggest shift in my thinking is that this year, it might not be an academic expectation, I may just have to let that go... Maybe he's going to do no work, but he's here, he's happy, he's picking up something that I'm sharing, and he's being social (Maria).

Teachers also acknowledged their expectations for certain students depended on the day or adjusted as the year progressed.

Half of the sample explained that expectations changed in response to *what* was being taught and *how*. Jade said, "the expectations of students to learn things has not changed, but expectations of *what* they're learning has changed." Participants alluded to this in a few different ways: they were slightly "behind" in the curriculum compared to previous years, because of taking more breaks, filling in gaps from the previous spring 2020, or moving more slowly through the curriculum; and they spent more class time on other things such as increased

sanitizing and cleaning and teaching non-academic outcomes (e.g., developing relationships, social skills, prioritizing students' well-being). A few participants noticed their expectations were as high as the restrictions would allow during that time, given the restrictions limited *how* teachers could support their students. Group work was discouraged and independent work was harder for some students. Thus, less work was completed. As a result of decreased resources, Gaby did not get an educational assistant (EA) or a resource teacher that year, which meant students who struggled were not able to be challenged and supported the way they would be in more typical circumstances.

Participants specified that rather than *lowered* expectations, student workload was *lessened*, and teaching staff had to be more flexible and lenient with due dates. For example, students had a decreased amount of work, no extra math practice or homework, and a reduced number of curricular outcomes to learn. Many enriching opportunities, such as field trips and guest speakers, were not allowed that year. This required more creativity in teaching some curricular outcomes and caused other outcomes to be eliminated.

Teacher Self-Expectations

Ten participants reported lessening expectations for themselves; some described it as a necessity for their survival. They did this by setting healthy work boundaries, such as leaving work at a set time or going to bed at a certain time despite not getting everything done, not bringing work home, and not taking on extras like supplementary reading or professional development opportunities.

> I've blocked out a lot of the other things that I would have been pushing as a teacher like professional development, make sure you're reading extra stuff to change this... I've narrowed my expectation to just have these kids ready for high school... It's like I'm in

survival mode right now, like keep kids safe, keep them learning, keep kids safe, keep

them learning. So all the other stuff [PD, extra reading] will come back when it's calmer

(Jade).

Some reported making time for self-care, including doing yoga and taking sick days. For the first

time in her 11 years of teaching, Jasmin eased self-expectations by accessing someone else's

resources (through the Teachers Pay Teachers website) instead of creating her own resources

from scratch. The lessons learned about having reasonable self-expectations and setting healthy

boundaries were things teachers wanted to continue implementing going forward.

I'm a workaholic, so I think COVID has positively impacted me and I've realized that I

need to give myself a break when I feel that I need it because otherwise there's no chance

[for a break]. I used to be able to go like 'Okay, I just have to push to Easter or...

Christmas or Teachers' Convention and then I get a break.' But living in the COVID

world, there is no break, and you never know what's going to happen so I've definitely

positively learned that when I start to feel that fatigue and that workaholic sense come

into play, I need to stop and I need to give myself a break and that's okay. That's not an

indication of you failed or you're doing a bad job (Maria).

Teachers' Perceptions of Administrators' Expectations

Most teachers felt their administrators made efforts to be supportive and that their

expectations were "reasonable for an unreasonable time" (Kayla). Gaby described how

expectations from her administrators eased completely: "The message [from administrators] has

been mostly to do the best you can under the circumstances... There's no pressure to still attain

the same level of achievement… if we can, great, if we don't then they're very understanding."

Others felt the expectations were still present, but they have eased in some regards:

[My administrator's] expectations are still high for us, but she's pretty lenient and understanding of what we need. At this point in the game, if we were being pushed on a professional level by her, I think we would all just crash and burn. So I think she knows that we're doing the best we can, and she thanks us (Jade).

Some teachers felt they were validated and acknowledged for their hard work: "They definitely acknowledge that we have an uphill battle each day. I've never had an issue with leaning on them for support and them not following through" (Julia). Other administrators showed their support by withholding things they would have typically done:

I don't want to say lenient but they're very kind to us in the sense that they don't encourage us to stay late, they don't encourage us to have lengthy meetings if they're not necessary, they don't add any extra, they don't force us to meet after school. I feel very supported by my admin (Delaney).

Other examples of what administrators did for teachers include: being lenient on administrative deadlines, offering extra time to prepare, making "free supervision" passes, and supporting teachers to take time off and set boundaries. Maria felt that the expectations from her administrators shifted from focusing on the administrative parts of the job to being a good teacher in the classroom. Teachers really appreciated these gestures.

Category 2: Expectations for Some Teachers Remained High

Two teachers reported sustained high self-expectations during this time, while acknowledging they probably should have adjusted them.

I will always put our students first and will always do whatever it takes to do the best for them and to have them be successful. I don't think my expectations have changed a lot for myself this year... but I think that's where the exhaustion and [feeling overwhelmed]

come in. I'm trying to do the best I can, but with the amount of extra stuff that has come

at us, I'm having trouble cutting myself that slack or giving myself that break, especially

because some of the stuff we're dealing with is big (Anna).

Both teachers, and a few others, spoke of increased pressure from parents and the media. They

felt they received a bad reputation in the media with messages that teachers could be doing more

and were lowering their standards: "all this teacher does is gives my kid worksheets" (Anna).

They both pointed to this added pressure contributing to their high self-expectations, along with

pressure from administrators to prove to others that teachers were working hard.

Eight participants felt their administrators' expectations remained too high, despite their

efforts to be supportive and realistic. Unreasonably high expectations were communicated to

teachers by giving them too much to do on top of their usual workload, and not giving them

enough time to do all that was expected. "It was just one thing added after another, after another,

after another. It's all the extra things that no one realizes on top of having to learn and plan and

organize and assess all your students. Something's gotta give" (Heather). Examples of "extra

things" in addition to their regular work duties included the new public health measures and

rules, constant changes, extra social-emotional needs from students, and a need to fill in

curriculum gaps from the previous spring. As well, some teachers felt they were not being

acknowledged for the extra work, which made it even less motivating to juggle everything and

work hard. "Even adults thrive from positive reinforcement" (Heather). Carl added, "We've all

had to adapt a lot, step out of our comfort zone, and do things to support students in this time and

we don't feel necessarily that we're being supported in the same way." Teachers also spoke of

conflicting messaging from administrators; while administrators encouraged teachers to take on

less work, their workload was not in fact lessened. Seven participants acknowledged that

administrators were under increasing pressure from the district to implement certain directives. However, the participants also felt "[administrators] should be doing something about it... they're the ones seeing us breaking and becoming more and more demoralized" (Jasmin).

During that time, participants urged for fewer expectations, more specifically the elimination of non-essential responsibilities or "new" things including changes to curriculum, new initiatives, and professional development. They also sought more time for planning and collaborating with colleagues, a few mentioned they would appreciate getting a half day every month for this. Teachers also wanted acknowledgement, appreciation, understanding, flexibility, and empathy expressed not only through words, but also through action. Instead of just telling teachers to take care of their mental health, help them make time for it by offering to take something off their plate or giving them time. Participants also advocated for better communication, transparency about changes, and to be invited to provide input about these changes.

Category 3: Unreasonably High Expectations for Teachers Had a Negative Impact on Their Well-Being

Most teachers described themselves as always having had high expectations for themselves, even before COVID-19. They made comments such as, "I've always been a perfectionist," "I've always said 'yes' when there is a staff member needed," "I would always complete hours of work at home." They also stated that many of their colleagues were similar in this way. While these teachers continued having high self-expectations well into the pandemic, many of them realized this was having a negative impact on their well-being.

