

The Learning Experiences of Young Adolescents during COVID-19: A Narrative Inquiry

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Masters Degree in Education

Faculty of Education
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Abstract

This study examined the learning experiences of 6 young adolescent students in Grades 6 to 8 in India during COVID-19 lockdowns. The lockdowns resulted in teaching through virtual learning instead of the traditional face-to-face learning in a formal classroom during 2020-22. Since students are important stakeholders in their education process, hearing their voices and understanding their perspectives in this learning process was important as they had been directly affected by this sudden change in the teaching-learning medium. To understand the personal and cultural conditions of the young learners the study drew on socio-cultural theory (Rogoff, 2003, Vygotsky, 1978) and the dialogical perspective of Bakhtin (1984). In-depth narrative interviews with 6 adolescents were conducted and were analyzed using the framework proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). A narrative interpretation focused on both the individual experiences and the common themes that emerged from six in-depth narratives. The analyses revealed the learners' resilience and their ability to adapt to change by developing constructive coping strategies. They also revealed the learners' recognition of the value of in-person social connection and the role that in-person classes, which foster collaboration, have for meaningful learning to take place. Finally, all the young learners expressed joy in being invited to share their learning experiences.

Acknowledgement

“Begin at the beginning,” the King said gravely, “and go on till you come to the end, then stop.”

- Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland

From the inception to its completion, this study provided me with the experience of unfolding narratives, while being on an insightful journey that involved processes of unlearning and relearning. All along the way, also came the opportunity for deep learning and understanding the significance of research, ethics, and implications that required the capacity to manifest a sense of inquiry, openness, objectivity, compassion, attentiveness, and space for skillful listening.

I share my success with my advisor and guide, Prof. Barbara Graves. I would like to express my sincere gratitude for her invaluable and continuous support during the completion of the Master’s Thesis. Without her expert guidance, constant encouragement, and active engagement, I would not have made headway on the project. It is her richness of experience, meticulous scrutiny, an open mind to ideas, scholarly advice, precision with thoughts and words, and clarity of purpose that has helped me to a great extent to accomplish this task. I am deeply indebted to the committee members, Prof. Christine Tippett and Prof. Giuliano Reiss, for their valuable input, constructive feedback, prompt support, and objective suggestions that have further added to the direction and richness of the study.

I also extend my gratitude to the school principal for permitting the study to be taken up and for being accommodating in the organisational matters related to data collection. I am most grateful to my research participants and their parents for their enthusiastic participation and for generously giving their time and consent to be a part of the study. Personally, I thank my beloved family and friends who have supported me, directly and indirectly in many ways in staying engaged and motivated in completing the thesis. Their gentle nudges, affirming faith, and constant presence worked wonders in keeping me focused and inspiring me to always give my best.

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Introduction

The Objective of this Research

The objective of this research was to understand the learning experiences of young adolescent students in Grades 6 to 8 during COVID-19 lockdowns. This research is important because the outbreak of COVID-19 impacted major areas of life, including livelihoods, work, community, health, and education (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/interactive-timeline>). One of the pressing societal consequences of COVID-19 has been the closure of schools across many parts of the world, which has led to students being deprived of equitable learning, thereby affecting their general well-being (Brantina, 2021, Conto et al., 2020). In particular, in India where I am located, schools have been shut down since March 2020. Lockdown was one of the most prevalent tools used to control the spread of the COVID-19 virus in India. Research studies report the profound ways in which the global pandemic impacts student learning and explain the challenges that are experienced by schools, teachers, parents, and students due to the sudden closure of schools (Chirinda et al., 2021, Sama et al., 2021).

The lockdown has led to many alternative methods of teaching students, for example, teaching through virtual learning from students' homes instead of the traditional face-to-face learning in a formal classroom. It has been reported in the media that students who engaged in fully virtual learning faced challenges such as increased screentime, struggles in managing time, adapting to new learning routines, the need for high-fidelity internet speed, and above all a need for parental support and assistance through the day in their learning process. Disruption in learning was seen to be more pronounced among students in less privileged backgrounds, given the unavailability of the IT resources and parental involvement that were required to ensure educational continuity during the pandemic crisis (Gouédard et al., 2020). Some studies have

also focussed on understanding the impact of the lockdown on the mental status of the students and their specific causes (Sama et al, 2021).

While these reports highlight many of the challenges facing learners and their families, they do not focus on the perspective of the students and their personal experiences during the process of online learning in a virtual classroom. Since students are important stakeholders in their own education process, hearing their voices and understanding their perspectives is valuable as they have been directly affected by a sudden change in the teaching-learning medium. The value and benefit of listening to students' voice comes from the premise that it is important to provide an authentic process of participation and engagement wherein the student has the opportunity, space, recognition, and acceptance to express freely and solicit views on their own learning experience (Cato, 2018). Thus, the aim of the current research was to study the learning experiences of young adolescent students during COVID-19 lockdowns.

I have a personal and professional interest in conducting this research because I have worked in the capacity of a school guidance counsellor for nearly two decades in one of the elite K-12 private schools in New Delhi, India. As a result of COVID-19, I have witnessed the sudden transition of students, at all grade levels, from a face-to-face classroom learning environment to an online learning medium. Parallel to my professional experience is my own academic journey, wherein I have been a full-time graduate student at the University of Ottawa. As a result of the pandemic, I needed to leave Ottawa and return to New Delhi in June 2020, subsequently completing my master's degree in an online environment. Learning online has personally been a process and an adaptation. This upheaval as a student has made me aware of the importance of the complete graduate student experience and the impact of its disruption on my own learning. I have come to realise how much I miss the full graduate experience, and this awareness has made me more sensitive to the experiences of the young learners who, like me, have been forced to study online.

Therefore, it is personally important for me to know and understand the perspectives of students, especially during their early adolescent years (11 years old and above). As a guidance counselor, I have observed middle school students (Grades 6 to 8, ages 11-14) show a keen interest in voicing their thoughts and opinions. They volunteer easily and communicate their insights with enthusiasm and openness, as they develop relatedness to others, displaying subject competence, and autonomy in their learning and decision-making. They also become independent in handling their learning using virtual mediums with the guidance required from peers and adults of different measures, based on their individual differences. For these reasons, I have chosen to explore the students' perspectives in Grades 6, 7, and 8 from the given school population of K-12 grades. The questions that guided my study were

1. What were the participants' initial experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown?
2. What were their perceptions and experiences of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What strategies did the research participants use to engage with virtual classes?
4. What was their preferred mode of learning between face-to-face in person learning and virtual learning?
5. What were their key insights gathered through their lived experience of COVID-19 induced lockdown?

Review of Literature

I conducted a small-scale literature review to identify peer-reviewed publications to understand the importance of student voice, and to explore the emerging research literature on the impact of virtual learning during COVID-19. This review showcased the findings of research studies undertaken in the last two decades in each of the two fields. This knowledge helped me evaluate the gaps in the available literature and use these gaps to consider how my study could fill the void that was currently present in the available literature.

Impact of Virtual Learning during COVID-19

The closure of schools due to the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) and the resultant lockdowns led to the decision, across many parts of the world, to shift from traditional face to face teaching to the option of virtual teaching, wherever it was digitally feasible. A review of the literature was carried out to understand how this decision to shift to virtual learning impacted various areas and contexts of teaching and learning. Terms like distance learning, online learning, virtual instruction, and online teaching-learning have been used in various research papers and are synonymous with the term “virtual learning” that has been adopted in the current study, and has been accepted for the review. The review of literature focused on the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns on student education, learning, and well-being; the impact of virtual learning during COVID-19; and the learner characteristics that were essentially needed or/ and developed through virtual learning.

Impact of COVID-19 lockdown on student education, learning and well-being

Given the public health crisis and the need for students to self-quarantine in their homes to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus, research on COVID-19 induced lockdowns and their impact on education, social life, and student well-being has gained a lot of traction in the last two years. Prolonged school closures of over 18 months in India have upended schooling, learning, and education for children and families. A study by Hoffman and Miller (2020) discusses how

schools are a necessary source of health care and mental health support and provide protective factors for students' social, emotional, and physical well-being. The protective factors promote positive mental wellbeing, and indirectly influence learning. Protective school factors included a provision of a robust class calendar, transition time, social interactions, healthy eating program, physical activities, vital mental services, presence of school counsellors and social workers, early identification, intensive one-to-one support, and effective screening procedures (Chaturvedi et al., 2021; Hoffman & Miller, 2020). A survey by Chaturvedi et al. (2021) studied the impact of the pandemic on 1182 students of different age groups in the NCR (Northern Capital Region) of Delhi. This survey is critical to my research, given that it covers the same geographical region as my study. The survey indicated that sleeping habits, daily fitness routines, education, and social interactions significantly affected the mental health conditions of the students. Each of these factors was impacted to some degree during the lockdowns, leading to anxiety and negative health conditions. To handle the perceived stress and anxiety, students sought different coping mechanisms and the support of loved ones (Chaturvedi et al., 2021).

Mahapatra and Sharma (2020) in their paper discuss the crisis in the Indian education sector given the abrupt closures and the ambiguity regarding the re-opening of schools. Various psychosocial issues emerged owing to the academic stress that could emanate as a result of uncertainty in the maintenance of education services, vocational services, rehabilitation services, and the continuation of assessments across various educational grades. Academic issues of concern also included the challenges of homeschooling for parents, stress due to digital learning, which was an unfamiliar terrain for parents, especially the low-income group in India, greater challenges with students with special needs, and academic stress that strongly correlated with reduced student motivation and engagement (Mahapatra & Sharma, 2020). All three studies indicated that staying at home during COVID-19 caused prolonged and collective stress because of the lockdown, impacting subgroups of children in varied ways, and compounding existing

stressors that influenced marginalised societies (Chaturvedi et al., 2021; Hoffman & Miller, 2020; Mahapatra & Sharma, 2020).

Impact of virtual learning during COVID-19 lockdowns

Online learning was considered as the best possible learning medium to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 induced lockdowns (Conto et al., 2020). However, the suddenness of the school closure and the introduction of virtual learning was seen to have had an adverse effect on establishing solid foundations and the required preparation for the virtual learning process (Conto et al., 2020; Young & Donovan, 2020). The brief by Young and Donovan (2020) explained that districts and school administrations faced an overwhelming challenge in ensuring a swift change in pedagogy while determining the level of internet access that families had, establishing learning management systems for virtual instruction, preparing teachers for online teaching, establishing daily schedules and timetable structures, and developing teaching modules that served the diversity of learners in a classroom. The key findings from the American Educator Panels Spring 2020 COVID-19 surveys compiled by Hamilton et al. (2020) indicated that while educators provided a variety of supports for distance learning, there were disparities and gaps in the implementation of the virtual learning practices, delivery of instructions, teacher connect and student accessibility to technology and learning. This disparity was proposed to exacerbate existing inequalities in the student population.

Citing UNICEF global estimates, Conto et al. (2020) noted in their study that the country's income level had a direct association with the percentage of students enrolled in the distance learning program. From over 100 countries reviewed, it was seen that 30% of students were unable to benefit from virtual learning due to geographical and digital challenges. While most countries provided remote learning in numerous ways, the paper indicated that 68% of primary, 71% of lower secondary, and 74% of upper secondary students took the opportunity to enrol in remote learning, while only 36% of countries focused on pre-primary students (Conto et al., 2020).

Regarding socioeconomic status, the teachers were able to reach out to 48.1% of high-poverty and 61.6% of low-poverty students (Conto et al., 2020) through virtual learning. To quote from Indian statistics, Mourali (2021) states that there are about 350 million students, of which around 43.9% students have access to a smart phone or other devices to take part in virtual learning. Survey analysis, as mentioned by Mourali (2021), states that around 11% of the rural and 40% of the urban population have access to computers and the internet in India. Thus, the digital divide limits access and equal opportunity to virtual learning across all strata, and this has a direct impact on the possibility of learning in a large student population.

To understand the importance of virtual learning during COVID-19, a descriptive study was done in India by Dhawan (2020) through a SWOC (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges) analysis. The strengths of virtual learning highlighted in the study were the flexibility of learning in terms of time and location, the ability to provide immediate student feedback, and the advantage of catering to a large audience or several learners. The weaknesses of the virtual teaching-learning process explained were the lack of personal and physical attention towards the student, technical digital difficulties during teaching, a huge dependence on learner confidence and ability level, and struggles with time management (Dhawan, 2020). The opportunities that virtual learning provided included the scope for new technical advances, the possibility of a pedagogical uplift from the current traditional ways of teaching, and an opportunity to address diverse learners in terms of their age and current level of development. The challenges, however, were the presence of digital illiteracy, increased technology costs, quality of the learning program, unequal digital infrastructure available leading to a digital divide, and a lack of standards for quality control on the need for the development of e-content and its effective delivery (Dhawan, 2020).

While evaluating the impact of virtual learning, the study by Hoffman and Miller (2020) illustrates how virtual learning does not meet non-academic needs, such as mental support and emotional wellbeing, and how this could influence learning in many ways, and solutions to

overcome them during the current lockdowns must be thought over. In addition, researchers also expect that students may return to school with more gaps in learning due to the disproportionate resources in terms of digital infrastructure accessibility amongst the students, absence of medical health policy, low economic funds, and non-availability of parents/caregivers to supervise students during their virtual learning classes (Hoffman & Miller, 2020).

Virtual learning and learner characteristics

While school administration and governing bodies made consistent efforts to ensure that students continued to learn in the virtual environment, studies indicated that a lot depended on the learner characteristics as well. The readiness and capacity to engage in self-monitored learning requires students to have the ability to manage themselves (Sulisworo et al., 2020). Self-regulation in virtual learning, as defined by Sulisworo et al. (2020), is the ability to monitor one's thoughts and actions, while engaging in virtual learning and utilising all the online learning features available. To evaluate the impact on self-regulated learning of students, as online learners during COVID-19, Sulisworo et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative descriptive study that involved Indonesian students in Grades 10-12 from high schools and vocational schools and assessed the dimensions of planning, monitoring, controlling, and reflecting aspects of self-regulated learning. Results indicated the need for improvement in the students' capacity for self-regulated learning because self-regulated learning as a skillset was directly related to achieving learning outcomes (Sulisworo et al., 2020). The study demonstrated the need for developing strategies that strengthened student online learning behaviors, including teaching self-regulation strategies explicitly, to prevent a decline in learning owing to a lack of teacher presence and the monitoring structures that regular face-to-face learning offers (Sulisworo et al., 2020).

In her study, Murali (2021) further adds the importance of learning persistence, self-discipline, and being technology-savvy as important learner characteristics that maintain learning performance and achievement in online learning. The notion of self-discipline and technology-

savviness is also supported in the study by Heo et al. (2021), wherein the study demonstrates that self-efficacy in time-management and technology increases the self-efficacy of learners in online learning and learning engagement. One of the main implications of the study was that promoting students self-efficacy in online learning was a key determinant factor in enhancing learning engagement in online learning. Studies also indicated that there were certain learner characteristics that had the potential to develop because of online learning. For instance, Dhawan (2020) pointed out that virtual learning catered to the prospect of providing means to train students and enhance their skills in critical inquiry, problem-solving, and adaptability.

The review of literature reveals some of the strengths, opportunities, and potential of virtual learning, as well as its prospective scope. Equity, access, and quality were seen to be three important parameters for any kind of learning modality to be a success. Looking forward, much research is currently focused on developing effective, resilient learning educational systems that promote learning, looking at cognitive and non-cognitive skills, physical, emotional, and mental well-being, learner skills, and effective learning outcomes that reach across a maximum number of children through various learning models.

Student Voice

This section of the review of literature focuses on student voice to comprehend the importance and relevance of the student's understanding, thoughts, and verbal expression in their learning context. Student voice is an emergent concept, referring to students in dialogue, consultation, and discussions on topics that concern them, such as their education (Fleming, 2015). Student voice literature and the research done in the 21st century defined student voice in many ways, moving from defining it as "listening" to more dynamic and inclusive models of participation, such as "consultation" and "partnership". The review of literature focusses on why does student voice matter; understanding the role of student voice in education; and student voice during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Why does student voice matter?

Student voice is the right of students to have a say in matters that affect them in their learning and the process of schooling. Student voice has evolved both as a concept and as a set of practice since the 1990's. The most prominent rationale for the advocacy of the student voice is the moral argument, based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states:

“All children... have the right to: a) articulate their views and express their views freely, b) be heard in all matters affecting them, including policy matters, and c) have their views taken seriously and in accordance with their age and maturity” (United Nations, 1992)

The autonomy of students in making their own decisions that relate to their life choices and education is central to this moral argument. A student is considered a developing citizen within a democracy, with a right to a voice (Fleming, 2015). Understanding student voice through the sociocultural perspective, much importance is given to social interactions and one's role and agency in them. Mitra (2004) focused on the premise that we learn and become who we are through interaction with others (Rogoff, 2003). Research indicated that having a student voice created a sense of individual and collective identity (Mitra, 2004). When students are involved in social activities and collaborate with other students and teacher, in discussions and decisions related to school reforms, students feel empowered as change agents (Mitra, 2004). Given the constant interaction between the experienced members, teachers, older students, and younger students in the group, these meaningful school experiences help meet the fundamental developmental needs of the students while bringing meaningful contributions to the school processes (Mitra, 2004). This two-way benefit takes place as the adolescent is considered an expert in their social world and possesses knowledge and insights that can be a crucial resource for school reform, in the learning community, through the process of active decision-making (Mitra, 2004; Krishner & Possoboni, 2011).

Looking at student voice from an educational model, the aspects of power and authority between an adult/ teacher/ institution and a student is explained in the power and cultural shift wherein Fielding (2004) describes student voice as ‘there are no spaces, physical or metaphorical, where teachers and students meet one another as equals and as genuine partners in the shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together’ (Fielding, 2004, p. 309). The primary concept is the necessary shift in mindset that students are not simply recipients of knowledge and information, but rather that students have important perspectives in learning and can share responsibility for their own learning with teachers. The primary focus lies on the student in the process of conversations wherein the teacher seeks advice and invites opinions and perspectives from the students, engaging them in their learning (Mitra, 2001; Ruddock, 2007).