Negative well-being was evident by participants' discussion of the most frequent emotions that arose in their work environments. When asked to name their top three emotions

experienced each day, 10 teachers reported at least two negative emotions, most frequently: anxious, exhausted, and overwhelmed. Four teachers reported all negative emotions (Jasmin, Anna, Delaney, Gaby). Based on my observations from the interviews with these teachers, it was clear they were quite anxious, unhappy, and burnt out. For example, one teacher cried during the interview when she was given praise and gratitude for her hard work that year. On the same coin, these were also teachers who appeared to really care and to go above and beyond for their students. Kayla recounted that in her 30 years teaching, she had never felt anything like the level of exhaustion she felt that year: "[At] the end of the day, I am done. I sit on the couch, I literally do nothing for sometimes it's 20 minutes... sometimes it's an hour. Sometimes I just never get up. I've never felt anything like it." A few mentioned this was a common feeling among teachers in their school: "You can see it in the whole culture of the school that everyone is exhausted" (Heather). Besides the evidence of negative well-being by participants' emotions, one teacher took a two-month stress leave, two teachers started taking medication due to severe insomnia, a handful of teachers noticed they were coping negatively by staying up later or waking up earlier to work more (sacrificing sleep), and skipping their workouts or other activities they typically did to care for their physical and mental health. Participants also spoke of the stigma of taking breaks as a teacher unless they were "really sick." Jasmin described a low point in the year:

> I was not my best self… I had to make a really drastic change because I was driving to work crying every day feeling like I was going to get sick. I know that sounds dramatic, but I would pull up to the school with this horrific sense of dread.

This speaks to the importance of reducing expectations during this time, which is reportedly what many teachers eventually did. They set healthy work boundaries, started advocating for themselves, and made time for self-care.

Category 4: Student Groups were Disproportionately Impacted by COVID-19 and,

Consequently, Expectations

Certain groups of students struggled more than others because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this impacted teachers' expectations. The difficulties for these groups of students existed before the pandemic, but the COVID-19 restrictions magnified the existing gaps and limited the number of resources teachers could access to support these students. In the past, Kayla, with 30 years of teaching experience and a PhD, had been able to find creative ways to support her students who struggled so she could maintain high expectations for them, but the increased barriers that year made it more difficult.

Students with Learning Challenges

Teachers observed that students with learning challenges especially struggled that year because teachers were not able to give these students the time, resources, and extra support they needed to learn. This was especially concerning for Gaby who lacked EA and resource teaching support, resulting in the feeling of "taking on the role of four or five different people. But then I'm also limited because I can't be in close proximity of my students for long durations, so I just feel frustrated." She goes on to say:

> The ones that are capable and don't have any difficulties, I would say my expectations are
> pretty much the same. But for those who need extra support unfortunately they're the
> ones who are suffering the most with this pandemic... I think the ones that are weaker
> [shouldn't be]; ... they should be doing better had they had all of that extra support
> (Gaby).

Teachers expected less from struggling learners who required additional support but could not receive it due to lack of resources during this time.

Teachers also noticed an increase in the number of students struggling to keep up academically. Students who struggled academically before the pandemic but who were "getting by" started falling behind. This could be due to several reasons, but some were underscored by participants: a) three months of lost time in spring 2020 disproportionately led to learning shortfalls. b) As a result of this lost time, teachers tried to move more quickly through the curriculum due to the perceived pressure to catch up students, which led to these students falling further behind their peers. c) Because more students struggled academically, it required more differentiation of instruction. This meant more time and resources from the teacher, both of which were already lacking that year, as described above. Overall, this means that teachers expected less from more students that year.

Students with Social, Emotional, or Behavioural Challenges

Students struggling with social, emotional, and behavioural issues also increased in numbers from previous years. Anna stated that while the proportion of students with social-emotional issues had increased over her 10 years of teaching, that year's increase had been "significantly higher across the board." Anna had a student from a family experiencing food insecurity, and who reported not having eaten in several days. Jasmin had more students than ever before meeting with the school counsellor, and more who were considered "high risk."

Teachers recognized the focus of their expectations that year changed from academic to first meeting students' physical and emotional needs, especially for students who struggled in this regard. "They needed to be okay emotionally before they could tackle even the most basic academics" (Kayla). Jasmin explained how in a typical school year she was able to support her students' social-emotional needs while still having high academic expectations and getting

"quality grade-level results." What changed with the pandemic is she was not able to properly support the social-emotional issues while also maintaining high academic expectations:

> You cannot deal with the impact of their social and emotional well-being and push them to those high academic levels. And our school prides itself on academics... it is a very, very big deal for some of these kids... I've got about three really high-risk kids social emotionally and I don't pressure them a lot for work. What I will often do if... they're not doing very well... I give them a bit of private tutor time at recess to try to catch them up and try to like 'stop the bleeding...' but you can't really go over a lot in 20 minutes (Jasmin).

She later went on to say: "Maybe what they need from me is not knowing how to properly edit a sentence, maybe they just need care and attention this year and that's okay" (Jasmin).

Students Without Parent Support

Lack of parent support can appear as a lack of communication with the teacher or being unable to support learning at home. Teachers noticed how parent support and engagement had decreased in general compared to pre-COVID-19. "[Parent support] is never anything I felt like we could rely on, but, if anything, this year is the worst…it's just not there at all. And I'm sure parents are dealing with a lot" (Tanya). Gaby felt unsure about how much to push parents, due to not knowing what was going on at home. Participants suggested various reasons for less parent support and engagement including parents who: are overwhelmed; are not able to afford to take time off from work when their child is isolating at home; may be busy working multiple jobs or long hours; or who may lack access to technology or internet, which is problematic given the shift to communicating and learning online. This may have also disproportionately impacted single-parent families. In sum, other responsibilities quite possibly took priority for some parents

during the pandemic. Regardless of the cause, a lack of parent support impacted how much teachers could expect of parents and their child.

Students Absent Often from School Due to COVID-19

Many students have missed a lot of school due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Students who had COVID-19, or who were exposed to someone with COVID-19, had to isolate for a period, and stricter-than-normal rules regarding cold symptoms were also implemented. Students were expected to continue learning from home during isolation, but certain students were not able to because of non-existent access to internet and technology, a need to care for siblings, or difficulty with that mode of learning. Participants also noticed certain cultural groups especially feared COVID-19 and kept their children home more often, even when they were not directed to. Maria noted certain cultures, such as her Filipino families, were more inclined to keep their children home because they lived in multi-generational dwellings, which increases the risk of spreading sickness. Those not understanding English well may not have completely understood the school directives even when students were able to return to school and instead kept their children home to be safe. Whatever the reason for students missing a lot of school, many teachers "let go of this [expectation]: 'I need to catch you up on everything that you've missed' (Maria).

Category 5: Relationships were Negatively Impacted

This theme about relationships is relevant because changed relationships due to the pandemic may also play a role in why teachers' expectations for students and for themselves changed. All teachers described at least one kind of relationship, and in many cases more, that were negatively impacted due to the restrictions that year: teachers' relationships with students,

parents, and colleagues. A few teachers noted some negative outcomes of these changed

relationships, and some spoke of efforts they made to improve these relationships.

Changed Relationships with Students

Teachers noticed it took longer to connect with students than ever before, they did not

feel as connected and did not know as much about their students at that point in the year,

compared to previous years. Below, Jasmin illustrates how she formed relationships with her

students in the past:

> It's been harder to connect and get to know them because the elements that make us
>
> human—like sitting close to someone, talking to someone, sharing a snack with
>
> someone—we can't do those things… there's a lot you can achieve with a group of young
>
> kids if you're sitting there, and you have a bag of chips and you're munching and eating
>
> and chatting with the kids informally. They want to know who you are as a person, too...
>
> Now this year, I'm told basically to sit behind my desk, behind my plexiglass and not to
>
> get too close to the kids.

Described in the quote above, relationships are developed in those informal moments with

students when sharing food and talking on a more personal level. The restrictions limited the

opportunities for these kinds of interactions. Participants mentioned other ways the restrictions

impeded their relationships with their students. Teachers had to enforce many more rules that

year which meant constantly having to correct student behaviors. "We're not just asking them to

be respectful and get on task and doing all of the regular classroom management; we're telling

them to put their mask up, get away from your friend that's not in your classroom, etc."

(Delaney). Wearing masks acted as a physical barrier to connecting with students making it

harder to get a read on each other and to have personal conversations. "It's really hard to get into

honest, in-depth conversations when your teacher is completely covered. So those conversations haven't been happening" (Jade). Physical distancing impacted the way group activities were structured, which impacted the sense of community in the classroom. For example, Gaby could no longer host meetings in a circle when a problem arose in the classroom: "It's such a small thing but to have them sitting together on the carpet, as opposed to sitting at their desks, separated, makes such a big difference. We just don't have that community feel quite as much this year." Jasmin, an immunocompromised teacher, described how fears of getting COVID-19 can come across as standoffish as she would often have to step back or say, "don't come close to me," in response to her students' approach. It was more difficult to maintain connections with some students while they isolated at home due to COVID-19 and harder to re-connect upon their return. In the past, extracurricular activities were opportunities for teachers to get to know students outside of the academic context, which was also missing. Teachers acknowledged how these changed relationships with students impacted their students' desire to work hard in class and reduced the sense of community in the classroom. "If school is a fun place, if they're comfortable, they'll do anything for you" (Jasmin).

Changed Relationships with Parents and Colleagues

Two teachers pointed out it was more challenging to develop relationships with their students' parents. Parents were not allowed in the school, so they did not stop by the classroom to drop off or pick up their children, and these are moments when small exchanges are made that aid in relationship development. Teachers communicated with parents predominantly by email, or on scheduled phone or video calls, impeding the development of relationships. Maria noted that changed relationships with parents made it more difficult to form a relationship with their child.

Fewer opportunities were available with colleagues to collaborate, ask work-related questions, talk informally, or even to share a smile in the hallway due to masks. This especially impacted the ability to develop relationships with new staff, although even participants who had been at their school for several years had difficulty maintaining previously established connections. Restrictions seemed to get in the way of staff relationships: staff rooms were closed, staff meetings were online, and established cohorts meant teachers were not allowed to interact with teachers outside their cohort. Heather pointed out that because of fewer opportunities to connect with colleagues, she felt isolated, especially self-identifying as a "social person." Others noted the evolution of a negative work environment.

> I've noticed that since the regulation came in that staff could no longer be maskless at any time in the school building, that really changed the whole dynamic because suddenly it no longer felt like a safe place to even have lunch... I found myself just running out of the building, lunch bell rings, goodbye I'm out. A lot people were doing that and that doesn't lead to those informal exchanges (Kayla).

Efforts to Improve Relationships

Six teachers made efforts that year to improve relationships with their students. Teachers had to work much harder at developing new relationships and maintaining others, but it was perceived as worth the invested time and something teachers were proud of themselves for prioritizing. Carl pulled on his background as a special education teacher to further build relationships with his students by doing more check-ins, talking about things beyond education, and reading the room before jumping into a tough academic concept. Kayla, a science teacher, took her class outside for as many lessons as she could. She also brought in her animals: a dog and turtle. She felt this time outside together and time with animals "helped us bond."

What ended up happening is me having them outdoors and finding earthworms and

woolly bears with my grade 3s or having the grade 6s pick the raspberries in the garden

and be able to—for goodness' sake—take your mask off and eat them [laughs]. It was

really special and has been a highlight (Kayla).

Tanya found a way to continue coordinating the mentoring program she had been organizing for

years, and she started a run club fundraiser for Terry Fox. She received positive feedback from

parents that it made a difference in their child's connection with teachers. Alec felt that his

relationships improved with his students due to his increased availability to connect and answer

questions online via Microsoft Teams. He also had a personal work goal to "pick a different

[student] every day and ask them at least one question... to get at what they're into outside of

school and to show a little bit of interest, which they seem to respond to." Alec also went above

and beyond his teaching duties to help a student get a job; he was reference for her and helped

her with her resumé.

 Efforts were made to improve relationships with parents and colleagues as well. Carl

created formal and informal opportunities to communicate with parents. He sent out a letter at

the beginning of the school year that laid out his values and expectations for the year in addition

to sending bi-weekly newsletters. He also set up Zoom meetings for parents to drop in, ask

questions, and get to know each other. In terms of relationships with colleagues, Anna made

efforts to connect virtually for support and to share and receive resources.

Discussion

An Expanded Conceptual Model

 The results from this study fit within the conceptual model explained by Brophy and

Good (1970) about the relationships between teacher expectations, teacher behaviours, and

student academic achievement. In the current study, teachers' beliefs about what their students can achieve during the pandemic differed from their beliefs before the pandemic. Participants described how their expectations for students have changed, impacting teachers' behavior—they moved more slowly through the curriculum, gave less homework and practice, and let go of catching up students who missed a lot of school. Teachers also described how the pandemic greatly impacted the way they were allowed to teach, communicate, and interact with students, which impacted their relationships with students. Therefore, it makes sense that students were less engaged and motivated, and there is evidence of lowered academic achievement (e.g., Hargreaves, 2021). To change the outcome in this model—from lowered to maintained or increased academic achievement—there needs to be a change earlier in the cycle.

Other factors explored in this study could be included in this model and precede teacher expectations for students. This would tie in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model (2005) as well. Based on the current study and previous research, I would add the following to the model: a) school-level expectations, school environment, and relationships can impact teacher well-being, self-expectations as well as expectations for students; b) teacher well-being is bi-directionally related to teacher self-expectations; and c) teacher self-expectations impacts expectations for students. See Figure 1 for a visual of the new additions (in blue) to Brophy and Good's (1970) model (in black). More research that includes these variables in a larger model could aid in understanding the relationships among these concepts and could inform a start point for intervention.

Figure 1

Proposed Expansion of Brophy and Good's (1970) Model
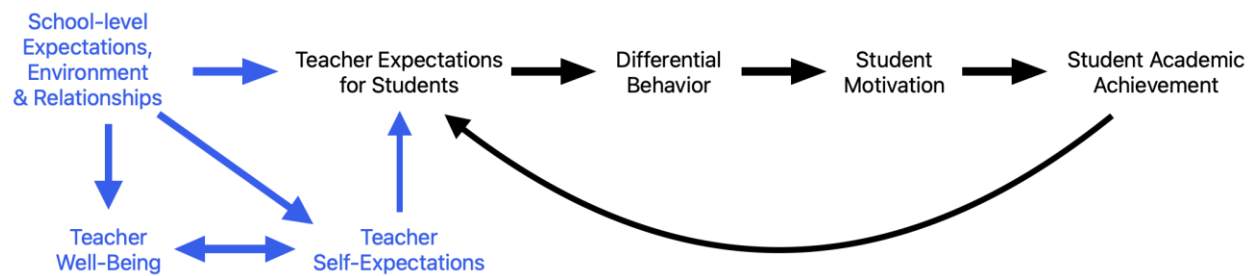
Teachers' Self-Expectations and Teacher Well-Being

Most participants reported a change in their self-expectations because of experiencing negative outcomes (e.g., anxiety, exhaustion, severe insomnia, working more and sacrificing self-care). This aligns with research showing teachers, when facing too many responsibilities and feeling unable to fulfill them all, can experience stress, burnout, and feelings of guilt (e.g., Fischman et al., 2006). Another study showed that when teachers were not able to uphold their professional standards, it greatly affected their emotional health (Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2020) and led to teachers seeking a reduction of the expectations on them and on their students. This was also the message from participants in the current study.