Understanding the role of student voice in education

Developing a robust student voice is actively advocated by schools, childhood services, and government policies (Fielding, 2010). A student voice is in the complex web of school culture and structures that are created by different stakeholders such as policymakers, teachers, students, peers, parents, administrators, etc. of the school (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014). One of the pioneers in defining students’ voice, Jean Ruddock explains that having students involved at a school and classroom level provides teachers insights into what learning and supportive conditions that facilitate learning look like from the learner’s angle (Ruddock, 2007). She asserts that a productive and successful learning outcome is only possible if a teacher can put the student at the heart of the learning process, wherein the learning partnership involves understanding the perceptions of the student and listening to their insights related to their learning (Robertson, 2015). Making students active players and not just passive objects includes looking at the teacher-student relationship more in a collaborative manner than a hierarchal structure and supporting students in becoming members of a learning community (Ruddock, 2007). The theory of constructivist learning further supports the importance of including students in the teaching-learning process,

while encouraging active collaboration between the teacher and the students in constructing innovative ideas or concepts that further add to their existing knowledge (Ngussa & Makewa, 2014).

Studies have elaborated on the presence of the student voice in distinct aspects of school processes that include the discussing voice that is heard in the teaching-learning process at the classroom level, the contributing voice as a researcher, and a valued voice in the school management processes and at the organisational level (Brasof, 2014). Student voice takes the form of a consultative voice as the student matures to become an adolescent, with the view that adolescents are developmentally ready to participate in school reform decision making under conditions of adult support. Fielding (2010) posits the role of students as researchers and co-researchers, wherein students actively engage in identifying issues, such as cyberbullying or teasing in class, that need to be explored. With adult support, students design a research approach, carry out the research, collect data, reflect on the process, and share their recommendations with policymakers and other leaders. The advantage of this engagement of students is the varied perspective that is gained, given that the student voice and perspectives are found to be significantly different from those of adults. Research partnerships that offered opportunities for dialogue, reciprocal engagement, synergy, and exploration of students with adults were found to be the most productive (Fielding, 2010).

Studies have indicated that there is a two-way benefit and value in having an active student voice in the school processes, leading to productive outcomes both for the school and the student. The study by Brasof (2014) elucidates that active student participation in the school processes leads to optimization and positive influence on the organisational outcome of student attendance, discipline, student safety, graduation rates, family, and community involvement. The research found students benefit from having a voice in organisational governance. This active participation creates a sense of equality, agency, belonging, and a more effective development of social and

academic competencies in them (Brasof, 2014; Mitra, 2004). This influence was also noted in Fielding's study (2010), wherein a student's self-awareness and self-knowledge were most visible when the frequency and intensity of the relationship between the adult and student was high. Mitra's (2004) research pointed out that not having a student voice resulted in adolescents experiencing a sense of alienation due to the large class size, segregation by age and ability, and the visible distance between the student and the teachers, describing their school experience that existed in terms of anonymity and powerlessness. Mitra (2004) in her study, however, concluded that how the student voice initiatives are organizationally structured, and the nature of the relationship shared between the adult and student influenced the way development in the student occurred.

Student voice during COVID-19 lockdowns

The database provided limited studies related to student voice during the COVID-19 induced lockdowns. However, these three analyses seemed pertinent to the current study. Research was conducted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Council of Europe to evaluate the extent to which opportunities for student voice was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdowns (Hoskins & Donbavand, 2021). Online teacher surveys of over 1000 respondents and 8 case studies were carried out in Europe and Middle, East, and North Africa and captured both the teachers' and students' voices regarding the student voice opportunities that were prevalent during the lockdowns. Results indicated that students' decision-making regarding school life had been significantly impacted during the lockdowns, given the reduced physical spaces for freedom of expression, loss of opportunities and civic participation (Hoskins & Donbavand, 202). Due to the lockdowns, results indicated a 30% drop in classroom discussion, 49% in volunteering, 50% in community action, and 52% in student governance, each of which being relevant and contributing to the presence of student voice, agency, and engagement. Despite large cultural, social, and economic

differences between Europe and Africa, student voice seemed similarly affected across both the continents (Hoskins & Donbavand, 2021). An in-depth analysis of the student voice studied by Pasaribu and Dewi (2021) focused on evaluating student opinions and feelings about online learning through their reflective journals. While online learning encouraged mutual cooperation, students felt more digital compassion for themselves, teachers, and peers, developed learning autonomy, and valued social interactions with friends and family.

A third study of relevance selected was an autoethnography by Wilson et al. (2020) of four college students from Australia and Singapore. The study provided a deep and qualitative insight of how the four students viewed their journey as learners during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The students were impacted by four key areas, namely engagement, awareness, socializing, and the environment (Wilson et al., 2020). The lockdowns initially disrupted socialization, leading to a distaste for change. Lack of authentic and personalized social interaction, due to physical distancing, led to demotivation and disengagement (Pasaribu & Dewi, 2021; Wilson et al., 2020). The autoethnographies indicated that the initial sudden shock and negative opinion because of moving from face-to-face learning to online learning, gradually converted into positive narratives once the students became comfortable in their own homes (Wilson et al., 2020). Having a student voice in terms of flexibility in learning resulted in proactive and productive learning patterns. Student participation in the form of class collaborations led to effective communication, a sense of community, and continuous engagement with peers, which mattered and improved their academic performance (Pasaribu & Dewi, 2021; Wilson et al., 2020).

The literature on student voice clearly demonstrated the importance of listening to young learners, influencing them on multiple levels and positively impacting student recognition, expression, and representation in the teaching-learning process. This active participation not only empowers the student in the development of adult-like skills of problem-solving but also inculcates a sense of civic inclusion, cultivating an individual and collective identity as contributing members

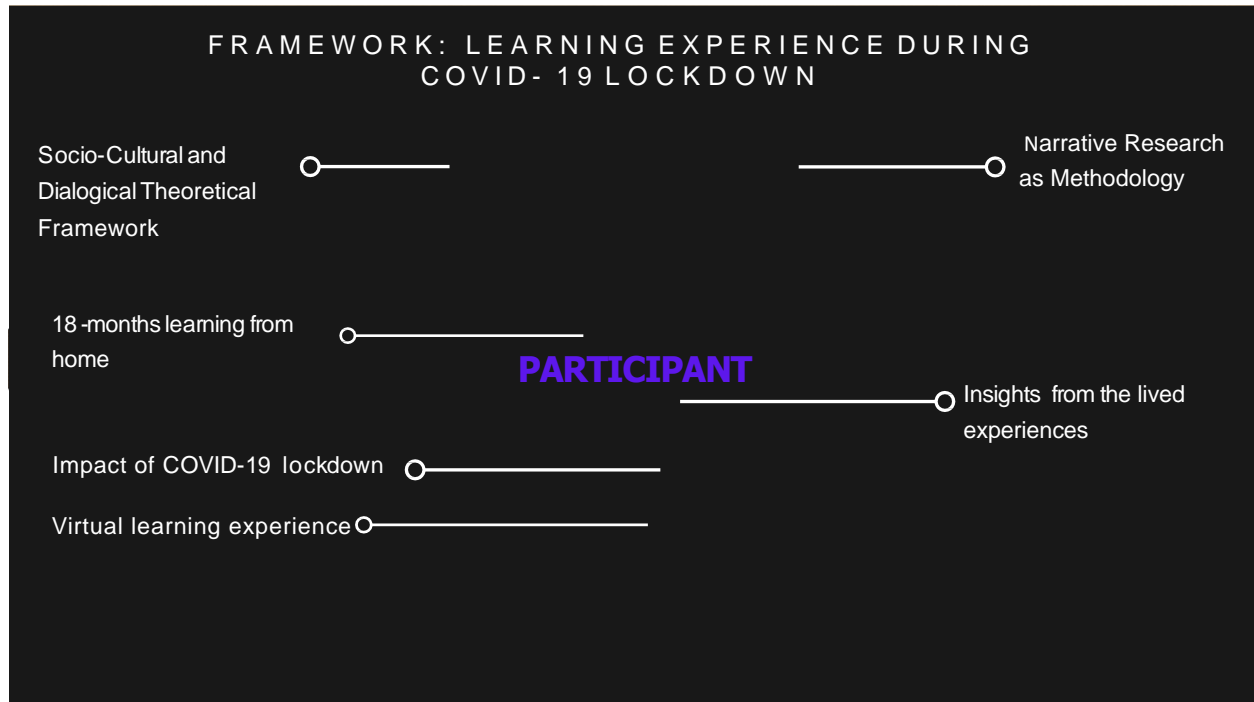
of the class, school, and society. More importantly, the studies emphasized the importance of prioritising student voice, especially during the COVID-19 lockdowns, from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds and diverse communities to counter inequalities and promote democratic engagement.

In conclusion, as a result of the review of the selected literature, the importance of student voice as a basic human right was well established. Students should have a voice. The inclusion of students and their partnership in the school process could be conceptualised through various models and perspectives. The importance and focus of student voice in schools could range from self-expression to personalised learning, from curriculum design to governance and shouldering responsibilities to participating in school decision-making processes. The review of literature on the impact of virtual learning during COVID-19 indicated that the actual impact and consequences of school closures and the resultant decision to introduce virtual learning may not be known for several years. As little is known about the learning implications and experiences from the students' perspective in the context of the pandemic, the existing gaps in literature gave rise to the rationale for the proposed study.

The framework used in the study is illustrated in Figure 1 wherein the interface between the participants' lived experiences and learning landscape that is studied, the theoretical lens that is drawn upon and the methodology used for the investigation is depicted.

Figure 1

Framework: Learning Experience during Covid-19 lockdown



As shown in the figure, in order to investigate the learning implications and experiences from the students' perspective during the COVID-19 lockdown, the study drew on socio-cultural and dialogical theoretical framework and used narrative research methodology as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). The following sections help understand the basis for the theoretical framework and the research methodology employed in the study in greater detail.

Theoretical Framework

To understand the learning experiences of young adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns, I draw on a theoretical perspective based on socio-cultural theory from the standpoint of Vygotsky and Rogoff, and from a dialogic viewpoint from Bakhtin.

Lev Vygotsky's work has had strong influence on education, explaining the relationship between development and learning in children. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of human learning describes learning as a social process and believes in the social origins of language and thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). He outlines the three main concepts related to cognitive development stating that culture is significant in learning, language is the root of culture, and individuals learn and develop within their role in the community (Vygotsky, 1978).

Learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers (Vygotsky, 1978. p.90)

Vygotsky explains that learning is not developmentally linear and is the result of the relationship between the biological basis of behaviour and the social conditions in and through which human activity takes place. This functional learning system, as explained by Vygotsky (1978), is not identical across children of the same developmental age and varies as per the kind of experiences that have been nurtured. Rogoff applies the Vygotskian theory (1978) as she explains that human development is not genetically inherited but arises in interactions with others and these interactions are mediated by culture and society (Rogoff, 2003). Vygotsky's theory of centrality of social interactions and cultural tools in cognitive development helped her channelize her own work on how thinking and learning is a part of social and cultural process.

In contrast to theories of development that focus on the individual and the social or cultural context as separate entities (adding or multiplying one and the other), the cultural-historical approach assumes that individual development must be understood in, and cannot be

separated from, its social and cultural-historical context. According to Vygotsky's theory, the efforts of individuals are not separate from the kinds of activities in which they engage and the kinds of institutions of which they are a part. (Rogoff, 2003. p.50)

Rogoff's (2003) focus has been on development in cultural context and her work extensively deals with working with different cultures, studying expansively various environments and conditions of intersections between culture and development. Rogoff specifies concrete examples of learning in children across wide-ranging cultures and traditions, emphasizing that children learn through participating in the ongoing activities in their families and communities (Rogoff, 2003). As observed by Rogoff (2003) new knowledge is created through social engagement via activities, relational interactions, and conversations with others. A community of learners is created by structuring shared endeavors like learning, with children and adults both being present and active in the process. This approach occurs in formal and informal learning, wherein children learn during social participation with adults (Rogoff, 1994).

In order to draw on theorists that propose having children as research participants, I draw on Maguire (2005) who makes the argument that children should be considered to speak on their own behalf and their voices must be included in research activities. Maguire encourages conversation, dialogue, and participation about ethical issues, with specific attention to children who learn and live in diverse, multiple language, and multicultural settings (Maguire, 2005). She draws on Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical frame as she validates through her research that children have good social radar in addressing contexts in which they find themselves. To quote Maguire (2005),

Children's perspectives and voices are important signifiers of their conceptualizations of the situatedness of their learning, interests, needs, and perceptions. They can be competent and valuable "informants"; and have the capacity to express in various ways what is

important to them and frequently have different interests and views of situations than adults who have power over them.

In addition to Vygotsky's socio-cultural framework, Maguire (2005) also draws on the dialogic theory of Bakhtin (1984) whose work has majorly focused on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language. He states that every word expressed or uttered is a dialogue. Embedded in social-cultural theory, Bakhtin's philosophy focuses on the dialogic relationship between people, culture, and people and culture (Maguire, 2005). He explains how language socially positions speakers in such a manner that children's text or utterances are answers to others' words, questions, or prompts (Maguire, 2005). Every utterance by the speaker positions the speaker in relation to himself, other speakers, and other socio-cultural groups. This voice, which is considered the speaking consciousness, can only be understood in the socio-historical cultural setting. Bakhtin's theory provides a framework that supports Maguire's stance regarding the competence of children to participate in research such that their voice is heard, understood, and valued (Maguire, 2005).

Bakhtin's dialogic approach to language encourages conversation and dialogue about ethical issues, thereby engaging children in human inquiry (Maguire, 2005). From the dialogic perspective, there is a need to necessitate and involve children in research discussions, with a commitment to respect children's rights and nurture their wellbeing. Such dialogic interventions between the adult (researcher) and children provide deeper insight into children's learning, language development, and decision-making processes as the researcher employs conscious ethical considerations while engaging in qualitative interactions and meaningful participation with them.

To summarize, the current research study is alligned to the premise that individuals are socio-cultural beings and knowledge is constructed through social interaction, relations, and active participation, whilst engaging in the medium of dialogue and communication. In

continuation, children engagement with the world and significant others in their lives has much relevance and context to their growth, learning and development. Therefore, their voice and participation in active meaningful ways with the context, adult, learning, and community is important. Each of the theoretical framework taken up for the current research study hold a central premise that since childhood, social interaction is the basis of all learning and development.

Thus, a good understanding of socio-cultural theory helped expand on my own knowledge of how we learn and encouraged my appreciation for the learning experiences and learning environment of young adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns. Further, this theoretical framework helped me as a researcher to define my research design, select the appropriate methodology for data collection, analysis, and interpretation, based on giving student voice its due importance in understanding how social, educational, and mental activity was construed by the research participants in the given pandemic situation of COVID-19 and the induced lockdowns, that created a need for educational institutions to go online.

Methodology

Narrative Inquiry as a Methodology

Narrative inquiry and its application as a methodology are seen across several disciplines of philosophy, medicine, psychology, economics, environmental sciences, theology, and education, with it gaining importance in the education research literature as a research methodology (Webster & Mertova, 2007). At the most basic level, a narrative “is a representation of an event or a series of events” (Abbott, 2002, p.12). It is the construction and reconstruction of personal stories, especially the intimate and personal accounts that have influenced a person in some way. To explain narratives as a way of communication:

People are always tellers of tales.

They live surrounded by their stories and

The stories of others; they see everything

That happens to them through those stories

And they try to live their lives as

If they were recounting them.

(Jean-Paul Sartre, 1964 cited in Webster and Mertova, 2007, p.1)

Narratives explain life in connection to how it is interpreted, reinterpreted, told, and retold, rather than how it was. Narratives create a center point of all that is shared, communicated, told, or expressed, given that people live their life through its narration in the form of stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). It is these stories and their collection, description, and interpretations that produce “narratives of experience” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2). Thus, using narratives to understand lived experiences forms the basis of narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology. This methodology is based on the landscape and the richness of what narratives can offer in understanding human experiences.

Life is understood from the narratives that are told (Webster and Mertova, 2007).

Narrative inquiry situates “individual experiences as a source of knowledge” (Dewart et al., 2020, p. 371). It provides a framework to investigate the way people experience the world, through the ways in which they depict experiences and draw meaning from those experiences in a narrative format (Webster & Mertova, 2007). These narratives can be understood both as a phenomenon and a method because they could be the “structured quality of experience to be studied,” and “the pattern of inquiry” (Clandinin, 2006 p. 45). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narratives as a powerful tool that further strengthens the student's voice and is a potent tool for self-reflection.

Focusing on narrative inquiry in the field of education, Clandinin and Connelly's development of narrative inquiry was based on the work of John Dewey who believed that education, life, and experiences were deeply connected, and he considered experiences, life, and education to be the same (Steeves et al., 2013). Dewey explained experience as constituted based on the interaction between the self and the world. In that lived moment of experience that happens between the self and the world, also exists the continuous interaction between the personal, social, and material environment (Clandinin, 2007).

As an education philosopher, Dewey proposed the three-dimensional space narrative structure approach (Interaction, Continuity, and Situation) that suggested that to understand people, one needed to examine not only their personal experience but also their actions with other people (Wang & Geale, 2015). Through this approach, Dewey explained that the quality of interaction and the quality of continuity in any given situation is central, wherein the researcher analyzes the experiences as well the exchanges and dialogue (interaction) of the participants with other people, across time (continuity) and in the participant's social landscape (situatedness) of action, participation, and functionality (Dewey, 2018). In extension to that, Clandinin (2006) defined narrative inquiry as

a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants over time, in a place or series of places and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst of living progresses in the same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of experience that made up people's lives, both individual and social. (Clandinin, 2006. p. 20)

The selection of narrative inquiry as a methodology is because of its characteristics of creating a participatory relationship, that involves dialogue, participation, involvement, and collaboration between the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Narrative inquiry provides a medium for meaning-making that is marked by openness, multiple ways of sense-making, and a collaborative process of exchanging ideas, that allows researchers and participants to locate themselves in relation to self and others (Dewart et al., 2020).

Given that the purpose of a narrative inquiry is to reveal the experience of the participants in their own words, the methodology provides a medium to amplify the voice of the student in their lived experience as a learner in a virtual medium, with emphasis on the experiences narrated by them, the language and vocabulary used while paying attention to the verbal and the non-verbal expression of communication and how the learning experiences are narrated. This research method suits the study aptly given that the purpose of the study is to delve deeper into the narratives of the participants in understanding their experiences, perspectives, and journey as learners in the virtual world.

Narrative Framework

To analyze the data, I apply the framework proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). As stated by Clandinin (2007), "the focus of the narrative inquiry is not only on individuals' experiences but also on the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individual's experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted" (Clandinin, 2007. p. 42). Thus, the data collected through narrative inquiry analyzes through the lens of Clandinin and Connelly's

(2000) three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (temporality, sociality, and spatiality) that is based on Dewey's notion of continuity, interaction, and situation (Dewey, 2018). These dimensions, as mentioned below, provide a structure and assist in the analysis of the narrative data; as "places to direct attention to while conducting the inquiry" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479).