Many participants described mostly negative workplace emotions during the interview, the most common being anxious, exhausted, and overwhelmed. The emotions discussed by participants align with results from another study where the most common responses from 5,000 teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic were: anxious, fearful, worried, overwhelmed, and sad (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020). However, based on the results from similar studies, we know teachers were already burning out pre-pandemic (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020; Moeller et al., 2018). Emotions have implications for many areas including health and well-being, performance, relationships, and decision-making. Also, as described earlier, teacher burnout leads to negative

outcomes for students, too (Arens & Morin, 2016). Therefore, these results of heightened

negative emotions should be taken seriously and efforts to improve teacher well-being should be

prioritized.

Changed Self-Expectations

Research on antecedents to having an increased sense of responsibility (Lauermann,

2014), which I associate with high self-expectations, can possibly help explain why participants

were not able to uphold all that was asked of them. These antecedents did not exist for most

participants and instead participants experienced: decreased parent involvement and

communication, difficulty reaching struggling students, lack of time and resources, feeling a lack

of support from administrators and colleagues, and stressful events in a teacher's personal life

outside of school (e.g., illness, home schooling school-aged children). These relationships,

resources, and circumstances can buffer how much teachers can take on, which is informative to

understanding self-expectations and how they change during extreme circumstances.

High Self-Expectations

While many participants described changing their self-expectations to be more

reasonable, two participants continued having high self-expectations at the time of the interview.

One commonality between these two teachers is they had a supportive principal and colleagues.

It was clear from both teachers (Anna, Tanya) that having high self-expectations was part of their

culture at school. Participants conveyed that they, along with their colleagues, worked very hard

and were committed to the common goal of supporting each other and their students. This sounds

like their school had collective responsibility; they held high expectations for themselves and for

each other (Hirsh, 2010). While both admitted they probably should have adjusted their

expectations, they seemed resilient as they continued to manage heavy workloads. This was

likely buffered by their prioritized relationships and mutual support among their colleagues. That said, other participants also felt supported by their administrators or colleagues but did not maintain high self-expectations. This difference could be explained by the job demands-resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), where job demands represent the stressful parts of a job and job resources are the positive and fulfilling parts of a job. Supportive administrators and colleagues are considered a crucial job resource (Kupers et al., 2022). Teachers can successfully meet their job demands when there is a balance of job demands and resources (Sokal et al., 2020). Therefore, the two teachers who maintained high self-expectations may have had a better balance of job demands and resources compared to the other participants.

Teachers' Perceptions of Administrators' Expectations

Most teachers noticed how their administrators made efforts to reduce expectations. While many felt this was not enough, they acknowledged administrators' responsibilities had increased as well. This was echoed by Canadian researchers who interviewed administrators during the pandemic who experienced immense pressure with the pandemic (People for Education, 2022; Osmond-Johnson & Fuhrmann, 2022), from receiving directives from their superiors as well as trying to meet the needs of their teachers, students, and parents (Constantia et al., 2021; Lewis et al., 2022). Many worked all day and on weekends, dealt with staff shortages, covered for staff when no replacement was available, called parents when a positive COVID-19 case was reported at school, and tried to keep up with communicating changes in rules to their staff. Experienced principals labeled the 2021-2022 school year as the most challenging one they have ever experienced (People for Education, 2022). Like teacher participants in the current study, administrators have also largely felt unsupported and

undervalued. Moreover, the increase in work intensification and unsustainable workload have resulted in adverse effects on their overall well-being (Lewis et al., 2022).

On the flipside, many teachers still felt they did not receive enough support from their administrators. Participants felt they were expected to do too much, and they lacked the time to do it all. They were frustrated when told to take care of their mental health, and to take less on, while expectations were not eased. This was another common theme in other research (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020). This disappointment with a lack of consultation and communication between provincial governments and school leaders was also referenced in the literature (People for Education, 2022).

Administrators can do small things to help their staff feel supported, even if they cannot implement all the changes being asked for. See page 48 for examples of what participants in this study urged for at the time of being interview. In general, teachers wanted fewer expectations, including the elimination of non-essential responsibilities or "new" things. They sought more time for planning and collaborating with colleagues, which is beneficial for teachers' well-being and professional learning (Rankin, 2023). Teachers also wanted their administrators' support expressed not only through words, but also through action. Instead of just telling them, help them prioritize their well-being by offering to take something off their plate or giving them time. Each teacher might need something different, so it is important to ask.

Adjusting Expectations and Addressing Teachers' Psychological Needs

This study has shown that when teachers were expected to take on too much, without appropriate supports as a buffer, it can result in exhaustion and increased stress. Therefore, during times like this, expectations placed upon teachers can be reduced, and teachers can be better supported by having their psychological needs met. Recommendations for how to lessen or

adjust expectations include: a) Being aware and clear about the expectations placed on self, students, or staff. b) Determining whether they are appropriate and challenging enough. c) If they are inappropriate, brainstorming ways (individually or with colleagues or administrators) to adjust them. For more information, WISE (2023) provides resources about setting and checking on expectations, how to have a conversation with a boss whose expectations are too high, and for leaders on how to communicate expectations effectively.

In situations when expectations cannot be lessened due to extreme circumstances, it seems necessary to at least meet staff's psychological needs. A relevant and well-known model for addressing psychological needs is the self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000). The three psychological needs from SDT are: autonomy (promoting independence, sense of choice), competence (sense of expertise), and relatedness (sense of belonging and need to connect with people). The theory explains that when these needs are met, it can enhance a person's intrinsic motivation and subsequent engagement and achievement. At the time of the interview, the pandemic-related restrictions impacted the way teachers were allowed to teach (autonomy), which resulted in them having to redesign activities and use tools they had not used before ("feeling like a first-year teacher;" competence). The school environment was described as negative and offered limited opportunities for socialization (relatedness). To make high self-expectations more manageable, administrators could make efforts to meet these psychological needs and teachers could advocate for them. For example, to increase teachers' autonomy, administrators could welcome and encourage teachers' suggestions, and give them more choice over how they teach. To increase competence, they could provide opportunities for teachers to share with others their ideas, strategies, or lessons they feel confident about. To increase relatedness, they could provide time and safe ways to connect with each other.

Certain Groups of Students Struggled More, and This Impacted Teachers' Expectations

Several groups of students struggled more than others during the pandemic, and participants had limited access to resources to properly support them. Participants indicated many of these groups struggled pre-pandemic as well, but the pandemic magnified their challenges and magnified the number of students with challenges. This aligns with other research confirming the pandemic has added to the social and educational inequities among young people, and further contributed to marginalization (James, 2021; Raising Canada Report, 2020; Westheimer & Schira Hagerman, 2021). Enabling teacher access to appropriate supports and resources to properly support these students is critical. The examples of groups presented in the results may be a starting point for identifying students who may need extra support and who may need adjusted expectations (see recommendations on page 63).

Relationships were Negatively Impacted by COVID-19 Restrictions

While the focus of the interview question on relationships was related to teacher-student relationships, it was obvious all relationships were negatively impacted by the restrictions, which had an impact on well-being and achievement. The need for relationships and socialization is a psychological need (relatedness) that has been lacking in schools during the pandemic, which has also come up in other studies (e.g., Colao et al., 2020; Klusmann et al., 2022). Research has shown that forming social relationships at school is a cornerstone of both students' and teachers' learning and well-being (Collie et al., 2015; Motti-Stefanidi et al., 2020; Vaillancourt et al., 2021). Relationships should be prioritized in all classrooms and schools, especially during times such as a pandemic. Johnston and colleagues (2021) provide examples for how to communicate high expectations for all students through positive teacher-student relationships (e.g., praise and encouragement, conveying pride, challenging students).