Interaction/ Sociality.

In the narrative inquiry, the focus was placed both on the personal and social interactions that existed in the narrative. The personal experiences, social interactions, and social influences experienced by the participants were relevant to the study. Focus on personal experiences that included feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions along with social interactions and social influences that inquired about the existential conditions, environment, surrounding factors, and social interactions of the participant with others were analyzed.

Continuity / Temporality.

Clandinin and Connelly (2006) state that the experiences that are under study are always in a transition and thus need to be described and understood in its totality of past, present, and future. A thorough description of the event, person, or object provides a rich and thick account with a temporal history that explains the past, present, and future actions and the time factor of the narrative. Continuity was an important dimension in the current study as the tenure of time involved in this study was that of over 18 months, given that the virtual learning classes had begun in April of 2020 for the participants. Thus the significance of the past and the present, and the perception of the future were important dimensions to explore, interpret, and analyze in the study.

Situation/ Spatiality.

This dimension of inquiry focused on the place and the context in which the narrative took place and how the activities of that place shaped the participant's experiences. Place in this context meant the physical, topological, and concrete boundaries where the inquiry and the events took place. In the current study, the specification and details of the locality are crucial as

it helped focus on understanding the various contextual influences, such as home, study space, school, community, neighborhood, etc., with the focus to understand the impact of place, activities, and context to the participant's learning and on the study.

In addition to the three-dimensional approach, the relation between the participant and the researcher is considered an important component in narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2006) describe that the collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participant is sensitive to the subtle forms of thought and feeling shared by the participant while the researcher explores through the participant's personal lives and the narratives with more in-depth discussions. Wang and Geale (2015) further explain the concept of relational-based inquiry as a shared intersubjectivity between the researcher and the participant. In this interaction, meaning through experiences is constructed mutually, allowing the researcher to understand and clarify the lived experiences, values, and perspectives as shared by the participant.

Research Design

This study is a qualitative narrative inquiry that is based on the model proposed by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and is grounded in Dewey's notion of continuity, interaction, and situation. The two main elements of this model are the focus on the participants' accounts of experiences and the exploration of the meaning embedded in the participants' narrative (Ntinda, 2018). These personal experiences of the participant are narrated not only from the perspective of self but also in connection, viewpoint, and interaction with other people (Wang & Geale, 2015).

Given that the participants are from Grades 6–8 (ages 11 to 14), narrative inquiry also gives a pathway to develop an ambiance and a trusting relationship, with an openness to explore emotions, thoughts, and feelings from a larger canvas and context from the dialogue. The method provides a dialogic space to explore personal and cultural conditions and experiences that make allowances for variance in the dispositions, thoughts, and perspectives of the participants.

Who were the research participants?

Six students, with two students each from randomly selected sections of Grades 6, 7, and 8, were a part of the research study. There are 5 sections in Grade 6, 4 sections in Grade 7, and 4 sections in Grade 8 with an approximate range of 460 students in total with about 140-175 students in each grade and 32-36 students in each section. Only one section from each of the Grades was randomly selected. The participants met the following inclusion criteria to volunteer for the research:

1. Must be a student of Grade 6, 7, or 8.
2. Must have been learning online due to COVID-19.

School Context

The students belonged to an elite progressive school situated in New Delhi. Nested in the outskirts of the city, the school has around 2200 students from Nursery to Grade 12 with about 135 teachers and a teacher-student ratio at 1:17 that makes the professional learning community. Almost two decades old, the school is a privately funded school with 75% of students coming from a higher economic background and prominently from a business background. Based on the government policy, there are 25% of students come from economically weaker sections of the society and are offered free education. The school calls itself an adaptive learning school, which thrives on the core school values of inclusion, attentiveness, authenticity, excellence, freedom to be, and respect.

Following the human framework model, much work is done on developing the student's voice and making learning visible, with dialogue and self-governance that is considered central to a child's learning. The spirit of the school as showcased in its website and classroom practices is the Experiential Learning Philosophy, which not only defines it but also sets it apart from the other schools in the country. The voice of all four stakeholder groups – the management, teachers, parents, and students, is heard and evaluated across various domains of safety protocols,

teaching pedagogy, community engagement, student well-being, and teacher professional development. The School employs a process of reflective inquiry, purposeful engagement, and collaborative learning principles as an integral part of the regular classroom practices and teaching-learning pedagogy.

During the Covid-19 lockdown that commenced as per the Government orders, in the last week of March 2020, the school within a week incorporated the online virtual learning model with the students, teachers and parents getting training for the online classes. Learning protocols, time table structure, class norms, paedagogical learning tools and a learning management system that were incorporated were explained through training modules and multiple orientations to all the stakeholders. The collaborative learning principles and practices were consciously incorporated so that the teaching-learning efficacy was maintained despite the sudden change in the teaching medium. Efforts were made to make a seamless transition from an offline to an online mode of learning.

The learning environment of the school can be well connected with the purpose of the study. The inquiry that has been designed serves as a means to understand how the participants perceive their current learning phase, view the classroom practices and identify the teaching-learning pedagogy employed in the virtual platform. Given that the practice of introspection and dialogue has been a part of their everyday learning environment, having the participants share their experiences and reflect on the last 18 months of online learning further helps to not only strengthen their student's voice but also provides critical information to the thinking process of the participants.

Recruitment Process

To conduct the research with the students at the school I work in, I sent a permission email to the principal of the school. The email explained the entire research process and the objectives of the study. The intent of the email was to seek permission to conduct the research with six

students of Grades 6, 7, 8, and the steps for selecting the participants was explained along with the process of maintaining the ethics and confidentiality of the students and the research data.

Once the permission was acquired, I wrote to the class teachers of the randomly selected sections and program leader of Grades 6,7, and 8 and explained to them the research intent and requested them to send an email on my behalf, to the class email groups of the randomly selected sections of Grades 6, 7, and 8. In that e-mail, I introduced myself and the research study to the students. I sent an invitation letter to the students to participate in the research and explained the research in some detail. I encouraged the students to discuss the research study and their interest in participating with their parents. I attached the letter of information for the student to share with their parents. The students' writing e-mail back to me, within three days of receiving the email, to my U Ottawa email address, (researcher's address to be inserted here) was accepted as an interest to participate. I explained that the selection of the participants for the research was based on random selection from the pool of students who had sent in their interest to participate.

In the information letter to the parent, I asked the parent to indicate a time of the meeting, to meet virtually, that was convenient to the student and the parent. The meeting intended to explain the research process to the parent and student with all the specifics of the time duration, the medium of conversation, and the objectives of the study briefly described. This meeting happened with all six of the students and parents as six separate sessions. Aspects of ethics and confidentiality were also explained, providing an opportunity to address their queries and concerns. After the queries were answered, the consent form was shown online, through the shared screen option, and read to the parent and the student. The parents and students were informed of the possible topics of discussion. They were asked for their verbal consent and with their permission, the verbal consent was video recorded. The student and parent were also informed that the consent form that had been read to them will be mailed through the student's e-mail for them to have a copy of the consent form. After the consent was video recorded and the

consent form was e-mailed to the parent and the student, the procedure of informed consent was completed. The students were given pseudonyms so that identifying information of the participants, the school's, and researcher's profile, and any third party mentioned was kept completely confidential.

Data Collection

For the research study and data collection, the appointment was scheduled as per the convenience of the student and the researcher. The interview took place on the Zoom virtual platform and the meeting was video and audio recorded. Verbal consent was also recorded at the beginning of the interview. The video and audio recording of the meeting was collected and will be securely conserved in the safe custody of the researcher, for a duration of five years. The recording was saved in the laptop that had a password on it and will be removed from the system after five years. No copies of the same were made. All efforts were made to ensure that the identity of the individuals is safeguarded. The names and sections of the students were not disclosed in the study. The identity of the individuals was safeguarded by anonymization of data and each of the participants was given pseudonyms. Also, the school's name and the researcher's profile in the school will not be revealed or stated in any future publications or research, to maintain the confidentiality and conservation of the data.

The maximum time duration of 1-1.5 hours was set for conversation with each student individually. Data was collected through one-to-one semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions based on the principles of narrative inquiry. The interviews were initiated with a welcome and a small rapport-building conversation. The medium of conversation followed was English or Hindi, the Indian national language, depending on the comfort of the participant. Rapport building is an important process in qualitative research and helps understand the participant, developing positive interpersonal relationships and a comfortable social space of communication (Ädel, 2011; Guillemin & Heggen, 2009). Having a positive rapport supports

understanding the participants' perspective, and gathering open, in-depth, rich, authentic, and meaningful data. Thus, an important objective of the research process was to ensure that the participant was comfortable in the research process and felt that their voice was heard, understood, and valued in the researcher-participant relationship and in the study. Thus, to make the participants feel comfortable, a small icebreaker and a light conversation were planned to know the participants better and set the tone and mood of the narrative inquiry. Because productive conversation starts with trust, I as a researcher tried my best to create a climate of warmth, respect, openness, and understanding that enabled the participant to share with ease and comfort.

Data Analysis

Based on the qualitative and descriptive narrative data collected from the interviews, the conversations were transcribed verbatim. As explained by Dewey (1938) every experience shared by the participant needs to be understood along a temporal, sociality, and spatiality continuum, given that every experience grows out of the previous experience and merges into the new experience. Thus, the originality of the verbatim was maintained to capture the authenticity of the narrative and the fluidity of the experiences. Also, given the nature of the study and the importance given to the student's voice, all the stories and dimensions that emerged were valued and noted verbatim (with their grammatical flaws) to preserve their unique focus, while the commonalities in and across the six stories were highlighted and the core emerging themes or narrative threads were further analyzed. Thus, the data analysis and narrative interpretation focused on both the individual experiences and the common themes from the six conversations.

Narrative responses of individual participants

The interpretation of transcripts was the first step in data analysis. This first step began with multiple readings of the transcript and an understanding of what each of the participants said (in terms of setting, tone, verbal nuances, perspectives, intent, etc.). The transcripts were noted

verbatim and comprised the participant's thoughts, emotions, and feelings. The multiple readings assisted in meaning making of each of the six transcripts and highlighting the main points of discussion followed by representing each story as a narrative.

Given that the narratives were context-specific and broadly answered the research questions, the readings helped in identifying events and meaningful issues in the participant's learning experiences during COVID-19. The participant's narrative landscape was interpreted across the three dimensions of interaction, continuity, and situation. In each story, the chronology of the events were noted, the continuity of learning, the contextual influences, and lived experiences across 18 months were explored and the spatial elements of the past events, present struggles, and future predictions were delineated. Narratives that substantiated the reconstructed story were provided as supporting evidence, providing authenticity and validation of consistency of the participant's account.

Thematic Analysis across the narratives

Once all the six interviews were transcribed and the personal narratives reconstructed, the data was analyzed using a qualitative approach to identify common elements between the six participants. The data analysis examined the experiences and stories of the 6 participants through the process of analyzing their narratives, words and phrases, topics and ideas, and language used to describe their journey across the 18 months of the lockdown. The analysis situated the narratives in the socio-cultural setting and was contextual to the researchers' interpretation of the statements. In my research, I attempted to construct themes that explained the experiences of the participant in clear definable terms. A theme here is defined as a pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data and the research question. Attempts were made to identify broader non-interrelated themes that were answered in different ways by each of the participants. The following were the steps undertaken to arrive at the themes that ran across the six narratives:

- Statements that addressed the research questions and described specific characteristics, ideas, thoughts or feelings shared by the participant were selected. These statements shared by the first participant were first categorised under broad themes. The statements that belonged to that theme were mentioned under it. This was followed by the second theme, and then the third theme.
- The same procedure was followed with each of the six participants. The statements of each participant were differently colored.
- Each of the statements that came under the theme was kept verbatim and was not altered. These statements which were associated with each theme were reread to ensure that the statements that supported the theme were kept.
- There were multiple themes that emerged.
- The statements shared by the six participants that came under a common theme were clubbed together. Themes that could be reworded to have more statements to come under them were reviewed and those themes were rephrased/ reworded.
- Once again, the narratives of each participant were read and reread to ensure that the sentences chosen were valid and were taken in the right context and elaborated on the theme accurately. This practice was repeated every time the themes were rephrased or narratives were clubbed under a broader theme.
- The themes were refined and visually represented. Five most commonly occurring themes were selected.
- The conceptualization of the theme was connected and explained in the context of the theoretical framework selected for the study.

- Participant responses that were relevant to the theme were selected and represented through visual representation. The wholeness of representativeness was captured through the depiction of these responses.

Student Voice: Discussing the Narratives

Each of the six students who had volunteered for the study showed great excitement to be a part of this research. They were curious, focused, conversant, high-spirited, happy and excited to connect and share. They were fluent in their responses giving examples and explaining in a manner to ensure that I as a researcher completely understood what they wanted to say. Their promptness in joining the Zoom session, complete attentiveness, zeal to answer, seriousness in responding, and explicitly understanding the importance of their response as a student, stood out in the discussions.

Given our Indian culture where a teacher or an elder is considered an authority figure, the conversations were semi-formal, with me addressed as “Ma’am” at all times. The conversation needed a prompt at all times and the inquiry was led by a question from my side followed by the answer to that prompt by the participant. These questions asked from my end served as a prompt to direct their thoughts. The conversations were flowing with personal examples and anecdotes with the students comfortable in answering all the questions that were asked. The participants demonstrated a focussed enthusiasm through the one-hour conversation. They showed a keenness to extend the talk if needed and were okay with the need to re-record if the first recording did not go too well. While they spoke in English there was a small element of Hindi narrative that was translated literally and as per the context in English. The need to be heard and understood was strong and the desire to share their personal space of learning, social interactions, individual choices, and hobbies was pertinent to them.

As I began to transcribe each of six interviews taken while hearing every utterance and dialogue narrated, and lived experience unfolding, I realized how unique the journey of each student was. Reading the transcripts multiple times and analyzing the transcripts helped understand the participants’ narrative context. It facilitated in understanding and interpreting the narrative core, through their personal and social context. For better cohesion, I rewrote the story

of what the participant experienced, highlighting and quoting their emotions, thoughts, and feelings. While reading through each of the transcripts multiple times, I tried to create an interpretative story, which comprised the interpretative script, part analysis, and part reflection of what was shared in the narrative of the participant.

Each of the participants had a unique story. Thus, each story was given a title. The pseudonym and the title of the stories of all of the six participants were the starting point of every story. The titles for each of the stories validated the context of the narrative and the core of the discussion while capturing and highlighting the ethos of each of the narratives. The titles given to each of the stories were:

1. Karan: The Most Important Things
2. Omkar: Finding the Silver Lining
3. Kanika: Reconnect to Family
4. Mira: Taking the best steps Forward
5. Ashutosh: Finding my Happy Place
6. Aryan: Real Learning and Back to School

Karan: The Most Important Things

As the very first interview taken up in this study as a researcher, this interaction was the first window of opportunity to wonder, understand and absorb the lived experience-of an adolescent boy during the COVID-19 induced lockdown. Karan invited me into his journey with openness, sweetness, and much simplicity. It was easy to get into the flow from the first minute of interaction. Karan, a student of Grade 6, came across as a straightforward and earnest adolescent. Describing himself as a hardworking, patient, and helpful boy, Karan understood his strengths well and talked of his capacity to endure technological struggles and manage adversity in a positive way stating

Karan: Ma'am, patience of mine helped me a lot.

VT: Explain patience-what do you mean?

Karan: Ma'am, because I was a little patient for waiting for the new system to come. I used to take classes in the other room where the Wi-Fi is there. I waited for the new laptop. So because of my patience I coped.

Karan was focused through the inquiry and spoke of matters that deeply mattered to him. His love and trust in the school, the importance for health and wellbeing, desire for interaction and joint project discussions, and joy in pursuing his artistic expression were the things that most mattered to him. He describes going to school

When I go to school, I feel that school is peace(ful). There is no one to disturb us here. And I like nature.

He complimented his teachers and the learning environment, admiring their efforts to ensure that the standards of learning are kept, regardless of the medium of study. Karan elucidated with a sense of affection

I love my teachers and how they help me in my work and others. Because the school is caring and thinks that if they're in the online learning and now not on offline learning...we will try our best to keep it the same.

The second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic was quite disturbing for Karan. He spoke of his father's working at a public space and the risk of continuous exposure to possible infection distressing. He shared

My father works at the airport-he is a front-line worker. So we feel very unsafe about him that anything will happen to him. One day when he came from the office-he lost the sense of taste. He was vaccinated-both the doses. He was Covid-positive.

What stood out as most important to Karan was health and wellbeing. Often during the interview, he quoted situations of unrest, fear, pandemic, and bereavement with some sense of caution. Karan witnessed struggles due to the Covid-infected cases, making him more conscious in taking care of himself and understanding the importance of social distance, and following the required protocols of safety. Karan explained

And, in our school-in our class, we got to know about some children that they lost their favorite ones. So this COVID pandemic was very hard for all of us and all the people on Earth. COVID pandemic came and just scattered all over India and we all are disappointed and just waiting that when will this pandemic go. Every day one lakh [one hundred thousand] to three lakh cases were coming and people were lost losing their favorite ones.

Despite Karan's keen desire to join back school, at the soonest possible, his need for safety stood out as utmost as he explained what safety measures could be followed.

Karan: I wanted to go to school, but my parents didn't listen to me because Ma'am, the school is safe but the van, the transport vehicle is not safe, so they were taking safety precautions, so they didn't want me to go to the school.

VT: All right, so, if you have your choice, and if you're allowed to come to school, would you come to school?

Karan: Ma'am, if the vehicle of transport is sanitized every two or three hours so Ma'am I can go to school then.

Karan was clear that despite the need to complete the curriculum, have the required syllabus completion, and maintain the regularity of homework, he believed that health must precede learning.

Karan: Ma'am, we should increase the time of our break due to our eyes and the screen time. And we can decrease periods because of screen time.

VT: But you were saying you were very worried about the decreased periods because earlier there were more periods and now there are lesser periods. But now you're suggesting we should even decrease more periods. Do you think we can manage with that? What are your thoughts?

Karan: Because more important than our homework is our health. If our health is not better, we can't attend online learning or online classes or offline classes. So our health is more important.

While comparing online to offline learning, Karan spoke of his joy in learning. He loved learning all subjects. He also prided himself in managing to do well in all subjects. Karan explained

So I learned all the subjects very joyfully- that I was very excited and curious to know.

However, Karan seemed to be a little saddened that mathematics being a delightful subject is taught online. He missed the collaborative problem-solving discussions that he enjoyed in face-to-face classes. Karan explained

I think that math is magic. And for understanding all the concepts, [one needs] taking help of our friends, clearing our friend's [doubts] and all our doubts.

What stood out was that Karan in the first 8 minutes of our conversation spoke of how online learning makes cheating on assessments much easier in both formative and summative tests, because the teacher is unable to make physical rounds of a classroom and monitor. Karan was genuinely pained by the aspect of cheating during assessments. This discomfort felt was not because he was morally judging the situation, or because the other students were getting an unfair advantage, but I sensed his concern for his fellow students. He seemed upset about the degradation of the learning process that was the result of the impossibility of monitoring an online testing condition. Karan explained

Like there are some assessments. Some of us do that-we copy-paste the questions from Google and answer them. So, it is little bit cheating. In virtual learning, there are some cheats happening in the assessment, CSA [Comprehensive summative assessment] and CFA [Comprehensive formative assessment].

Interaction and everything together stood out in most of his conversations. Karan terribly missed this togetherness. While he spent more time with his family, due to the online learning, he missed all the curricular and co-curricular activities that were done collaboratively. Karan shared

Ma'am, what I like about virtual learning is that I can spend time with my family and I don't like virtual learning because we can't interact with our friends and teachers. And one thing I like about face-to-face learning is we get to interact with our teachers. We used to play outdoor games. We used to have assemblies. We used to have plays. Our class also did plays.

Karan shared that he missed working on live projects and brainstorming with classmates. Collaborative thinking provided a lot of ideating in making a working model. For him, the interactive discussions and learning derived from the failed project were far more important than the success of the project itself. Interaction and doing things together as a theme kept resonating and repeating themselves in our discussion. Karan reflected

VT: Despite being a failure, you loved doing that live project and doing it together?

Karan: Yes, doing everything together.

VT: So you are missing what? The project or doing it together?

Karan: Ma'am, I'm missing doing studies together and making everything together, playing everything together with our classmates.

VT: OK, so one challenge is you can't make live projects and you can't do it together and that is something you are not able to accommodate to or find another way of doing it at home.

Karan: We can't do anything together if we are on an online platform.

VT: Would you in the future like to have face-to-face with some virtual learning mix or would you like all face to face or how would you like it to be?

Karan: I would like whole face-to-face learning

VT: Why

Karan: Once this COVID pandemic is over, I would go to school, and Ma'am the reason is the interaction. We enjoy our breaks. After we eat our food, we play.

Karan spoke of sports as a subject that had been a struggle for him, and he did not seem to enjoy exercises much. He echoed that

When we have a sports class, we only do exercises, but when we were offline sometimes, we used to go down to play, sometimes we would play hockey, sometimes we would play football- like these outdoor games. But in these virtual times, we didn't play any outdoor games. And these sports teachers, they also were at home. And we were only exercising. No outdoor play.

Coming towards the end of the session, we talked of the other co-curricular activity, which was Fine Arts. Karan loved the subject and was passionate to show his talent in sketching, drawing, and painting. Armed with his drawing book in hand, he eagerly waited for the conversation to finish, so that he could share the various genres of paintings he had created during the COVID- 19 lockdown, while he had enrolled himself in the online classes. Karan explained

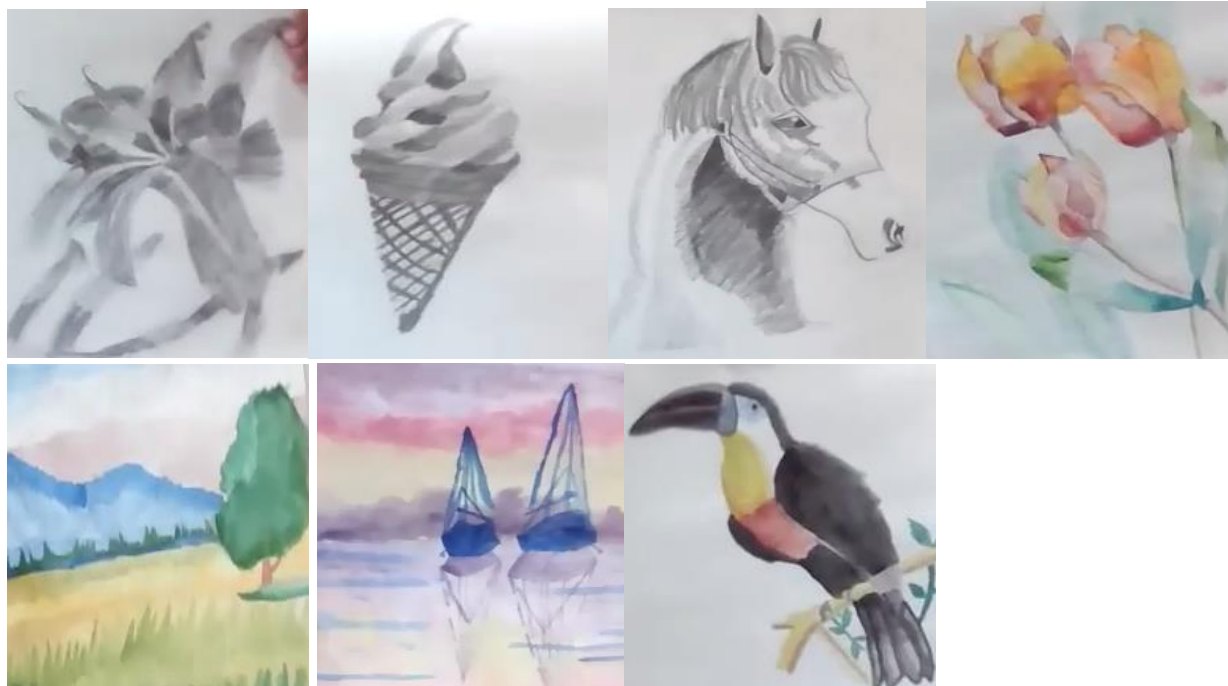
Ma'am, this is a kind of shading and then coloring the foreground and the background.

Ma'am, this is a shadow painting. This ice cream is chocolate flavored.

Karan enjoyed showing me 15 different paintings and he was happy to talk about the various styles and mediums. He showed a keen earnestness to share and answer every question on the strokes, color, and context of his artwork. A sample of his art work is displayed as Figure 1.

Figure 2

Sketches by Karan



Karan described

And this is the landscape. I first drew the boats and then I painted. And this is a bird that I made. My teacher just told that these birds have a longer beak than their body.

Once we reached the end of the discussion, what stood out was Karan's sincerity to share all that he could and at the very end wait for the actual inquiry to begin. He inquired

Ma'am, when do we have the next one, the inquiry, the project starting? Ma'am when will the project start?

It could be possible that Karan must have thought that the inquiry was something more formal and not simply a dialogue and conversation. As Grade 6 student, he perhaps thought that a

project/study was a thing of doing, an activity or of creation, a notion that could have been understood based on his previous classroom experiences. With some regret, Karan also asked

Okay, so it's over?

An interview of around 67 minutes, Karan spoke of all things that deeply mattered to him. He was the youngest of the students interviewed and showed a need to also know who the other participant in his class was. The simplicity of communication, the genuine openness to share, and a wholesome capacity to reflect and communicate were visible throughout the discussion.

Omkar: Finding a Silver Lining

Composed, confident, and conversant, Omkar was a student of Grade 7. Staying in a joint family, he had his grandfather, parents and younger brother play a positive role in his life. Having a fixed routine, Omkar came across as a boy who liked to have a structure and clarity of things to do. He loved to play drums, listen to music, play his video games, play sports, and write. Omkar was well supported by both his parents in learning. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he had found the newfound hobby of writing small articles on all that he experienced in day-to-day life and playing music. Omkar shared

I have written many articles, like around 100 of them now in a month, in two months actually. So writing keeps you motivated at that time and I write about everything that I see in the world.

Omkar spoke with much fondness of the school. With his mother from the teaching fraternity working in a different school, and with Omkar moving from a traditional school, he appreciated the progressive, engaging, and caring learning environment he experiences the current school, thus affirming

Here in ... [the name of the school] even when we are in a free period we get to learn something. Here we can share our thoughts with our teachers and then we reflect and

cherish the same. The school is one that we can relate to in every matter, even when the teachers scold us-it's because we get to know that we have done something wrong. Because here it's very rare that we get scolded but when we do-we learn something. When we reach out to our teacher regarding something she would easily understand it face-to-face because she knows our personality. She knows it so well that she can tell what we want before we approach her... what's the problem with us and she will fix the problem there and then.

Omkar speaks of the lockdown as a dark period in his life. Further, his travel to the US was cut abruptly short due to the sudden evacuation laws set by the US government, owing to the sudden rise in the Covid cases. Their return home was excruciating for Omkar. The beginning months of COVID-19 induced lockdowns had unsettled Omkar a great deal as he shared

Most of our family had to fight [with the airport officials] as my younger brother had to have surgery at that time [at the New Delhi airport when they returned]. And they [the officials] were not even thinking about it. They could see the pain in my brother's eyes and yet slowing things down as they could do.

It was frustrating then and as the lockdown began it was like a dark time that had surrounded. I didn't want to get up in the morning, knowing that there are no friends to play with. We can't do anything. We can't interact with friends. So, everything had come to a stop. I would go into my room, lock it out and cry every time. I tried to not let all the cries out of me.

The negative response by the neighbors who falsely complained about them to local authorities for not following quarantine protocols on return from the US, and their poor neighborhood support further negatively impacted Omkar. These agonizing months of non-cooperativeness of the neighbours had affected the family, where personal freedom inside the

home was also thwarted, leading to the decision of the family to move from the neighborhood (and thereby the school).

We will be shifting soon. The neighborhood is a little awkward. We do not want to live in an aura where there is shouting at us every time we go out, or we refuse to participate in the events which we think are not good and they come back to tell us, "You should leave the building!" We don't want to hear that and that's the reason.

Given that Omkar has online drum classes, he accommodated and managed with just the sticks because

Drums are very loud. Our neighbors complain even if we play cricket in our house, even when we play it with a smiley ball. So, drums will be catastrophic. They will come every minute saying that this has happened... Our neighbors are not that good, considering that we were locked up in the lockdown when we needed some help.

However, Omkar shared that the environment inside the home was positive with a lot of harmony and love between all members. He spoke of his parents guiding him through academics and he communicated a strong interconnectedness with both, his brother and him. Omkar joyfully described

It's like it's a rule that everybody has to sit- we call the Friday..FRI-YEAH [Like free... yeah..Yipee], like FRI- YEAH [with the action of happiness] and we mostly watch a movie or Fridays with Papa [father], me, Josh [younger brother] and mama [mother] sit to watch one and it can go to 2.00 at night. Then after that mama and Josh go to sleep, so papa and I watch another movie and we have a movie marathon.

Yet, it was at three points in our discussion that Omkar candidly spoke of his fear in bringing his hope up. He seemed anxious in showing optimism and sharing his desire for things that he would want. The constant struggle of being positive during the COVID-19 lockdowns despite

feeling low and negative about the situations he was experiencing was evident in his statements.

Omkar explained

When we got to know that there is a vaccine in India, I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it; how could it happen. I did not believe it for a month until my friends told me. It was real and then all my hope, which was, buried deep down somewhere- it came up. Then the second wave happened. It went back down saying that I won't come back now. You can stay where you are now! Now I refuse to accept any kind of hope because it lets me down.

Despite having positive virtual teaching-learning experiences and being provided a multitude of resources to learn, Omkar believed that productivity was better enhanced in face-to-face learning. He justified

I would go face-to-face, and even if there are more resources (in online learning)- productivity comes from face-to-face learning. And if you are productive, you will maybe make out something that will help out in the future.

Omkar missed school badly. He misses the teacher's personalized connection and their understanding of his thoughts and emotions even before he would verbalize them. His sense of balance in connection to his productivity and enthusiasm, and acceptance in tackling teaching-learning issues like a teacher's struggle with technology, smaller duration of breaks, handling disappointment with lack of practical lab work in subjects like sports, social sciences, and sciences during virtual classes is evident in his narrative. He showed a keen desire to join the school as soon as the school provided such an option. Omkar shared

When I was in school, it was kind of my dream to go to that lab. When we got the chance to do so, the lockdown hit. Science and Social science were things that were greatly missed. And Equib was also too. Because in Equib classes - the quality circle time, the whole class would give out their aspects. But now we cannot do that because Equib is all about

emotions and we cannot display our emotions that correctly in the virtual classes. So that is missed.

Omkar looked at a tech-savvy world, with state-of-the-art learning stimulations and digital literacy, as the need of the hour in the current situation, post the COVID-19 pandemic. He believed that adaptive new ways of learning and technology were crucial for evolution and thus supported virtual learning. However, he also believed that emotional connect, real communication, collaborative brainstorming, understanding of emotions, transparency, and productivity were best manifested only through face-to-face learning. Omkar clarified

In face-to-face the teacher could sense what the child is feeling, even when the child hasn't shown any symptoms, anything. When we want to show something, in face-to-face learning you cannot hide your emotions. If you're curious, the teacher will know it when she sees your face, and when you raise your hand and show/ shout, she sees the curiosity on your face and gets to know what you want to say. So, when we say that sometimes the teacher knows everything you want to speak without even you speaking- it's that what happens in face-to-face learning. Whereas in virtual, we cannot do that. The emotions ... our Internet is not that good that emotions will pass through it. So in face-to-face learning, the emotions can be displayed transparently.

Omkar also pointed out that there was a segment of the class population who, in fear of judgment, were not responding to the teacher's calling their name, had their audio and video of the virtual learning medium off, and were not being approachable to students and teacher alike. Omkar at times felt frustrated when he was in a break out room with these students who did not respond. He would also at times become upset that the class needed to wait for them and at times sad that the teacher was unable to reach out to these students in a virtual class (unlike when they are in a face-to-face class). Omkar's consideration of gaps in inclusion were witnessed in this

conversation. Omkar felt that this exclusion could be the result of lack of physical proximity and ability of the teacher to reach out in person in a virtual learning class. Omkar reflected

Omkar: Ma'am, all children make judgments. Even I would (fear) because there are many types of discrimination.

VT: So, would you say in general, the classes are a little worried about being judged by other kids in general?

Omkar: Yes Ma'am. That is inevitable. Everybody will be afraid of their image being ruined. But in virtual learning to amend that- we don't have anything. In face-to-face learning, we can still amend that by talking to the teacher. But here we can't. We can't approach the teacher nor can the teacher approach us. But in face-to-face, we could have done that.

Omkar attributed his growing up and transformation to his conscious connection to positive affirmations and his talking to the Universe. This talking indicates the belief in affirmations and his ability to communicate with the world around him. Omkar seemed to be strongly influenced by his mother and her introduction to the law of affinity and attraction of the Universe. She seems to guide Omkar in strategies and ways to create such visualizations that help instill a newfound resilience in Omkar along with an acceptance of the way life is. He explained

This is one of my learning that everything is impermanent. Everything is unexpected. One thing is that the importance of things is known when they are taken away from you.

[Learning from the past..] I know I couldn't have adapted to the COVID situation, but I am ready now. Even if the schools open, I will adapt to it easily. Even if another Covid comes, I will fight it easily. I know how I will do it. Because I know I will contact my friends about it, talk to my parents about it, and I will try to be as transparent as I can be.

Omkar seemed to be quite self-aware. He recognized his own discomfort with change and yet understood he needed to accept it. This for him was growing up and yet he would not want to make this evident to his peers. Omkar justified that

To the world, I am mostly the same. Inside I have changed a lot. I talk to the Universe now. I didn't believe in the Universe. I didn't know there was a thing called the Universe, like before COVID did.

While Omkar responded to the laws of the attraction of the Universe he was also conscious that such concepts may not be accepted and appreciated by his classmates, so he keeps it to himself. I infer that what Omkar means by talking to the Universe is his connecting to the large world with positive thinking that what you ask from the Universe is heard and given because of the collective and positive energy sent forward. Omkar believed this connect to be a great coping strategy as he explained

Because COVID brought sad times. And, I wanted to resent and repel the sad time. So I would try to talk to the Universe to divert my mind from the things.

Omkar also recognized the fact that he had made one best friend, during this difficult phase, with whom he was able to share his personal anguish as well as thoughts. They connected at a deeper level through the experience of writing a 100-page book with them characterizing their own lives across divergent stages of being and then culminating the book with a strong message of acceptance, with the lesson of acknowledging the COVID-19 lockdown as a new normal. Omkar shared

So we connected two storylines- one was his when he had the best time of his life and me when I had the worst time of my life. And at the end, I try to accept that this is the new normal now, and I have to cherish it then. So my storyline merges into his and then we are friends.

If Covid did not hit- I wouldn't have been friends with my best friend, I wouldn't have aspired to be a writer, I wouldn't be published in a magazine, and I wouldn't have talked to the Universe and I wouldn't have known what is Universe.

Omkar carried a certain maturity that is layered with sadness, strong emotions, and pain. He understands that his connection with the Universe is what his mother endorses, and he now also relates to it. He strongly felt that this connection has led to his growth and evolvement. However, Omkar also believed that sharing an evolved part of him and explaining this to his peers can lead to judgment. Thus, Omkar consciously lets this part of him continue to be a secret. He admitted that

Omkar: Before I was totally transparent, but now I am all opaque. I will not let sad emotions come out as I did in face -to -face classes.

VT: Why don't you let it come out?

Omkar: At that time, I had a different image,(Now..) I have the same image, but I'm not the same. I have the same image, but I am not the same now. So, I don't want them to think why he has changed, and I do not want them to discriminate against me on that basis.

VT: Who is your go-to person when you don't feel very happy and you're sad or you want guidance?

Omkar: there are things only guardians can solve, and the parents understand. When I talk to the Universe, my friend will call me, "What are you doing? Are you mental or something?" But my mama believes in the Universe, and she would help me know that it is the right thing.

I consider the theme of Omkar's story as a cloud with a silver lining. Given the deep sense of distress he experiences periodically, Omkar still finds resiliency, constructive coping mechanisms, and a sense of purpose. The positive outcomes of his newfound writing skills, adeptness in handling digital modalities, learning music, and connecting to things larger than himself, enhanced his productivity as he slowly begins to term the lockdown as a blessing in disguise. He justified

And in this generation, we can see how people are so tech-savvy now and like before COVID. I didn't even know how to operate a laptop and now I play games on them. I suggest

to my computer teacher to do something when she has a problem. So COVID 19 evolved us. But many people would not say it as evolving, and they would see it as a curse but for me, it was a blessing in disguise.