Limitations and Future Research

A few limitations of this study need to be noted, as they may impact the transferability of the findings (Mayan, 2009). First, at the time of the interview, some participants taught at a different school, grade, or program than they did prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This means it may have been difficult for participants to distinguish pandemic-related impacts from these new environments or circumstances. For example, at the time of the interview, one teacher taught at a new school in a new province, another teacher taught in the same school but a different grade, and an additional taught in the same school but a new program. In hindsight, including teachers who taught the previous three school years at their same school, grade and program could have been beneficial. However, many of their experiences ended up still resembling those of teachers who taught the same grade, program and at the same school. Second, administrator expectations for teachers were explored by asking teachers for their perceptions, which may be different than how administrators would describe them. Both would provide valuable information. Future studies may want to recruit at least one teacher and administrator from each school to get both perspectives. Third, designing a study during a pandemic context is difficult because things change so quickly. As these results are written, schools are operating differently, and experiences of teachers are likely different as well. This impacts the direct relevance and transferability of these results and recommendations. That said, many of the challenges and needs of teachers were present pre-pandemic and they unfortunately magnified with the pandemic. Therefore, the results and recommendations are very likely applicable at the time of publication and beyond. It would be informative to interview teachers again to find out how things have changed, or not, since the 2020-2021 school year. Finally, expectations placed upon teachers is a concept that has not been given much attention in the literature and is worthy of exploring further to be better defined and

differentiated from similar concepts. As mentioned above, with more attention, these could be incorporated into existing conceptual models (e.g., Brophy & Good, 1970), increase understanding, and inform intervention.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that expectations for students and most teachers changed, and their well-being needed to be prioritized. Teachers met students where they were at, set healthy boundaries for themselves, and engaged in self-care strategies. High self-expectations remained for two teachers, which may in part have been managed due to supportive administrators and colleagues. Many teachers felt their administrators made some efforts to be supportive and realistic during this time; however, many felt it was not enough and this was likely due to directives from their superiors. Certain groups of students struggled more than others, increasing the gap that already existed between them and their peers, which impacted teacher expectations. Participants felt it was more difficult to develop and maintain relationships during the pandemic, and many kinds of relationships had been negatively impacted by the pandemic-related restrictions. Relationships are important at school for student and teacher well-being, but also for how students perceive what kind of expectations their teacher has for them.

This study contributes to the existing literature on expectations in schools by focusing on a few areas that have received limited research attention: expectations placed upon teachers by themselves and their administrators, and teacher-student relationships, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. I proposed the expansion of a conceptual model related to expectations in schools by adding elements including teacher self-expectations, teacher well-being, relationships, system-level pressures and expectations, and the environmental context. This expanded model could be explored further, and it could also aid in identifying areas for intervention.

Furthermore, this is one of the first studies to explore the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic context on teacher expectations in schools. Learning about how the pandemic impacted expectations allows those working in schools to gain feedback and apply recommendations for responding to the lingering impacts of the pandemic and to equip members with tools to face other future high-stress situations or extreme circumstances. The aim is that this will lead to increased well-being, performance, and satisfaction at school for students, teachers, and school leaders.

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Appendix A

Theoretical Framework and Researcher Positionality

The theoretical framework that aligns with my assumptions, views and with the chosen method is social constructivism. Social constructivism is the belief that knowledge and truth is co-constructed through interactions and individual experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Crotty, 1998). In the direct context of this study, knowledge and truth is co-constructed between myself and the individual participants. Almost all participants had not thought about expectations in this way before the interview, so I really felt that this knowledge was co-constructed: it took my knowledge of expectations research and teachers lived experience to get these results.

This constructivist perspective is rooted in a relativist ontology (Mayan, 2009) which is the belief that there is not one observable reality, rather multiple realities, as individuals construct subjective meanings from their interactions and experiences (Creswell, 2013). In short, reality is subjective and there are multiple ways of experiencing expectations during the COVID-19 pandemic. This framework leads the researcher to look for the complexity of views and for multiple perspectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was evidenced in my study as I used maximum variation sampling to get a range of participants with diverse experiences (e.g., different provinces, grades, years of teaching experience) who each have rich knowledge in the classroom during the pandemic.

This framework also requires a flexible approach that is inductive and dynamic (Doyle et al., 2020). This was evident in my use of a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions, inductive analysis, openness to change, and tracking decisions along the way. It was also important to recognize my background in shaping the interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As I described in chapter one of this dissertation, I am not a teacher but rather a psychology student

pursuing a Ph.D. from an accredited program in school and clinical psychology. I have seven years of research experience with teacher expectations in addition to my experience working in schools as a researcher or assistant on numerous projects and as a student-practitioner through practicums and an internship. This informs the lens through which I conducted the interviews and data analysis. Throughout the research process, I reflected on my background and biases and kept notes in my research journal. I wanted to stay as true as I could to participants words (aligning with my method and research questions), which is why I did member checking to ensure my summaries were accurate.

This framework also aligns with my assumptions and beliefs as a practitioner. In my work with a child, I try to understand the reality from their perspective to help them through my lens that has been influenced by my knowledge and training in child development, learning and motivation theories, psychopathology, assessment and therapeutic modalities. I also believe that this framework aligns with my belief about how learning occurs in the classroom setting, between a teacher, student, and their peers.

Appendix B

Demographic Questions:
1. Age:
2. Gender:
3. Ethnicity:
4. What grade(s) do you teach?
5. What subject(s) do you teach?
6. How long have you been a teacher?
7. Level of education:
8. How many teachers are at your school?
9. Has your school moved to online learning for some period of time? If so, how long? (For the 2020-2021 school year):
10. What are the three most frequent emotions you feel most days as a teacher? You can add your own words as well; these are just to give you some ideas.

happy	anxious/worried
inspired	unmotivated
valued	ignored
supported	overwhelmed
effective	sad
respected	fearful
hopeful	discouraged
understood	exhausted
confident	

Task #1:
I want you to draw or take a picture of something that reflects what you think the impact of COVID-19 has had on your expectations for students' academic performance. We will discuss this during the interview.

FYI The main topics that we will discuss during the interview will be about the impact of COVID-19 on expectations in three areas: your expectations of students, your expectations of yourself, and your school administration's expectations of you.

Appendix C
Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Years as a teacher	Ethnicity	Province	School type	Program type/ Subjects taught	Grades	Education level
Heather	female	29	5 years	Ashkenazi Jew	AB	public school	Special education	1-6	BEd (masters student)
Julia	female	30	4 years	Caucasian	NS	public school	Social studies	7 & 8	BEd (masters student in spring)
Jade	female	35	3 years	First Nations/ Caucasian	ON	public school, rural	All	8	BEd
Jasmin	female	34	11 years	Caucasian	AB	charter school	All	6	BEd
Anna	female	34	9 years	Caucasian	AB	public school	Bridges program	7-9	BEd
Carl	male	32	9 years	Caucasian	AB	public school	All	4/5, 7	BEd
Delaney	female	25	3 years	Caucasian	NB	public school	French immersion	8	BA, BEd and Masters student
Maria	female	25	4 years	Caucasian	AB	public school, rural	All	6	BEd
Kayla	female	53	30 years	Caucasian	QC	public school	Science	3-6	PhD
Gaby	female	36	14 years	Caucasian	MB	public school	All	5	MEd
Tanya	female	40	17 years	Caucasian	QC	public school	English and Math	5	MEd
Alec	male	32	4 years	Caucasian	NB	public school	Phys Ed, Art, Personal wellness	6-8	MEd