Omkar could have talked on and on. In our 67 minutes of conversation, there was not a single dull moment or a pause. I could find so much realness in his words. There was a strong need for a socio-emotional connection. Beyond his self-sufficiency and growing autonomy as a self-directed learner, I also marveled at the depth of vision and insight that Omkar communicated and the profound clarity he had in identifying his own feelings, emotions, thoughts, and action.

Kanika: Re-connect to Family

Kanika was a Grade 8 student, who came across as spontaneous and talkative. Her quotes were laced with her sweet Hindi phrase of “Maine Kaha” [I said...] As the mother and daughter joined me in the first session of recording the informed consent, the mother had stated, “Ma’am, my daughter is your daughter, and you don’t need my consent. It is our pleasure that she has been selected for this research and that she can contribute!” Hearing the mother’s trust and enthusiasm overwhelmed me as I witnessed the kind of trust that the parent had in me as a researcher and as a representative of the school. Kanika belonged to the 25% of the students from the economically weaker background. This context is important to share given that Kanika’s struggle with and perception of the COVID-19 induced lockdowns needs to be understood from the perspective that Kanika comes from a marginalized section of society and her lived experiences could be a little different to other participants. Thus, I tried being more skillful and culturally responsive while I asked the questions in the interview.

On being asked about her strengths and hobbies, it was interesting to note that Kanika preferred to talk about her limitations and her struggles.

First, I’m not confident enough to speak in front of people. My second is that when we are in a conversation, and some friends say something- I take it very seriously- like if someone

says a joke, I take it very seriously and that hurts me. And the third thing about me is that I'm not able to interact with people that much very comfortably because I'm like a comfort zone person. If I'm liking somebody, then only I will talk to that person otherwise no conversation.

Once satisfied that she had explained herself well, she explained that her hobbies were dancing, playing guitar, and making posters. She further added that her strengths were her capacity to write and read books. Kanika has been a student at the school right from the nursery class and described her journey in the school

My connection with the school is very good because teachers are very supportive in terms- if you're not able to understand, they have given us the liberty to ask at the last of the meeting [If you have any question, or if there is something that you don't want to talk about in front of people] so that's the very good thing that I like about our school. And the second thing is that the teachers are very friendly, which makes me comfortable. So, when something happens- some children are... [not very supportive or polite]... the teacher makes me comfortable, and the teachers are very supportive and concerned.

When I wanted to understand more about Kanika's emotional connection with the school, she brought in an aspect of being misunderstood in the group, on occasions if she would log out (due to the poor Wi-Fi coverage and constant voltage fluctuation). This lack of harmonious connection deeply affected her, and she shared (within the first three minutes of our discussion)

It's sometimes that when we are in a group, and when some people do not respond, so in between our names are also taken. I have joined late in the group. By mistake, I had left the group. So, it happens- when I then entered, they had discussed everything. Then, when Ma'am asks-who has not responded? They take my name. But it was a glitch that I left the meeting. Everything was discussed- what could I have said then?

Kanika was quite upfront when she shared that, like other children, she was quite happy when the school announced that students were required to study from home. But her happiness was short-lived as she would often forget the dates of submission, struggle with the learning platform, and would get anxious when she was unable to submit the test assignments on time. Stating all her current struggles in relation to virtual learning, Kanika shared

Ma'am, it's very confusing for me because I have network glitches. Like because of rain, or something happens-like a power cut. I am thinking that *agar mein* [if I am] I am giving my exams, and a power cut happens- what will happen next because the teacher is saying that you have to turn your camera on otherwise you will not be accepted for the exam. It's like I am really scared right now about a power cut, network, about TEAMIE everything. Because it's very... we have to submit the form, we have to click the photo, we have to create a PDF, then we have to submit so it's very... What should I say...? very confusing also like we are doing quickly also. Even at home, I shout at my small sister sometimes- like when she is just disturbing me by clicking on a photo. When I shout, my mama [mother] says, "why are you shouting at her, it's your problem, you are not able to submit on time". *Maine kaha* [I said], "It is not my problem, it's the time problem. The questions were difficult. That was the problem that I face.

Added to the above struggles, Kanika also pointed out the intense fatigue and the pain in her eyes that she experienced due to the online classes. Kanika explained

And my eyes pain a lot. Also, my sleeping time has also increased when I'm online because my eyes are paining. And if I'm taking a half-sleep, so my eyes pain a lot for me again. So I take a sleep of five hours after the class. Mama says, "Why are you sleeping so much?" I say, "I don't know my eyes are paining". I cannot see... I cannot open my eyes... because I have spectacles, so I think even the number has also increased.

VT: What about your eyes and the sleep and the rest it needs? How do you take care of your eyes during your school time? So between 8.00 to 1.00 whenever you have .. Do you put eyedrops?

Kanika: Ma'am, I do not have any eye drops because Dr doesn't say. He does not say to put any eyedrops. I have to put on my spectacles for 24 hours. Only when I am sleeping, I have to remove [my spectacles as I have very poor vision. So I splash water. And if [my eyes still hurt I ferment my eyes hot/warm]... I do like this [taking hands to the eyes and touching it]. So, but in the front of the class, when my camera is also on, I'm mostly like doing. like this or this [cupping her left or the right eye again and again]. I think what Ma'am will think, this girl has so many problems, but I have a genuine issue that my eyes pain and I say it to my mother. My papa says-Leave the meeting and take a rest for some time. But how can I leave a meeting? If Ma'am will take attendance in the end, I will be marked absent. If I have been attending a 45 minutes class and am away for 15 minutes, I will be marked absent.

Online learning has been quite challenging for Kanika in many ways. Kanika felt quite uncomfortable asking questions in front of other students. She would wait for all other students to leave the Zoom meeting, wait for the teacher to be alone, and then would ask the questions. Often, she would feel that she was fortunate as she would have the teacher waiting till the end of the class. But sometimes this was not so and that made her feel uncomfortable and challenged. There were also times that Kanika would not ask a question at the end of the class, owing to her lack of confidence and wondering whether her questions would be considered sensible. Thus, this led to more discomfort and anxiety in her, creating a gap in her conceptual understanding of the topic taught. Kanika described

In this meeting, the teacher must have a question meeting, with only some children that have doubts. This could be a bunch of children; Ma'am can take only 10 children at a time

so that they can ask their doubts at that point. What happens sometimes is that some teachers end the meeting, and we are not able to ask the teacher. The teacher should stay back, ask and wait till the last and wait for a minute. I was waiting and was going to speak, but the teacher ended the meeting, so I was not able to talk to her.

Kanika had a lot to share against virtual teaching. Despite the newfound joy of managing technology, making projects thought digital literacy sessions, and getting the awe and praise from her father in handling technological know-hows, Kanika felt that face-to-face learning was the best.

Kanika: Maam, learning technologies on one side is exciting also. Like last night my father said, "Can you make this banner? Can you do this by applying this..?" I said, "Yeah!" Papa said, "Show me first because I am not sure you can do it!" I said-"Okay give it, I will do it". And I did it in five minutes. My father said- "Very Good! Very Good!! How did you learn? Teach me also! "This was the advantage of technology that I gained from the online platform, because of the holiday homework and assignments I create".

VT: You think this is important learning for life?

Kanika: Yes, Ma'am for me it's very important because first I didn't know how to write emails. Ma'am would tell us but I was not comfortable with email writing. But now it's like.. I know the Email, Google calendar properly and know how to work with them ..so yeah! It's lifelong learning for me.

Despite the benefits of technology in virtual learning, Kanika enumerated several reasons for her preference for face-to-face learning including that more content is covered in the same given time, teachers were able to reach out one-to-one to students, students were able to ask their doubts, fewer misunderstandings were created between students in person and more clarity was received in each of the concepts.

Kanika: Ma'am, virtual learning for me is very boring and sometimes confusing also. And face-to-face learning is exciting because, when someone said, "Today, we are going to have some special activity" so we were like kya hoga (what will happen?) Will we be in groups or what? But now virtually we think that - vahi (that same thing) it will be on a padlet or will be a writing thing or you have to play some games. So yeah! Boring and excitement... Knowledgeable. We gain more knowledge when we are face-to-face.

VT: Why do you say we gain more knowledge in face-to-face?

Kanika: Ma'am, like in science- It was our time to go to the lab and make things and investigate things. But now we have to do it in our homes and we are confused... like I was confused in my holiday homework, I was confused as to how will I do this... I know that - if we would have been face-to-face, Ma'am would have taken us to the lab and cleared our doubts- so yeah in that way there is more knowledge.

While virtual learning brought a lot of unease to Kanika, her time at home with her family helped her bond with them in multiple ways. Kanika found joy in fetching her sister from the playschool during the longer breaks between classes, assisting in cooking and trying new dishes in the kitchen, dancing along with her sisters as a form of relaxation, learning concepts along with her mother, and sharing secrets while having long dialogues with her. Kanika also shared how divulging and voicing her innermost fears and anger to her younger sister served as a catharsis to her pent-up emotions, given that her sister was too young to communicate to anyone.

Ma'am my relationship with my parents has increased because I'm mostly at home. But with friends and outside people, it's decreased because when I was in face-to-face classes- shuffling happened and we used to meet our friends in the breaks down at the Cafe area side in the ground.

Outside the house, the relationship has not been that good, but in the house from the parents and from siblings it is very much good. What I personally do when I'm sad is that I

bring my sister- she doesn't know anything right now... she's just four and [she cannot explain the secrets I share with her] *Maine kaha*, [I say..],“If I will tell you something, you will not be able to tell anyone!! So, let me tell you only”.. I tell her everything and she says “hmm.. Hmm..Hmm...huh” And I ask her, Haina? [Isn't it so?] and she would say, “Haan!” [Yes!] I would say, “*Chalo Theek Hai !* [Well, that's good!!]. So I am happy with them [the family] now more than my friends.

Kanika spoke of how learning face-to-face meant so much to her. Beyond the learning space, she also spoke of her need to meet her classmates and have certain misunderstandings cleared which she felt a virtual learning space did not provide. Kanika’s need for one-to-one interaction, physical contact with teachers and students, and want to have a heart-to-heart conversation stood out. Human connection deeply mattered to Kanika. While virtual learning took away those opportunities of connecting to the school students and teachers, subsequently it brought her much closer to her father, mother, and siblings thus bringing the charm and contentment in spending fruitful hours of connecting and interconnecting at home.

Mira: Taking the best step forward

Mira was one of the most enthusiastic volunteers who had shown a keen desire and deep interest to be a part of the study. Despite having lost her grandfather on the day we had slotted our inquiry; she wrote me an e-mail sharing her sudden loss and apologized for not being able to be a part of the inquiry. She also suggested I chose another volunteer as she may be busy with the rituals and ceremony for the coming fortnight. Looking at her diligence and earnestness, I wrote back my condolences first to the family and then offered her that if she really wanted to participate in the inquiry, I would be happy to wait for a fortnight if that was okay with her. She, as expected, wrote back that she very much would like to have the interaction, and the new time slot given worked well with her!

Mira was a Grade 6 student who was thoughtful, composed, refined, and well-measured as she shared her lived experiences during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Answering always to the point, she spoke in a self-assured manner, wanting always to give an adequate answer to the questions asked. Mira described herself as a kind, helpful, and polite person who loved drawing, painting, papercraft, play indoor games, and dancing. She spoke of school with much fondness and reminisced old memories and events.

Ma'am, I miss my school very much. I miss the gossip with my friends. I miss my van friends, my teachers-my morning route to school and the fresh air, and the memorable moments with my classmates.

While Mira explained and defined what virtual learning and face-to-face learning meant to her, she was quite succinct in explaining each of the mediums and their pros and cons in relation to how they impacted her learning.

Mira: I love online learning because it has a variety of resources. And Ma'am I got introduced to many educational tools- like Moodle and Teamie and we switched to many sites from Meet to Zoom, from Moodle to Teamie. I have been introduced to Canva, make posters, e-cards, and newsletters. Ma'am, it was a great source of knowledge for me. I got to know more about computers, it was like my understanding got clearer.

Mira: Ma'am, in face-to-face learning-I get a clear understanding of science topics more. It is more practical because I can do lab work, which is not available in virtual learning or online classes.

VT: How else will you define face-to-face learning for you?

Mira: It is a practical mode of learning and socializing. Ma'am when we teach our friends or classmates, we get a good understanding also of the topic. Because when we teach someone, we also get knowledge from him or her.

VT: So how do you do that in face-to-face learning?

Mira: Sometimes when we need to help our friends, we have eye-to-eye contact. We have more conversations, and we feel more comfortable.

Initially tensed and unsure about her capacity to accommodate to online learning, Mira soon began to learn the nuances of digital learning and independently began to manage all her learning tasks and submissions. She, in a matter-of-fact way, also shared how online learning had made her an autonomous and self-directed learner. She was happy to now be more technologically savvy and digitally competent. Mira rationalized that

Teamie [Teaching platform] is a feature where you can make assessments - you can have quizzes; you can post thoughts and you can ask doubts from teachers. You can share videos regarding the topic, which you think will help your classmates. That's a great advantage. [Through virtual learning I was also introduced to pictoblocks, and to SCRATCH, and gaming sites.

In online learning, I experienced that I was more independent. I searched more things from Google, from websites, from different videos for confirmations to make newsletters and make posters for our class.

Mira enjoyed the increase in the time duration that she now had for herself. She utilized this extended time on hobbies and spending time with her family. Further, Mira exhibited happiness in being able to continue to connect to her friends while online, utilize her potential to support other academically weaker students in the subject, and put her helping nature to beneficial use. Yet, cognizant of the cons of virtual learning, Mira enumerated them in a single line

Some children are dishonest-so dishonesty, distraction, lack of direct contact with the teachers, screen time, health.

Taking a little time in deciding about her preference for online or face-to-face learning, after some deliberation Mira confirmed that her preference was face-to-face learning. Acknowledging the school and the clarity of teaching Mira experienced both online and offline, Mira justified that

Teachers give us a clear understanding of each and every topic. They also clear our doubts after the class. They stay back after class and clear our doubts. And Ma'am as on Teamie, if we have any doubts-we post it in the thought section and our teacher replies-to refer to this page number or to like.. She does it orally. She tells us the answer and what we asked. Once our doubt is cleared, only then she leaves us when our doubts are cleared.

While Mira complimented the way the Socio-emotional classes and Quality Circle Time periods took place even in the virtual medium, she was also authentic and upfront in sharing her demotivation and disinterest in pursuing the Sports classes as she confessed

I'm losing interest in sports, dance, and physical activities basically because of my attraction to more and more videos- I don't feel like doing physical things.

A student who has worn spectacles since childhood, Mira spoke of her need, especially due to the extended screen time, to exercise her eyes in between classes and explains

Ma'am, they [my eyes] actually really bother me... Now the school hours are fine because we get a 20 minutes-15 minutes break in each class. In each class, we get a "20-20 break" (20-20 is an eye exercise that is done in order to reduce the fatigue of the eyes that is caused due to the constant strain by looking at the computer screen. A "20-20 break" is a time set by teachers during class, to practice the activity in order to pay attention to the visual health of the student). For 20 seconds we blink our eyes. During the break, we blink our eyes 20 times, [while] we look at a spot continuously for 20 seconds.

Mira's joy of friendship, interactions, and conversations was evident as she described how she enjoyed having surprise parties organized for the teachers on their birthdays or teacher

days. She spoke of the ways she managed to make these special moments joyous, adding to the fun of collaboration despite the present virtual distance. On asking what was it that Mira most missed and would like to do the first thing when schools reopened, Mira shared

Ma'am, [During these 18 months of lockdown], I missed gossiping with my friends the most. [When we begin going to School], I would first give a nice big hug to all my best friends.

While we delved into favorite subjects, Mira shared that she had no favorite subjects and then with much probing, she began to share about the topics in Hindi that she was not very fond of. She also spoke of how getting negative feedback in the rubric affected her. [Rubric is an assessment tool that is given twice in an academic year to indicate the academic achievement of the student] and the support mechanisms that helped her do better in future.

Mira: When I get "Partially Met" in a rubric, I feel like crying.

VT: Who supports you in your home in learning?

Mira: Ma'am, in the subject I did not score well, or I got a "Partially Met" or a PM, my parents support me, and they motivate me. Once in Hindi patrekhyan [letter writing] I got "partially met". Then I practiced it well, I got some books.

It is during this discussion that I realized how deeply feedback, scores, and remarks impacted Mira. She reflected on her perspective towards feedback and proposed that

Mira: I should have positive thinking. I should take feedback as feedback. Mostly I think people judge me. I should take feedback as feedback only.

VT: You just said, "I should change the way I understand feedback"- you mean yourself as Mira or do you think as a school, we must work on helping children feel comfortable with feedback?

Mira: At times Ma'am gives me feedback to improve my vocabulary, so I should take it as positive feedback. I should not think that I am not good at this and should practice it more. I should not feel guilty. So much guilty that I start crying!

When I asked Mira about her friendships, she was eager to describe her understanding of what friendship meant to her and with whom she could communicate her deepest thoughts and feelings. She shared that she was not a believer in having best friends and instead enjoyed sharing her personal affairs most with her mom, explaining also why she felt this way. Quoting Mira's observation of herself

Mira: Ma'am, actually to be honest, I didn't have any best friends.

VT: Okay, and with your friends are you able to keep the same friendships like before? Are there any good friends you have or most of it is now mom only?

Mira: Ma'am, actually to be honest, I didn't have any best friends. I just had normal friends. They are not the friends to share secrets. I am only comfortable with my mom in sharing secrets.

VT: But you have friends in your class?

Mira: I have friends in my class. But I do not have a best friend. I am not fond of it.

VT: Who is your go-to person in school, if ever, you need and you have a doubt. So, at home, you said- my mom but in school who would be your go-to person?

Mira: No Ma'am I do not have anyone with whom I share secrets with. But, if I am on a leave and I want to bring work- or just copy down the work- or jot down the work that has happened in the classes - then I contact my friend.

It was interesting to note that while face-to-face teaching gave Mira a structured time schedule, online classes provided the opportunity for more time for sleep, family and hobbies and Mira was happy with that. Mira showed profound clarity in describing the ways she had matured during the course of the online classes. Mira explained

Ma'am, I get angry on very small things. I have learned to be self-dependent, I have learned to explore, and I have learned to search on my own- to search things from every resource, from YouTube, to watch videos, from websites, and sites, to be independent, to use all the

things, to upload my work. And as I am experienced to all of it, I am independent. So, I have more knowledge about things.

In hindsight, while appreciating all that worked well with online learning, a very valuable insight shared by Mira was the limitation of the overdependence she had developed as the resultant of too much online research which curbed her own creativity. Recognizing the limitation, she also provided a solution as she shared

Mira: I'm not totally independent and still dependent on gadgets so I don't do brainstorming. I think that I will get the answer from Google- so just go to Google and search it. I will find the solution right there.

Mira: In Google there are many sites. From one site you took one idea, from another site you took another idea, from another site you took another idea- then you combine all of it and get the whole solution. You don't do brainstorming at all. You don't put your own efforts in that. You don't put your inputs.

VT: So, what do you want to do about it?

Mira: I will try to do brainstorming and I will try that I am not dependent on gadgets anymore.

Mira reflected that without the face-to-face schedule and lack of a proper sports period in the timetable, there were some areas and habits that she had to further work on to bring about the required discipline that she earlier had. Mira revealed

Ma'am my food habits and sleep habits have improved. But Ma'am- to be healthy and to do physical exercises, that has not improved.

The 66-minute-long discussion was beautifully spaced with continuous chatter and Mira's clarity of thoughts. Mira shared how she had quick snack breaks pretending to be offline due to technical faults and expressed her small joys of pleasure of eating in-between her virtual classes.

As we closed the session, Mira shared her happiness in being able to answer well and enjoying the session.

Mira: Ma'am, I want to share that I loved the session very much.

VT: Why so?

Mira: Ma'am, because it was really comfortable. First, I was nervous. If Ma'am asked me something that I don't know what will happen? But I had answers and I had much more to share with you.

Mira, a student of class 6 had so much to share. While being compliant, respectful and to the point in each of the questions asked, she was clear in her thoughts and words. She carried a maturity that was way beyond her age and a focus on what had worked well for her and what didn't. Mira shared her personal stories and narratives and how deeply her doing well mattered to her. Her small joys of seeing appreciation in the teacher's eyes and connecting to classmates in co-creating events, while helping peers meant so much to her. There was a newfound maturity wherein Mira reflected on strategies that would benefit her in the future- be it in her personal, physical, academic, or social goals. Her clarity of goals spoke volumes of a determined girl who seemed to be on the path of excelling, taking small productive steps along the way.

Ashutosh: Finding my happy place

My conversation with Ashutosh stayed with me for a long time. The effervescence of the chatter, the bubblyness of the discussion, and the element of feeling good stood out throughout the entire discussion. And yet, under the surface was something much deeper, that I only much realized after reading the transcript the second time. The persona of Ashutosh had a transformation and it is the journey that comes alive in our discussion of 51 minutes. It was perhaps the shortest of all the inquiries taken and yet divulged how significant these 18 months of virtual learning have been for him. He began by describing himself as

I would say that I am a humorous person. I crack a few jokes outside and in between the class. Ma'am is annoyed with me with this [laughs] Also, I am into music. I would say that I'm the musical type of person who can connect to music more than the real-life stuff and then I would say that I care for others more than myself. And last, I'm very lazy.

Ashutosh's fondness for his school and comfort with his classmates was well depicted by the ease with which Ashutosh connected with his teachers and friends.

In our school, I can interact with teachers more than I can interact with my parents because I would certainly say that my parents wouldn't know about me that much as well as my class and my teachers do know about me because I'm that kind of person who can't keep a secret to himself. Though I had a few, but those are like too confidential, I can't reveal them. But still, most of the things I have revealed to the whole class and some are with my friends. Our school is friendly, and I feel like at home in there.

Ashutosh shared how he had been able to enjoy online learning and finding friends he had lost over the years. The barriers of physical space now dissolved, he had found hangouts and online chat, gaming portals and interactions far easier to interact through, with conversations more frequent. While others found online learning boring, Ashutosh shared the advantages

People think that these online virtual learning is kind of boring and we can't study it out very well. But I I say that in online learning also, as in normal class, this is the simple habit of each and every student that we talk to our friends in the middle of the class. That is undeniably a fact. So for that, here we talk on hangouts. That's the difference.

Despite having made more friends, Ashutosh further commented (like all others I had discussions with) about how the persona and the temperament of a fellow student could not be truly known or understood in a virtual medium.

I think that in online learning you can't see that person, how he feels actually, what he's actually like, how he's actually in the real life. Because if I say about myself, also that if the person meets me in face-to-face, though I am the same person, here also- there also. I am the same person- humorous, talking nonsense stuff and all, but I would say that I have met my friends and they are completely a different personality out there.

Sharing his view and preference for online learning, Ashutosh shared the benefit online learning had over face-to-face learning, elucidating

You can explore more [in virtual learnin]. Like if you know something, you can explore more about it-If Ma'am shares any video like the pattern, then the techniques as it is raising the level, the rise of level is on a massive scale and I like that. I like virtual learning.

Ashutosh distinctly explained his opinion of the difference between physical (face-to-face) and virtual classes and interestingly choose virtual classes over the face-to-face classes, commenting

If I describe the physical learning- simply means to me that we focus, we are disciplined, be happy, enjoy with friends, have fun in the class. Online learning means like don't be physical, don't be focused, and don't be disciplined... just enjoy... nothing else. That's why I like online more than physical.

Ashutosh felt a similar style in the teaching learning process adapted by the teachers in the online and face-to-face medium of learning. Ashutosh notes

Both are the same for me because like in offline also, if we had a doubt, we have to ask the teacher and in online also. Though we have some more doubts, than in the offline but still we can ask our teacher, and both are the same thing.

Ashutosh made a clear distinction also in explaining the teaching-learning process, the importance of teacher monitoring, and teacher connection for him while studying in the virtual and face-to-face classes. In the virtual classes, while he looked forward to the teacher's connection and enjoyed the teaching-learning process, Ashutosh recognized the dilution in the teacher

influence that had happened due to the lack of physical proximity and face-to-face connection.

He states

I'm saying that the one thing that I miss about the Offline School I had that fear of being scolded by Ma'am for small, small things. And right now I'm like, "*OK? Hogaya chalo, Maam dantigi types* [okay it is done- ma'am will scold is taken so casually]". Yeah, now the fear, I don't know where it is going... It is going to the market having shopping

Ashutosh explains the kind of relationship he has with his teachers. He shares what in learning appeals to him the most and how his connection with his teachers motivates him to learn.

School teaching hasn't changed like they have adapted the most futuristic ideas. But I would say that they are the same people. They then also made us laugh, have fun and play movies and although you can't watch movies at that good level but still!! We have fun in our classes, and I like this.

I have a motto that how can I connect with the teacher better? Because once I connect with the teacher better. Already- you know our school... she will make me understand once if I have any problem.

Ashutosh spoke in undertones of his discomfort in handling the learning portals of Teamie and Moodle (which are the learning platforms implemented by the school). Given the flow of the conversation, I did not touch that topic. However, I was keen to note the subjects he was most comfortable with and those he was not. While he enjoyed subjects like Science, English, French, Computer Science, and Social Studies, Ashutosh was quite vociferous about explaining his difficulty in subjects like Mathematics and the second language taught in School that is Hindi. He further explained how Sports must be taught face-to-face only and clarified

Maths is that fear that comes in my dreams when we have our assessment announced for that. Also, French is from films, but I'm so confident that if a person gives me a surprise test also, and then I will be like- OK done. But in Math, I don't know what happens to me.

I am almost so tired it's like having two physical days after having Maths and Hindi classes because I don't like these two subjects.

Ma'am, sports classes should be offline only. I don't feel like playing sports alone at my house. That is completely boring.

While describing virtual learning, Ashutosh explained an interesting point. He explained how virtual learning can trigger one's interest and also could be a challenge for those who may need monitoring during the teaching-learning process. Ashutosh talked about his own self-regulatory process and interest as he described

In the physical school I was a bit like a disciplined and focused child, but the change in me right now here is that, first of all, I believe I already know what is the syllabus going on. So, I get bored easily and the stuff that I do behind the classes [opening other tabs] and that I don't like about me and I'm trying to change also from the past.

I found it interesting to hear how Ashutosh decided to reward himself a Coke/ Pepsi for the week he would control himself from opening other tabs. These tabs he explained were brainteasers that helped stimulate thinking during the online classes. Ashutosh explained the need for these brainteasers

I would say that online is fun, but it makes you get a bit lazy while looking at the screen. Your eyes begin to close, and you are about to get sleepy in between the class, it is not the right thing to do. If you are not there mentally present, what will you learn? So simply I used to switch my tab to keep me awake. So instead of that, now to keep me awake- I have given myself some consequence. And because of that I keep awake

VT: Have you done that actually what you have said and controlled yourself from the Pepsi?

Ashutosh: From the past week I have not pressed my tab even once in the classes. Then only I had PEPSI today (and he shows the empty bottle). I like giving this to myself.

Ashutosh had definite opinions and perspectives. While he realized the changes, he needed to make in himself, he was also aware of his energy levels/ fatigue and eating routines, especially during the virtual classes. He also seemed to have created coping mechanisms and strategies to work on both these areas. I could not but admire the resolute determination that Ashutosh had in working on each of the areas of struggle as he explained the strategies explored by him.

Eating routines have been imbalanced completely. Eating routine is dead completely because I don't know what is happening that sometimes I'm eating at 12 sometimes like I'm eating at 10. Sometimes I'm eating at 1:00 o'clock also my breakfast. And I am like, "what is this?" I have now given myself a time from the past week like I've mentioned that I've given my resolutions from the past week- Just considering that as my Happy New Year for now and I don't know how many days it will go, but I've given it like it at this particular time I'm having breakfast. If I don't eat it then – I won't eat it. That's it.

I don't know what this is, but in physical class, I wasn't that tired that I am in online stuff. I don't know why. It's because of my eyes watching the screen for too long, but now it is my daily routine like my eyes have this habit and now I don't feel tired. I feel like after School, I will take bath and it will be fine.

While our conversations had a lot of lively remarks from Ashutosh, there was also an essential element of self-awareness and change that was discussed. Beginning from the day that the COVID-19 induced lockdown was declared by the school, Ashutosh's first feelings were that of tension. Calling himself an introvert Ashutosh explained his incapacity to explain or emote and how he struggled with adapting to change.

Earlier I was a person whom you can call an Introvert simply because I'm the one who can't give his speeches in the class. I stutter a lot because of nervousness. Sometimes, this happens with me that I don't tell the answer also in the class, I would think what others will say. I don't know why I thought like this. But after coming online, I am different. My friend

says, "*yehi same Ashutosh kya hum delh rahe the pichle chaar saal se* [Is this the same Ashutosh whom we have been seeing for last 4 years]". These were their exact words. They said, "This isn't the same Ashutosh He is blurting out in the class, cracking jokes, making fun also- of others and laughs at self also, I don't know what he's doing".

VT: So, what is this change in personality you said, "I brought a change in my personality?"

Ashutosh: This is like the personality in me .. the same change when the silent kid of the class comes up. And that is what I am. My personality earlier was an introvert and now no one can stop me from speaking in the class. That's all. I don't know how to sing also very well and I have sung.. in front of 75 people from the school and I'm like what? How is it possible? How did I do it?

While listening to him, I practically found it impossible to believe that this lively, spontaneous, confident, and cheerful boy would describe himself as nervous and introverted. This was the turning point in our discussion when I had to ask him the reason for this transformation, the supporting conditions, and Ashutosh took no time to continue to explain

Ashutosh: I don't know, like I, I felt more secure here... like in my house, talking about... talking about myself. I don't know what happens to me in this particular room that I get too emotional talking about stuff. And while I get emotional, I don't know what I speak, and I don't have control over my words. Simple as that. It's the aura of this room. I don't know why.

VT: OK, say more about your new heaven.

Ashutosh: My new heaven is like it has my favorite videogames. That's why I like them. My guitar is whole day kept here only. Otherwise, I am sitting the whole day on this chair. This is my favorite. This is very comfortable so that.. I don't get discomforted when I am talking about myself with somebody else. In online school, it is way better. I don't know about others. Like I say... they say that you are a little bit kind of a mad rag, my friends say this..

Because they don't know... how he likes sitting at home? They simply say, "You are stupid". These are their words because I'd be completely opposite to everything they have ever said, so... I'm a different kind of person.

This newfound confidence was exhilarating for Ashutosh as he explained and showed his room and its influence on him. Ashutosh explained how this confidence further strengthened his capacity to look at several perspectives, communicate emotions, and helped him mature. Ashutosh also added how much he enjoyed the class teacher's periods that were centered on emotional well-being. He explained at this point also towards his main goal of joining the inquiry was to discuss emotional aspects and he shared

VT: How have you grown as a person? What would you say I'm more confident about?

Ashutosh: I can talk about emotions very well. I understand other person's perspectives as well.

VT: Was there any other question you would have wanted me to ask you?

Ashutosh: I like EQUBE in our classes just because that there we talk about emotions and all. And I like to talk about them. Hence, I participated in this research also, because you had shared that in the research, you said we would be talking about emotions. I like to convey them because it makes me feel a bit better sometimes like being happy contains you feeling better also.

Ashutosh spoke of students in his class who needed support, during the virtual learning. As the conversation continued towards the dimension of what were Ashutosh's suggestions in terms of student support, he enthusiastically communicated the emotional dimension and concerns he had for his other classmates. He explained the gaps in the emotional well-being that his classmates might be feeling. While however not divulging the reasons, he maintained the secrecy and the integrity of his class, as he shared

Ashutosh: In my class, each of my friends has their own problems and I'm the only one .. I don't know how... but who is epically happy, I don't know if epically really is a word or not, but still, I use it. I believe I make them understand that some things are not important. It will get healed through time. Just have fun, listen to songs and crack jokes in the classes. Nothing else.

VT: What kind of tension do they have? What kind of stress do you see because of which you guide them?

Ashutosh: Ma'am, sometimes they are sad unusually. I don't know how because they don't tell the particular reason. Sometimes their parents had scolded them. These are the normal ones. Yeah, no reasons are there, but yeah there is.. But I can't tell.. that thing.

Taking his cue, I asked Ashutosh about his role and intervention in such situations to which Ashutosh explained that he would at times counsel, at times crack a joke, or at times find a friend of the person to cheer them up. Ashutosh further added that he loved cheering others as he himself had no problems and was a happy person, defining what a happy person is.

Ashutosh: I would say that I can't help everyone in the class first of all, because I'm the only person who makes everybody laugh. So for that I will ask their friend, "What is the matter. You help them, you are their friend".

VT: Thank you for answering that question. But if you want to come back to this question during our conversation right now, feel free to. If there is anything that comes in your mind. Please feel comfortable.

Ashutosh Like Ma'am, I won't be able to guide it in a better way like my friend, Omkar who is also involved in this [Research inquiry] Because he is the person I go to if I have any problem. Though, I don't have [any problem] because I'm a happy person.

VT: What is a happy person by the way?

Ashutosh: A happy person is one who holds his smile, cracks jokes, just makes everybody smile, helps everybody, has fun, doesn't care what is going sad around him.

Finding himself and his confidence was like having a new identity, making Ashutosh more buoyant and self-assured. Thus, the theme, "Finding my happy place" I felt went well with our discussion. I was amazed and also spellbound to witness such a huge transformation because of the COVID-19 lockdown on this one student. It made me realize that: We all perhaps face situations in diverse ways, respond and evolve in multifaceted aspects.

Aryan: Real Learning and Back to School

Talking to Aryan was easy like it was with all other students. Real learning, interactive discussions, learning in the lab, having face-to-face dialogue, and learning in class truly mattered to him. Students of class 8 face examinations for the first time and look forward to the scoring system that helps them know where they stand in the class. Aryan, in our discussion, covered elements of real learning and kept a simplified focused conversation through the inquiry. Beginning as with all other kids, with his hobbies and strengths, Aryan shared with much confidence his capacity to hold the harmony in the class and manage himself alone at home independently. He shared

Aryan: Ma'am- first I would like you to know my hobbies. My hobbies are that I like to play guitar and I love... actually not like ...I love to act as it is my passion and I want to become an actor. My strength is acting and my other strength is my parents. They help me a lot when .. whenever I'm stuck in something- so they help me a lot.

VT: Tell me two more strengths of yours.

Aryan: Another strength that can be... I'm not sure if this is a strength, but I am like... whenever like the teacher is in class...sometimes... many times... it happens when the teacher is not in a good mood or the teacher is very angry, so I try to calm the whole class and the teacher, down by doing something funny or by presenting something.

VT: You don't think that's a strength?

Aryan: I think that's a strength because it helps the children... because they also feel like the teacher is scolding and someone is trying to calm her down, so I think that is my other strength.

VT: Lovely! And a third strength?

Aryan: And a third strength can be that I can handle myself very properly.

Aryan was interested in knowing my strengths and hobbies. He connected to my hobbies and shared how the love to learn things, explore more, and being curious was common to both of us. He spoke of his love for exploration and showed profound knowledge for a boy of his age.

Aryan: If I ever get a chance, I would like to explore the world and to go to places which are very ancient and they have some... you know... mysterious secrets behind them, so I would love to find out If I ever get a chance!

VT: So which places do you think you can have a safe bet on and start from.

Aryan: I think it can be from India only because India also has many, many places that have many mysterious facts behind.

VT: Which part of India would you begin with?

Aryan: I would begin from the top most-Jammu and Kashmir

On explaining the difference between virtual and face-to-face learning, Aryan's definition was straight and simple.

Face-to-face learning is where a teacher and a student can bond themselves. Virtual learning is a virtual platform where we are not meeting each other, we are doing it with the help of zoom and or any recorder, so we are doing a video call and we are learning.

Aryan spoke of a strong preference for face-to-face learning. He debated with me, in order to explain how crucial face-to-face learning was.

In virtual, we are not able to do as teaching is not so good because in face-to-face when we used to do it often in classes, so the teaching was in a very different phase.. Sometimes teachers used to, like in Science, sometimes Ma'am used to take us to the Biology lab and we did many experiments, we did, like practical's and sometimes in EQUBE [socio-emotional class] and in our QCT [quality circle time with class teachers] periods, we used to play games and know that this happened, we did it like practically, but in virtual, we are not able to have that kind of fun in it and so that is why I feel that face-to-face is much better.

Triggering further insights from Aryan, I pointed out on the advantages of online learning, the scope of having online polls, simulations, and digital applications that facilitated deeper learning. Aryan took up the question and rationalized with clear points from his end.

Ma'am, like you are saying that you can do a poll. What if someone's net is not there, or someone's net is not good. He is not able to do it. Simulations can be done in school also and simulations, Ma'am can do it practically also but in virtual she cannot do it practically-right? She would have to do it using a simulator.