Pseudonym	Involvement with Admin	Time online (weeks)	Cares for child/ parent at home	New to school/ program/grade	Emotions	Emotions (- or +)
Heather	yes	2-month stress leave, 0 time online	no	no	overworked, unappreciated, committed	2 -, 1 +
Julia	no	0	no	yes (school)	overwhelmed, discouraged, understood	2 -, 1 +
Jade	no	1	yes (child)	no	defeated, hopeful, worried	2 -, 1 +
Jasmin	no	2	yes (teen)	yes (grade)	complacent, tired, surviving	3 -
Anna	no	0	yes (children)	yes (program)	overwhelmed, torn/split, exhausted	3 -
Carl	no	2	no	yes (grade)	unmotivated, discouraged, happy	2 -, 1 +
Delaney	no	0	no	yes (grade)	overwhelmed, misunderstood, tired	3 -
Maria	no	2	no	yes (grade)	exhuasted, confident, ignored	2 -, 1 +
Kayla	yes	1	yes (parent)	no	valued, effective, exhausted	1 -, 2 +
Gaby	no	2	yes (children)	yes (program)	anxious, overwhelmed, frustrated	3 -
Tanya	no	2	yes (children)	no	anxious, supported, exhausted	2 -, 1 +
Alec	no	2	no	yes (school)	happy, confident, respected	3 +

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol:

Participant #: _____   Date: _____

Interview Start Time: _____

Hi (participant name)! It's nice to meet you. Thank you for your interest in my research and for your time today, especially after a full day of teaching. I really appreciate it! I hope you had a good work day.

[Review consent and answer any questions before starting recording]

1. **Can you tell me what changes have been made due to COVID at your school**? [*For instance, responsibilities or logistics, prep time, supervision time. if I walked into your school today what would I see or say "oh that looks different"*]
    a) How would you rate the change on a scale from small, medium, to large?

2. **Can you tell me about the three most frequent emotions you feel most days as a teacher**?

The following questions will be related to expectations. As you know, I'll be focusing on expectations in three areas. I'm going to start with expectations for students and define it/give some examples.

An expectation is a firm belief that someone should or will achieve something. So in the context of teaching, teachers' expectations are beliefs teachers hold about their students' academic abilities. These expectations can be positive or negative. For example, you might have the belief that some of your students will surpass their goals in reading and writing by the end of the year, versus having the belief that some of your students probably won't reach their goals in math this year because of X, Y or Z... We're in the middle of a pandemic, they lack support at home, etc. Does that make sense? Any questions?

Prior to this interview, have you given much thought to the concept of expectations?

3. *Expectations for students*: **Did you get a chance to complete the first task I sent you, asking you to draw or take a picture? Tell me about your picture.** [*how does that translate to your expectations in the classroom? what does that look like in your classroom? How does that compare to what your expectations were pre-COVID times? Could you give some examples pre-COVID?*]
    a) **Have your expectations of students changed with the pandemic?** [*are there opportunities/ways for you to have higher expectations for your students or to challenge them? Do you find that you have the same opportunity/efforts to challenge students now or are you happy just to get through the day?*]
    b) **Under the circumstances, do you feel your expectations of students are now where they should be?** [*Can you just tell me a bit more about why you think that? For example,*

are they realistic, consistent with your values, aligned with what your principal wants or what parents want? Do you think you should have higher expectations for your students right now? Is there a gap between your expectations and what principals/parents want them to be?]

c) **Tell me about your relationship with your students. Has/how this relationship changed since COVID? (***e.g., are you closer with your students this year, less close, about the same, have you found different ways of relating***)**

d) **Are there particular sub-groups of students that have been notably impacted, positive or negative? If so, which groups, why**?

Now, I will be asking you about the impact of COVID-19 on your expectations of yourself. So your beliefs about your own achievement in your role as a teacher, again they can be positive or negative. Some examples to get you thinking: do you always push yourself to be the best teacher you can be, do you give yourself a break when you need it, are you kind to yourself, do you believe that you can get through challenging situations, do you persevere until you get something done, etc. Or do you struggle with these things?

4. *Expectations of self*: **How would you describe your expectations of yourself as a teacher during COVID-19? Give me an example**. [*did you have these expectations or do these things pre-COVID or are they new this year; if there wasn't a change, why do you think that is? How does that make you feel to have lowered your expectations of yourself?*]

Finally, I'm going to ask about the expectations of you from your school administration. This could be related to perceived support from your admin, the working environment, does your admin challenge you to meet your goals, etc.

5. *Expectations of you from your school Administration*: **How would you describe the Administration's expectations of you during COVID-19? Give me an example**. [*was this new or was this done pre-COVID; if there wasn't a change, why do you think that is?*]

6. **Recommendations**:

a) **If you were advising school administrators on things they could do to have good/ or more realistic expectations for their teachers during times like this pandemic, what would they be**?

b) **If you were advising teachers on things they could to have good/ or more realistic expectations for their students during times like this pandemic, what would they be**?

How do we support teaching practices to get back to grade level?

7. **In your role as a teacher, what are one or two things you've done since the pandemic started that you are proud of**?

8. **Conclusion: That's all the questions I have. Is there anything else you'd wish to tell me**?

Is it okay to follow up if I have any lingering questions? I will turn off the recording now.

Thank you so much for your time today! As you know, there is one final step, called Data Verification, which can be done over email or on the phone. This will involve reviewing the themes and categories that I come up with after analyzing your interview. The purpose of this step is to make sure that the results align with what you intended and meant to say. It is during this step that you will be encouraged to make clarifications and corrections to any of the themes and categories that do not fit your experience. I will be in touch in the next couple of months or so to review these themes and categories.

Interview End Time: _____   Length of Interview: _____

Interviewer's Name: Agnes Flanagan

CHAPTER 3: GENERAL DISCUSSION

The overall purpose of this research was to explore how the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions impacted expectations in schools. In this general discussion, I reflect on next steps in terms of changed teacher expectations for students and for themselves. Next, I discuss implications for psychologists. Finally, I identify research limitations and challenges, as well as provide suggestions for future research.

When and How Expectations Can Return to Pre-Pandemic Levels

When Expectations for Students Can Return to "Normal"

In spring 2021, participants in this study discussed how their expectations for students had changed (i.e., were reduced or lowered) because of the pandemic restrictions; however, expectations may already be on their way back to pre-pandemic standards. This speculation is based on student academic achievement data, given its relationship with expectations. Research showed student academic achievement lowered with the onset of the pandemic (Kuhfeld et al., 2022), with the largest gap occurring during spring 2021 (Lewis & Kuhfeld, 2022). Data collected in spring 2022 showed students made progress towards pre-pandemic standards in math and reading (Lewis & Kuhfeld, 2022). However, Lewis and Kuhfeld (2022, p. 6) predicted students are still several years away from reaching "full academic recovery." The recovery is even further away for certain groups of students (e.g., the youngest and oldest students in their sample [grade 3 and grade 8], students in high-poverty schools, as well as Black and Hispanic students). Further research is needed to determine whether this positive trend in student achievement outcomes is in part due to a positive change in expectations.

How Expectations for Students Can Return to "Normal"

One way to initiate or continue making positive changes toward pre-pandemic standards is to increase teachers' awareness of expectations for students and their effects on students' academic growth. Almost all participants in the present study had not thought about expectations as explicitly as we had considered it during the interviews. This is likely the case for other teachers as well. Expectations are often implicit, easily influenced by prejudice and bias (Jussim & Harber, 2005). Research shows the pandemic especially impacted those already marginalized (Westheimer & Schira Hagerman, 2021), putting these students at an even greater disadvantage. Therefore, it is especially important for teachers to reflect on their expectations about what students can handle during this time.