Aryan had well-defined opinions and perspectives on his preference for face-to-face school over online learning as he commented with clarity

Aryan: Definitely, I would have studied better at school.

VT: What or which areas do you think would have been better?

Aryan: In every area, I would have been better, it would have been better in school because the teachers tell us with proper examples and they tell us like, "This will happen". But in virtual learning, nothing is happening. In virtual, we are able to ask teachers, but we are not able to get that clarification.

On clarifying with Aryan about why was it that some students felt more positive about virtual learning, Aryan justified that there were two kinds of students- those who desired to learn and those who were not too serious about learning.

Aryan: Ma'am, I wouldn't like to name but children who are naughty and who don't like to learn, and are always inattentive- they would love this kind of virtual learning. But children who are hard-working and they like to learn, they like to explore new things, so they are at a very big loss.

VT: Aryan, which zone are you in?

Aryan: I'm in the learning one Ma'am.

This conversation on learning seemed important to Aryan. He further explained with lucid clarity what learning meant to him.

Learning is when we learn it with our whole heart when we learn something, and we have that you know- we had that curiosity to learn.

On delving further into the two broad groups of learners Aryan categorized, I was curious to know what he felt about those learners and how did they contribute or influence the culture of learning. Aryan was voluble and quite clear in his thoughts on how cheating was not true learning and the role of a teacher in situations of lack of connection of the student.

VT: Do you get disturbed at any time if other children are either inattentive or not responding or not in the zoom room collaborating or

Aryan: Sometimes I feel, why aren't they coming, quickly come. When they don't respond, the teacher says that if they're not responding, the class will not begin, or any activity that we are doing- If they're not responding, the teachers stop that activity because of those few children.

VT: What do you think, should she stop or not stop. I mean, what are your thoughts about that?

Aryan: She should actually stop because somewhere, I feel if they're not attentive, the teacher should be scolding them or calling their parents. Sometimes I feel that why is she

stopping? If they don't want to listen, then why should we poke them again and again as they're not even listening to us, not even responding.

VT: You're in grade eight and your assessments have begun. What are your thoughts about online assessments and face-to-face assessments?

Aryan: Ma'am, in online assessments, we are given any quiz or something. There, sometimes children cheat also and in face-to-face, children were not able to cheat because the teacher was in front of them. So I feel face-to-face is much better, because here also when the teacher asks a question they Google it online. And then they respond to it. So they're not able to learn, this is not even learning, this is cheating. When there is cheating there is no learning.

Aryan connected learning to face-to-face classes and this he was very sure of. However, as much as Aryan desired to be in school as soon as possible, he seemed to have resigned to the fact that School may not open too soon. His sense of prediction was that

Aryan: 2022... in the end of 2022 or 2023 starting.

VT: Why do you say that?

Aryan: Ma'am, I think... Because we all know that the third wave will also come so we have noticed that the second wave and first wave took around six months to go. Corona is still there, but not at the high level, not at that level which can be called a pandemic, so I think that 2020 end or 2023- in the first term.

Aryan talked of two important subjects in particular- Sports and Hindi (the second language taught in School). Given the nature of the subject, like the other participants, Aryan talked about how sports are now reduced to that of physical activities and the degree of involvement by some students. He on the other hand also spoke of a second subject Hindi and the teacher's lack of expertise in creating a real connection of the subject with the students. This was an important

revelation. It showed how clearly Aryan as a student his age could connect to the domains of teaching-learning and factors that supported learning.

Aryan: We can't play football in virtual learning, so the teacher tells us to do activities and activities like doing exercise-and show..Like how are you doing and who is doing better? They/ he or she highlights to the camera so that everyone can see, but in face-to-face we used to do it in front of the teacher. There are some children in virtual learning who keep their camera off and just sit around, lie on the bed and go out and don't even respond in virtual also... in sports also. So, I feel in sports, it is not doing much of help in virtual learning, but then, when we were doing it face-to-face, we used to play many games and we used to do exercises also.

Aryan: I don't want to tell this, but Hindi teacher- I don't like her very much or I would change my Hindi teacher.

VT: Okay, thank you for being so honest. Is there something about her teaching strategy or her struggles with the digital technology that makes you feel like ..

AG: 25:46: Ma'am I don't like her teaching strategy because... to be fair... earlier we use to have RS [pseudo-initials of subject teacher] Ma'am. She used to do it in fun ways and she was very strict, we all know that... but at the same time, she was very sweet also. When children used to misbehave, she became very straight. She didn't scold me very much because I was very good in her class. And she used to have some debates and she used to make the class very fun. But I don't feel that fun criteria when our teacher... this Hindi teacher is doing with us.

VT: Is fun important in learning?

Aryan: Yes Ma'am.

The clarity and need for fun, for trust, for connection seemed so important for Aryan. The next question on who his "go-to person" was, spoke much about Aryan's authenticity and

willingness to make real connections. Bonding seemed especially important to Aryan as he shared the go-to persons for him

Aryan: Ma'am -of course, parents. And Ma'am if my parents are not there and I have an option to go to two to three teachers- So Ma'am, first of all, I would like to go to RS [pseudo-initials of subject teacher] Ma'am, Second, I would like to go to GT Ma'am [pseudo-initials of another subject teacher]-You might know her. And third I would like to go to you.

VT: you know me?

Aryan: Yes, ma'am. We have had conversations in School also. And we have... I got to know a lot in the past 15 minutes.

Getting on to understand the negative influences and positive influences on the shift from face-to-face learning to virtual training, Aryan explained the impact on him as follows

Negative: In my body-there is not much stamina left, right now, because due to this lockdown and virtual learning- all the stamina has gone, and I am not left with any stamina now. Like if someone asked me to run a kilometer- I won't be able to, and my speed has also decreased physically. And if we talk about mental so- Ma'am- I don't feel like- I feel a change that I get bored a lot. So I don't feel like studying in virtual.

Positive: Ma'am I learned to do house chores. I also learned to cook, and I also learned how to drive a two-wheeler. Earlier, I used to draw only- make drawings- but now I do proper sketching.

As we were coming to the end of the conversation, this was an entry point for me to see (and Aryan was more than delighted to share) the sketches he had made, wanting me to also guess the political heroes, film actors, and freedom fighters he had sketched. These sketches have been exhibited as Figure 2.

Figure 3

Sketches by Aryan



To summarise, the childlike joy in Aryan's sharing, clear thoughts, and perspectives advocating face-to-face learning, the need for bonding, and a determined focus on all one does was so evident in what Aryan practiced in real life. Indeed, also, his yearning for fun and true joy in learning was felt throughout the inquiry. Thus, the title "Real Learning and Back to School" seemed so apt for this lucid heartfelt conversation between Aryan and me.

Reflections as a Researcher

As described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry is "a study of the ways humans experiences the world" (p.2). It is embedded in the belief that stories are the best entryway through which human experience is interpreted and made meaningful both individually and socially. Taking around 25 hours to transcript every narrative, listening and re-listening to the tone and spirit of the conversation, reading and re-reading each of the transcripts, while highlighting and underlining the core emotions felt by each of the respondents felt overwhelming as a researcher.

I could also agree no less with Clandinin and Connelly (2000) when they describe narratives as a powerful tool that further strengthens the student's voice and is a potent tool for self-reflection. While the landmarks of continuity, interaction, and situation were consciously

embedded in the inquiry, the list of loosely constructed wondering and probing questions from my end provided the required impetus, structure and direction for participants to reflect and share. There was so much authenticity and genuineness in each of the narratives, whereby the personal, family, interpersonal, academic and social struggles was so simply and directly expressed in the conversations.

While each of the conversations were quick-paced and there were so many grammatical errors noted while typing the transcripts, the essence of each of the statements was maintained and no grammatical changes were made. I felt deeply connected to the spontaneity of the discussions, the straightforwardness of replies and the casual style of utterances that captured the ethos and sentiments that the participants experienced in their roles and responsibilities as students, learners, friends, siblings, daughters and sons, and as teenagers in the social-educational system.

Discussion

The objective of the study is to understand the lived experiences of each of the six young adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns. This chapter describes the journey of the six participants and presents their experiences and stories through the process of thematic analysis that investigates into the narratives, words and phrases, topics and ideas, and language used. Sharing the two important variables- given that the students were from Grades 6 to 8 and had volunteered to be a part of the study, each of the inquiries demonstrated a comfortable conversation with an overtone of enthusiasm in answering each of the deliberations and discussing every dimension in great length. Being punctual for the Zoom meeting while following all the conversation protocols also demonstrated the earnestness, digital etiquettes, and keenness of the students to share and be a part of th research.

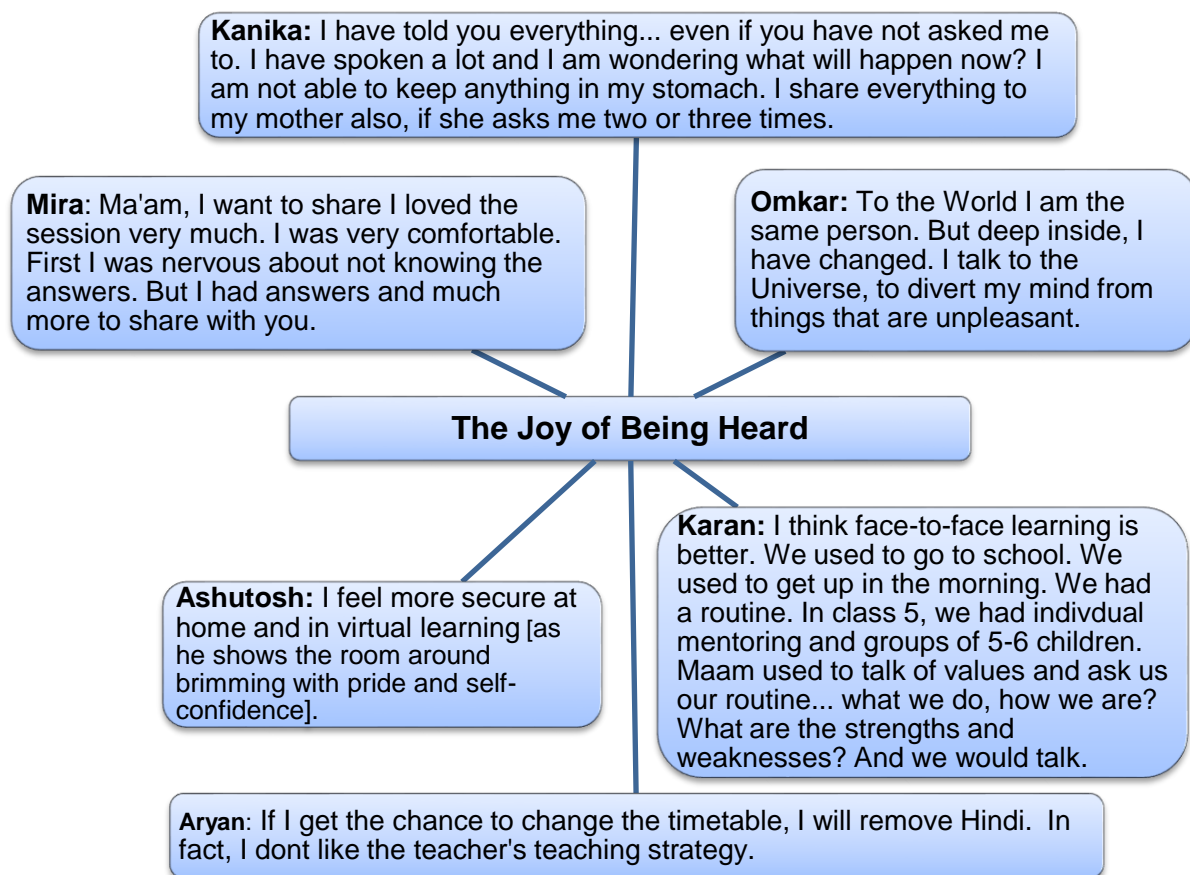
Through thematic analysis, the emerging themes and commonalities between the experiences and stories of all six participants is highlighted. The patterns in the six narratives that answered the research questions and provided an opportunity to explore the lived experiences were investigated. The themes reflected the personal and social landscape that was embedded in each of the narratives. These narratives helped in understanding the student's participation, respecting their role, and recognized their voice in their own experiences and research activity. The themes reflected the core characteristics and traits that emerged and became strongly evident as the result of COVID-19 induced lockdowns. The core characteristics can be categorized as the joy of being heard, the need for social connection and interaction, resilience and accepting change, developing constructive coping strategies and conceptualization of learning. Each of the themes is discussed in detail along with the visual representation of the narratives shared by the participants.

The Joy of Being Heard

As stated by Maguire (2005), children's perspectives and voices are important signifiers of their conceptualizations of the situatedness of their learning, interests, needs, and perceptions. From the dialogic perspective, the inquiry provided an opportunity to enter the participant's world, while understanding their participation in meaningful activities in the context of self, teachers, learning, school, other students, and home. As defined by Fleming (2010) student's voice is primarily being in dialogue, consultation, and discussion with them, on topics such as education that primarily concerns them. As seen in the study, the participants really enjoyed and felt acknowledged for being a part of the research. In their narratives, they communicated a sense of accountability and ownership not only of their learning but also for took responsibility for their development as fully functional individuals.

The respondents actively engaged in identifying issues that needed further exploration and spoke about finding solutions to the same, such as the need for inclusion of all students in the class and possible ways to make the class timetable more functional to suit their learning needs. Children have a good social radar for assessing the contexts and situations in which they find themselves (Maguire, 2005). Thus, my hearing and valuing their opinions and insights, provided a great opportunity for strengthening their confidence, because they saw themselves as social actors. They had a voice on topics connected to their academic learning, personal growth, school systems, and class social structures in general. Looking at the issues holistically mattered to them. While sharing their viewpoint they could look at perspectives from a socio-cultural viewpoint and reflect on the interplay of experiences between the self, peers, family, school, and the larger community. Figure 3 illustrates the responses of the participants as they share their thoughts and opinions with a keenness to communicate and contribute to the study.

Figure 4

The Joy of Being Heard

During the narrative inquiry, the students showed great capacity for self-reflexivity, while demonstrating compliance, assent, or dissent during the conversation. The students had an opinion and validated their thinking with clarity and a sense of assertion. They could see themselves vis-à-vis the changes in them across these 18 months as well as the way their peers and teachers acknowledged their presence/ identity and connected to them. The students not only communicated with authenticity, faith, and trust that their voice will be valued and accepted non-judgementally but also communicated a sense of responsibility to speak in all fairness and relevance of what they thought was important to communicate as a student of the grade/school. As also reported by Fleming (2015) they seemed conscious, positive, and developmentally ready

to participate in school reforms and decision-making processes under conditions of adult support, thus demonstrating a potential to participate in co-creating the policy for blended learning once COVID-19 induced lockdowns were opened.

The Need for Social Connection and Interaction

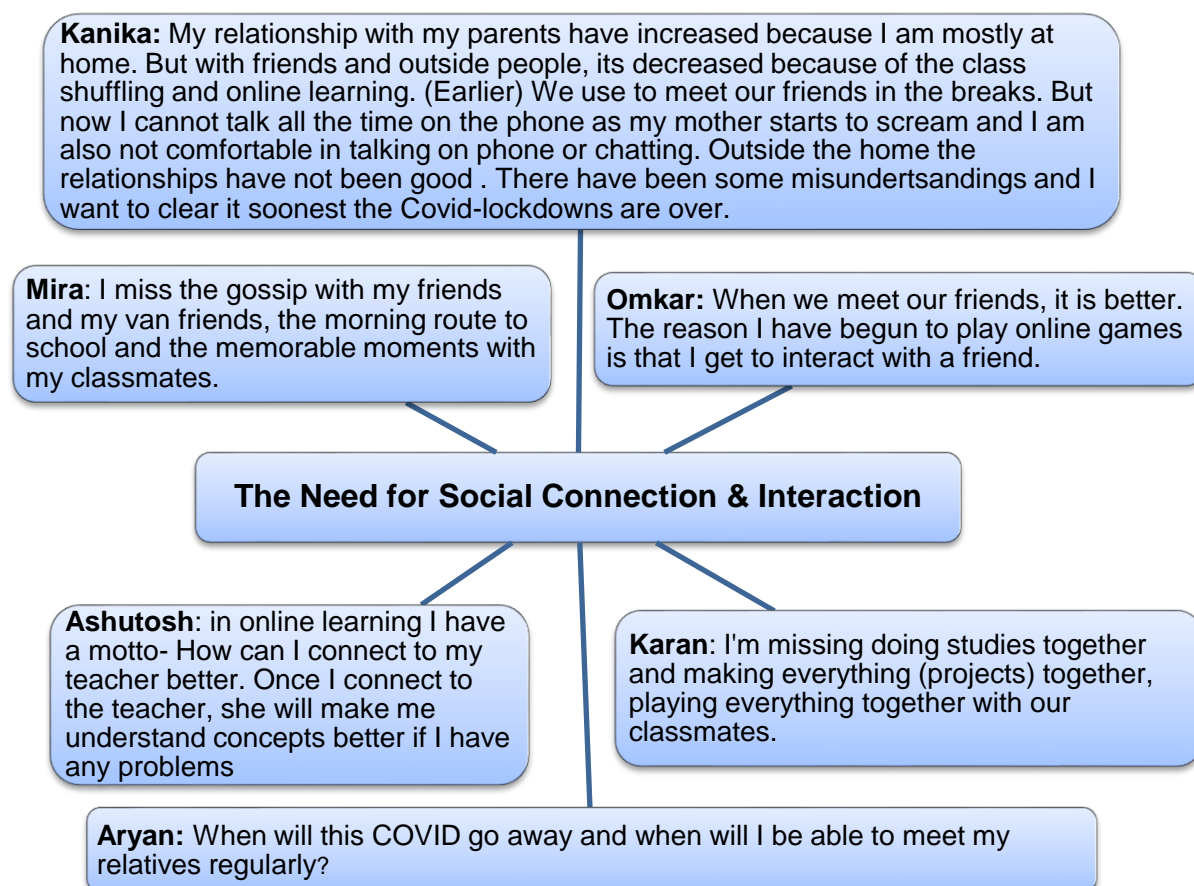
Dewey suggested that to understand people, one needed to examine not only their personal experience but also their actions with other people (Wang & Geale, 2015). As per the three-dimensional space narrative approach, the interaction involved both the social and personal aspects of the experience. Consequently, these experiences were not stand-alone entities but provided rich information and an in-depth understanding of the participant's thoughts, feelings, emotions, struggles, and needs. Thus, the quality of interaction and continuity wherein the experiences and dialogues of the participants, across time in the social landscape of action, participation, and functionality were examined (Dewey, 2018).