Another way to aid in resetting from the pandemic impacts on academic expectations is to promote the practices associated with high-expectation teachers. Over time, researchers have been able to distinguish between high- and low-expectation teachers based on their classroom practices (Rubie-Davies, 2007). Teachers tend to behave in a way that communicates overall high or low expectations for their whole class as opposed to having different expectations for individual students. These are observable behaviours involving measurable, transferable teaching practices, which have led to positive teacher expectations and student outcomes (De Boer et al., 2018). High-expectation teachers tend to use less differential behaviour and create exciting and challenging learning environments where student autonomy and self-directed learning are encouraged. Low-expectation teachers ask closed questions, group students inflexibly by ability, and offer less choice. Rubie-Davies (2015; 2017) determined there are three overarching areas of practice followed by high expectation teachers that should be part of interventions aimed at increasing teacher expectations: a) using mixed ability grouping and providing challenging

learning activities; b) promoting a positive class climate; and c) setting mastery goals, promoting student autonomy in choosing goals, and using formative evaluation and feedback to monitor progress towards these goals.

Based on the proposed elements that precede Brophy and Good's (1970) model, there are likely several factors influencing the timing of teacher expectations for student return to "normal." These factors include teacher well-being and self-expectations, administrator expectations, and the school environment. Clearly, responsibility for this recovery is shared with school leaders, given their impact on the school environment and teacher expectations, and change may need to start with them.

Supporting Teachers' Self-Expectations Toward Pre-Pandemic Levels

Returning to pre-pandemic standards for self-expectations will likely not be a goal for many teachers whose self-expectations have historically been unrealistically high; but there may be room for positive change for some teachers. One of the key learnings from this study is unrealistic self-expectations held over a long period of time led many participants to feel overburdened, stressed, and exhausted. This may not be so different from how they felt before the pandemic (Brackett & Cipriano, 2020). These feelings prompted most participants to reduce their self-expectations to reflect their circumstances more realistically. A few participants in the current study indicated the lessons learned about setting boundaries and easing expectations were changes they intended to continue implementing going forward. Some teachers' self-expectations may have been considered low during the pandemic, possibly a response to stress and burnout, or they may have already rebounded to being too high again.

Teacher self-expectations can return to being appropriate depending on individual teachers' magnitude of stress and burnout symptoms, which impacts the intensity of intervention

required. Their rebound also depends upon teachers taking care of themselves, in addition to support they might receive from their school administrators. Murphy (1984) proposed interventions at various levels of intensity to prevent and manage workplace stress. Cartwright and Cooper (2005) summarized them as follows: primary-level interventions modify or eliminate sources of stress in the workplace environment; secondary-level interventions expand the personal resources of individuals to help them cope better; and tertiary-level interventions treat and rehabilitate employees who have already developed significant stress-related health problems. Schools should at minimum implement the primary-level intervention, but also offer resources or opportunities within or outside the school for secondary- and tertiary-level interventions. When unfeasible or too costly to change the work environment, it is essential to modify and enhance employees' personal resources and coping strategies (second- and tertiary-level interventions; Siu et al., 2013). Such interventions have been effective in reducing employees' stress (van der Klink et al., 2001). Below are examples of primary- and secondary-level intervention strategies for teachers.

Recovery time is a necessary component to prevent burnout and further deterioration in mood and performance for those already burnt out (Siu et al., 2013). Recovery time means detaching psychologically from work through scheduled breaks during the workday or, at least, during non-work hours such as evenings and weekends (Seibt & Kreuzfeld, 2021; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2007; 2015). Many participants in my study described having always had high self-expectations, which often meant working long hours and bringing work home most evenings and weekends. This does not allow much time for recovery. Rankin (2023) reported this to be the case for many other teachers throughout the pandemic as well. The implementation of appropriate recovery time requires a combination of efforts from school administrators and

individual teachers (Seibt & Kreuzfeld, 2021). Administrators could design the working environment in a way that ensures adequate recovery time (Seibt & Kreuzfeld, 2021), which could include scheduling recovery time for teachers during the workday or scheduling time to get work done that teachers might otherwise take home. Another option is for administrators to make the workload more manageable so it can be completed during work hours. Some schools may require creating the physical space for teachers to have these breaks away from their students. Additionally, it would be helpful if administrators communicated their expectation for teachers to prioritize evening and weekend recovery time. Teachers, too, must take responsibility to prioritize and schedule recovery time, which can be difficult for teachers who experience significant stressors at work (Seibt & Kreuzfeld, 2021).

Another method administrators can use to support teachers to establish realistic self-expectations is increasing job resources or having a better balance of job demands and resources (Lehr et al., 2009; Rankin, 2023; Siegrist & Li, 2016). Such job resources can include positive relationships with students and colleagues, a cohesive team, support from supervisors, as well as a supportive and inspiring school climate (Kupers et al., 2022). I would argue another job resource is an administrator who meets teachers' psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness; Ryan & Deci, 2000). When there is a balance of demands and resources, teachers can successfully meet their job expectations (Sokal et al., 2020). A mismatch of job demands and resources can lead to increased stress and burnout (McCarthy et al., 2015).

Author Dr. Jenny Grant Rankin (2023, p. xiii) provides excellent resources for teachers who want to prevent or recover from burnout while finding "sustainable success at work." These are also strategies teachers can use, and administrators can encourage, to help teachers return to having appropriate self-expectations. A few of her realistic strategies, supported by other

research (e.g., Rau & Triemer, 2004; Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015), include being aware of not overcommitting, setting boundaries, reducing workload, and collaborating with colleagues.

Efforts to avoid overcommitment could include determining when saying "yes" is okay, taking time to think before deciding to take something on, thinking ahead about how to say "no" to opportunities, along with pulling out of ongoing tasks or committees already committed to, which no longer serve you. In terms of setting boundaries, Rankin (2023) encouraged teachers not to work from home, instead finding a way to have a life with breaks from work, electronic devices, social media, and emails. While sometimes external factors are largely responsible for teachers' work overload, there are often ways in which teacher practices also contribute to unnecessary work, such as the volume of assigned work/homework for students, how much of that is graded, and what kind of feedback is provided. Rankin (2023) recommended to be more selective about these and to leverage resources: use existing lessons, collaborate with others, use technology, or advocate for more time. She highlighted solo planning as being inefficient to sustain long term. Collaborating with appropriate colleagues can be more efficient and enjoyable. Mental health and stress-related cognitive processes, such as rumination and other negative thought patterns, influence recovery as well (Cropley et al., 2006; Cropley et al., 2015; Vahle Hinz et al., 2014). Getting professional help is important when needed. However, it can also be helpful to adopt other coping methods such as finding a healthy place to briefly vent, journaling frustrations, finding opportunities to laugh, adopting healthy habits (e.g., exercise, get enough sleep, get outside, make a playlist with your favorite songs), and building a support network (e.g., administrators, colleagues, students' parents, one's own family and friends). Finally, it is advised to ask for the kind of support needed and advocate for change when things are out of one's own control (Rankin, 2023).

Teachers play an important role in student well-being and success. Keeping teachers healthy is important in many respects: for the health and well-being of teachers themselves, job satisfaction and retention, and quality of teacher instruction (Arens & Morin, 2016; Klusmann et al., 2022; Madigan & Kim, 2021). Teachers' health and well-being is a key component to recovering from the pandemic impacts, which will take time and effort.

Implications for Psychologists

Providing Context

This research has implications for psychologists, especially school psychologists who work within the school system. The results from this study can help school psychologists understand how changes in the school context may have resulted in a) more teachers who are exhausted and overwhelmed, b) an increase in students who struggle socially and emotionally, c) a need for support with relationships, or d) a need for improved communication between teachers and their administrators. Understanding the school context can help psychologists prepare and anticipate how they can help members of a school. Of course, each school—and individual staff members within it—will likely have different needs and difficulties; while this will change with time, reviewing these findings may be a good place to start.

Enhancing the Well-Being of School Members

Psychologists could also play a role helping address, remediate, and advocate for change regarding the mental health impacts of the pandemic. Some have noticed a shift from a viral pandemic to a mental health pandemic (Clifton, 2021; Ornell et al., 2021; Rankin, 2023). Evidence of negative emotions was certainly present in the interviews with participants and in the review of the literature for students, teachers, and administrators (Constantia et al., 2021; Samji et al., 2022; Sokal et al., 2020). A psychologist's role could involve sharing information

with school staff about coping skills on topics of stress management, relationships, and grief; initiating discussions and brainstorming ideas about ways to engage in activities promoting mental health and self-care; offering emotional and mental health support to individuals; connecting them with resources; or, helping them find psychological support in the community. The school psychologist could aid in implementing the previously described (p. 82) three-tiered stress intervention for teachers.

School psychologists could promote and remediate student mental health using another three-tiered model, namely response to intervention (RTI; Burns et al., 2012). The overarching goal of RTI is to identify and provide appropriate support to all students on an as-needed basis through universal screening and monitoring progress to decide what level of intervention is needed (Foley, 2019). Tier 1 targets all students in the general education classroom who have access to the general curriculum and social-emotional learning. Students who need additional support, or who are considered "at-risk," would move to Tier 2 to receive targeted, small group intervention. When students continue to struggle and need more intensive, individual support, they would move to Tier 3. Depending on the school, mental health interventions may fall within the domain of the school counsellor.

Knowledge Translation and Expectation Interventions

School psychologists could share the research knowledge about expectations in schools and encourage teachers and administrators to have appropriately high expectations for their students, staff, and for themselves. A meta-analysis of intervention research on teachers' academic expectations for students showed interventions that simply create awareness of expectancy effects can increase teacher expectations and subsequent student achievement (De Boer et al., 2018). This knowledge sharing could also occur more formally through presentations

or informally through meetings, conversations, or consultations. Participants noted they did not have the capacity to learn more during the pandemic. Thus, incorporating bits of knowledge into already scheduled meetings involving school psychologists—school-based team meetings, consults on various matters, discussions on referrals—could be a good place for this sharing to occur.

Another method for sharing research knowledge is through a professional learning community model. Instead of a one-time professional development session, this method fosters collaborative learning among colleagues over time that involves accountability, applying knowledge learned, and collaborative problem solving (Dufour et al., 2006). This occurs in recurring cycles of learning, followed by applying this knowledge, assessment and reflection, and problem solving as a group to make any adjustments. The key is to find a group of school leaders and teachers who are interested, and who choose to engage in learning about, and making positive changes to, their expectations.

There is another simple reflective activity to be piloted and evaluated. As part of my master's research, I administered a survey for teachers to assess whether they have different academic expectations for students of different ethnic groups (Flanagan et al., 2020). Anecdotally, one participant thought the survey could be a great exercise for teachers to complete at the beginning of the school year to check in about their expectations and biases. This simple activity could be completed with teachers, followed by a brief discussion, and evaluated to see if it makes a positive improvement in teachers' expectations, behaviours, and student outcomes.

Another role for psychologists is in prevention and advocacy (NASP, 2021). Sharing the findings from this study is important not only to validate teachers' experiences, but also to inform how to respond to the pandemic impacts now, and to similar events in the future. For example, school psychologists can advocate for improved and expanded mental health services in schools, improved communication about policy and procedural changes, a manageable workload balanced with sufficient recovery time, and better resources for the groups of students who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

This study also has implications for employees and leaders in other fields as it relates to employee well-being, motivation, retention, workplace environment, and the role expectations can play in all of this.

Research Limitations & Challenges

The recruitment criteria for this study were quite broad, which could be considered a limitation. One inclusion criterion allowed for participants working anywhere in Canada, which could limit the specificity of some recommendations. Education and health care systems are managed provincially; this is reflected in differing provincial responses to the pandemic. Recruiting teacher participants from one province could have led to more specific recommendations tailored to the way things were operated in that province. The same goes for the criterion of grades: I chose to speak with teachers who taught grades four to eight. Choosing to speak with teachers who taught only one grade level may have allowed for more specific recommendations as well. However, broad recruitment criteria were established intentionally for a few reasons. Most importantly, this was a feature of the study's design: it was an exploratory study, and I intentionally selected a diverse sample to gain multiple perspectives to hopefully

increase transferability of the results. A benefit of this approach was spending time with teachers in different provinces who shared a range of experiences, some similar and some not. The criteria were also chosen to be broad due to possible difficulties with participant recruitment because, based on hearsay, teachers were overwhelmed and exhausted from the pandemic. However, there was no shortage of interested teachers.

Another possible limitation of the current study is that I am not a teacher and, as such, am considered an outsider. Thornberg (2014) discussed how teachers can mistrust and be suspicious of outside experts who have little direct experience with teaching and classroom management. Being an outsider limits my knowledge of the teaching profession, which may have limited the follow-up questions asked, or my understanding of their terminology. However, I have research knowledge about the topics covered in the interview. I also have experience working in schools with teachers as a psychology practicum student. Further, I asked for clarification when needed during the interviews. In addition to being an outsider with this acquired knowledge and experience, I approached the interview humbly, ready to learn from participants as the experts. An outsider researcher can also impact buy-in or recruitment, especially if teachers feel the researcher cannot adequately represent their story (Woods, 2019). This did not appear to impact recruitment; instead, teachers seemed quite interested and appreciative of having the opportunity for their voices to be heard.

Other Directions for Future Research

Individual factors influence how one copes in response to stress (Fox & Walter, 2022). Therefore, it might be informative to ask more explicitly about participants' symptoms of burnout, coping strategies used, job demands and resources, and behaviours compared to the behaviours of high-expectation teachers. These questions could be asked in a demographic form,

interview questions, or observed in real time. Asking these questions can provide context for the differences found between teachers' experiences: why some teachers struggled more than others or why some teachers were able to uphold high expectations placed upon them during a stressful time. This could also inform ways they could be supported by their administrators.

The knowledge translation and intervention activities described above could be evaluated in a research capacity. For example, the work on increasing awareness of expectancy effects, changing behaviours to be more like those of high-expectation teachers, and enhancing teacher well-being could all be evaluated. A benefit of evaluating these activities is it would provide a systematic method to know whether they led to an increase or maintenance of positive outcomes, or to determine what could be improved. Teachers are more inclined to try new teaching methods if they receive positive feedback from their peers about the methods' effectiveness and success. It would also contribute to the limited intervention research in this area.

Future research may also want to consider using a more collaborative approach to working with teachers, one involving them in designing the research project—from defining the problem, to choosing methods to gather data, to putting the findings into action. There has been a shift in education research and practice where practitioners, researchers, and policy makers are beginning to favor a focus on "practitioners' problems over researchers' solutions" (Yurkofsky et al., 2020, p. 404). The benefits of collaborative research with teachers are numerous, including knowledge about the local educational practices and setting that an outside researcher lacks (Efron & Ravid, 2019). It also contributes to teachers' professional growth, expands their skills, and empowers them (Efron & Ravid, 2019). Thus, it seems important to ground future research in local problems or needs and empower practitioners to take an active role in research and improvement.

Conclusion

Recovery from the pandemic's impacts will take time and effort from individual teachers and school leaders. Given the important role teachers play in students' lives, this is time well spent and should be a top priority. This chapter provided some recommendations for teachers, school leaders, and school psychologists to aid in pandemic recovery, allowing them to be better equipped to deal with future highly stressful situations and conditions. The findings of this study also lay the groundwork for future research aimed at understanding how expectations change in response to stressful circumstances, and about sharing resources to help teachers maintain or return to equilibrium.

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