The inquiry provided the means to understand who the significant others in the lives of the six participants were. It further provided the opportunity to explore the meanings that the participants derived from these experiences, their larger audience, and the emotional input it gave to their own personal growth and development. This audience provided a landscape of the real people in real-life settings, providing a broader lens in examining the past and present actions, along with the anticipation of the possible behaviors and events in the future (Wang & Geale, 2015). The engagement of the participants with the world and with their significant others involved multiple negotiations of value and importance across various contexts at different points of time (Maguire, 2005). The social space between the significant others (be it a parent, adult, teacher, or a fellow student) and the participant provided intimate opportunities for social and intellectual interactions. As suggested by Vygotsky, children socialize into the intellectual spaces of those around them and thus the influence of the adults over them must be considered (Maguire, 2005). This continuous interaction of human thought and behavior provided a rich medium to interpret

the social needs and dynamics that were present and common to the participants. Figure 4 provides a small preview and sample of the interactions and social needs of the participants.

Figure 5

The Need for Social Connection and Interaction



The need for social connections and interconnections, interactions, and conversations seemed to matter to all six participants. The requisite for supportive relationships with friends, classmates, relatives, parents, siblings, teachers were strongly verbalized. Whether it was the collaborative learning and discussion in the class that strengthened conceptual learning, or the necessity to share intimate thoughts with a parent, or the desire to meet relatives and enjoy bonding, or the longing to clear misunderstandings with a classmate, or the need to connect to a teacher in order to be able to understand a topic more deeply or the urge to spend hours playing

online games in order to maintain friendships and trigger mental stimulations-the requisite for social connections was high.

The “go-to person” for the participants in times of academic or personal challenges, as described by the participants, ranged from the trusted parent to a best friend to a caring and listening teacher. These relationships were not only wanted but also consciously identified, appreciated, and cultivated by the participants (be it with an adult, younger or older sibling, or a peer of the same age). This helped me infer that the strong relational needs could either be the result of the abrupt school closure, social isolation, and negative impact of the COVID-19 lockdowns or could be a normal developmental need of an early-adolescent student.

Resilience and Accepting Change

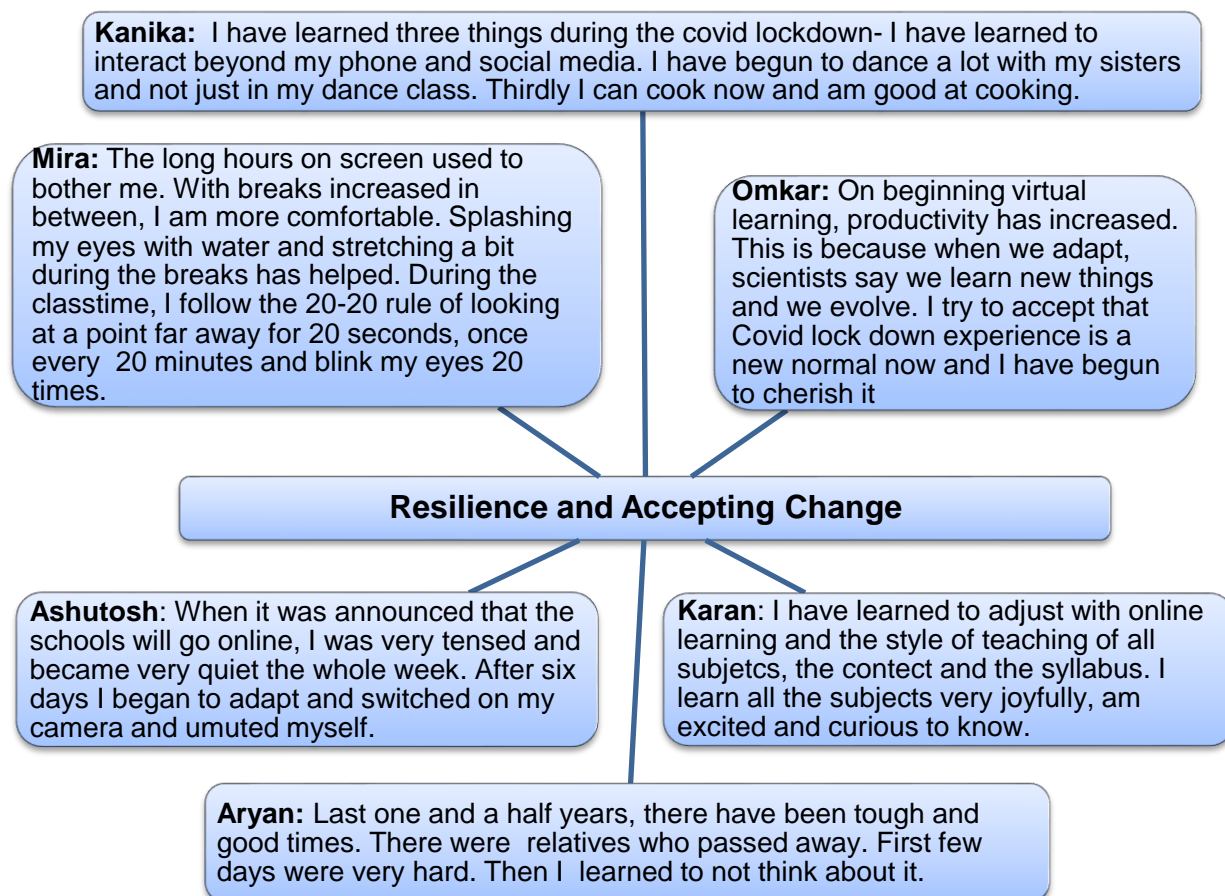
While Dewey explains experience based on the interaction between the self and the world, in that lived moment of experience that happens between the self and the world, there also exists the continuous interaction between the personal, social, and material environment (Clandinin, 2007). COVID-19 induced lockdowns invariably provided a stream of experiences that need to be deeply explored. Adversity comes in many forms. The COVID-19 outbreak, and the resultant induced lockdown as shared by the participants were abrupt that needed strong adjustments from their end.

Initially looking at the lockdown and the possibility of studying from home as a context of fun and a kind of holiday, this joy seemed to have been short-lived. While learning to adapt to the different technological platforms to study were also additional struggles of acclimatizing to altered work schedules, differentiated learning styles, modified class structures, a different set of teachers, altered teaching methodology, and a different class of students that have been shuffled, in the beginning of the academic year. In addition, were also the significant changes in family work cycles and responsibilities, social isolation, rising uncertainties with accompanied fear and challenges for families owing to the Covid outbreak and the dangerous second wave-producing

irrevocable damages that caused severe personal, interpersonal, and family stress. The chain and continuity of experiences encompassed the psychological, physical, social, and materialistic dimensions of struggle. The narratives captured not only those struggles and challenges but also identified the capacities each of the respondents generated within themselves in order to accept these challenges and respond to them in order to create a positive shift in their mental formation of the context and problem. A sample of struggles experienced and capacities developed by the participants is presented in Figure 5.

Figure 6

Resilience and Accepting Change



Overcoming adversity and narratives of resilience that are mentioned above spoke a lot about the protective factors that helped the participants in accepting change and bouncing back

from the current crisis. The common protective factors that were much evident from the inquiries were the learning environment that provided for academic and procedural clarity, personal connection, and open communication between the school, parents, and the students. Given the progressive school they were studying in, the transference to digital learning systems was smooth and swift. Processes and procedures were methodically laid down and individual concerns of the students were heard, valued, and understood. Digital acclimatization along with digital competency was systematically developed. In addition, focus on self-development and collaborative learning was paid attention to such that despite virtual learning, students were able to engage in dialogue, co-construction of knowledge, and discussion thus attempting to reduce the social isolation caused from studying online. Further, staying open to feedback from parents, maintaining reasonable study and break schedules, having reflective sessions in the socio-emotional and life skill classes, and explicitly teaching strategies that improved emotional and physical well-being added to their inner strength.

In addition, the physical and psychological proximity to the family during these stressful situations improved the inter-familial relationship. The increased duration of togetherness and time spent together deepened the bonding amongst the family members. As the students participated in the socio-cultural activities of the families, the collaboration gave rise to the cognitive formation of oneness, a sense of security, and the capacity to move forward, thus providing the capacity to accept change and develop resiliency.

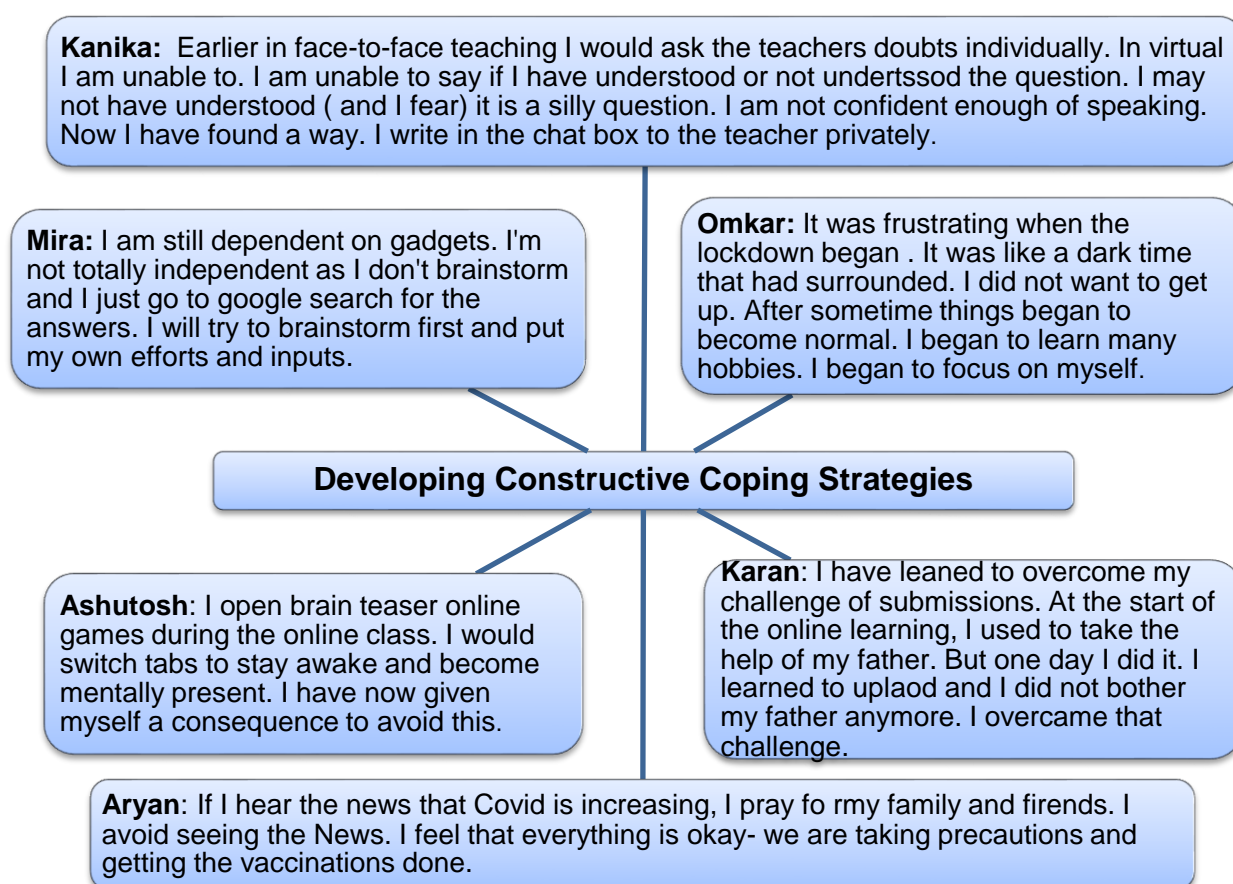
Developing Constructive Coping Strategies

Working from the premise of Rogoff's and Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach that all psychological phenomena originate through interpersonal interaction, the socio-cultural framework provided the lens to understand how the participants think, speak, and behave/ cope during the covid induced lockdowns. As explained by Rogoff (2003) learning to think, acquiring new skills, developing constructive coping strategies, and problem-solving skills are learned

through the participation and guidance of skilled peers through socio-cultural activities. The narratives shared by the students, as presented in Figure 6, provides a glimpse of the vulnerabilities felt, problem situations perceived, insights acquired, and the constructive coping strategies employed by them in managing the consequences of COVID-19, the resultant lockdown, and the limitations experienced because of virtual learning.

Figure 7

Developing Constructive Coping Strategies



Each of the six respondents in their narratives shared events that occurred across these 18 months of COVID-19 lockdown. As they would point out the areas of struggle, they also shared how they coped with the challenges they experienced at that time. These coping strategies helped them overcome their struggles and facilitated them to become more confident of their capacity to

problem-solve. These struggles ranged from the misfortunes that were the result of the second wave of COVID-19, the technological challenges of learning online, experiencing health hazards as the result of watching the screen for a long duration of time, resisting the desire to play online games during classes, witnessing social isolation, and struggling with learning challenges because of not being able to participate in face-to-face learning.

Hearing the experiences of the participants, it was noted that both cognitive and emotional-focused coping strategies were used. Support was sought of friends, peers and elders (teachers or/and parents) wherever needed. The strategies were well targeted to the problem situation and were focused on pro-active action from the participant's end. This capacity to problem solve communicated the social-emotional resilience that the respondents had developed through participation and interactions with peers and elders, in groups and communities across time.

Conceptualization of Learning

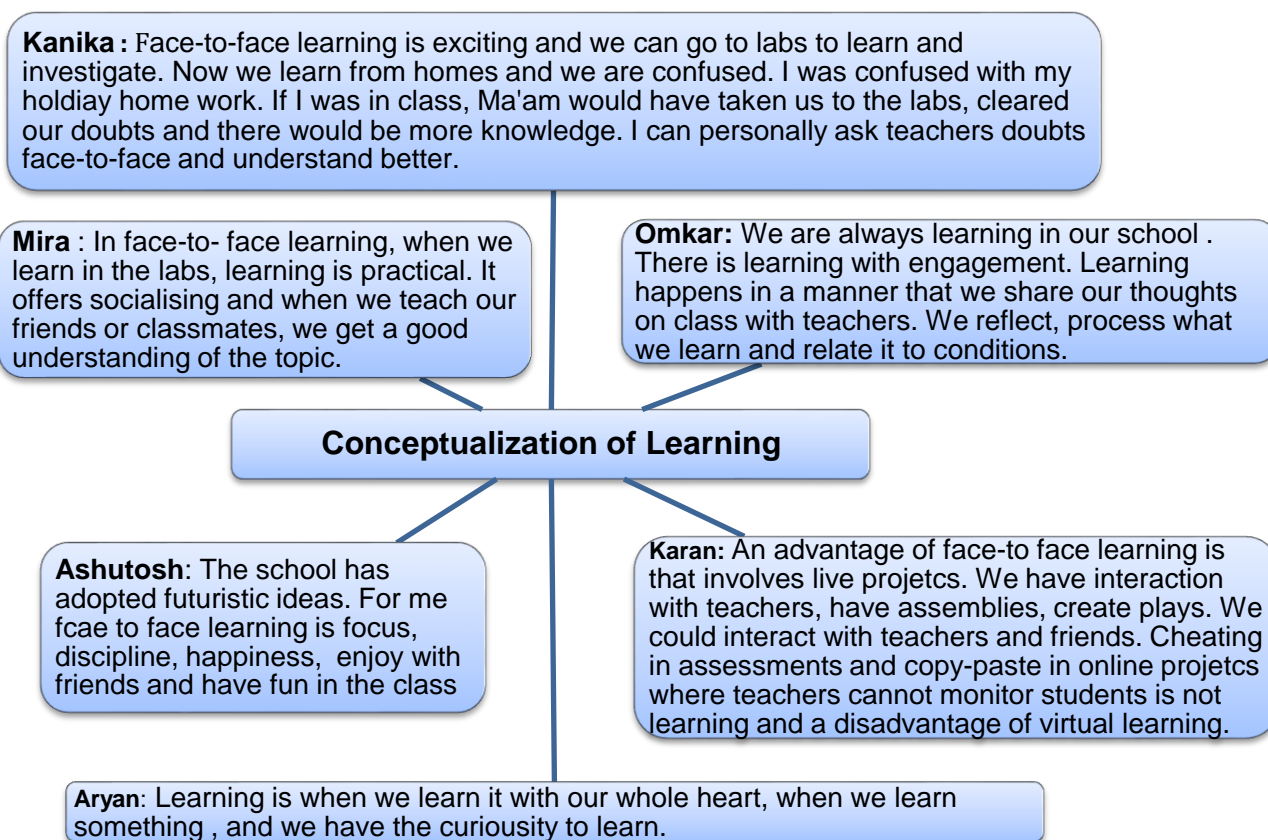
As stated by Dewey (1938), education is a social process, that is realized in the degree to which individuals form a community. In this also lies the role of the teacher, with the school contributing as a microcosm of active community life. Experience is the starting point of all teaching and learning. And as Dewey explains, experience requires continuity and interaction (Dewey, 1938). Interaction is the transaction that takes place between the individual and the environment. It is through this interaction, that students become agents of their own learning wherein the series of unfolding questions and co-constructing meaning together form the continuity to learning.

As the six respondents described what learning means to them, they quoted examples from what they experienced as learners both in the virtual and face-to-face medium. Their past and present experiences, and comparisons of the past and present learning environment, and supporting conditions were discussed. The students spoke about the pros and cons of virtual learning, their preference between virtual and face-to-face learning, and what they would define

as good teaching. They also reflected on what they would like to propose in the future, ways in which teaching-learning process could be better implemented, in the benefit of self and other students. Their clarity on the changes they would want in the timetable or teaching style and reasons for the same demonstrated their capacity for reflection and analysis. There was an awareness, enthusiasm, a sense of agency, and desire to initiate and ideate to find alternative solutions to the current existing problem in learning through the virtual medium. Figure 7 illustrates the various notions and viewpoints the participants have about learning.

Figure 8

Conceptualization of Learning



The respondents clearly defined the supporting factors and conditions that promoted learning for them. All of them preferred face-to-face learning and shared that social interaction (in learning, discussions, play, and in breaks), practical simulation, and investigation through lab

activities and live interactive projects not only activated learning through engagement but also helped develop sound conceptual understanding and deep learning. They felt they had more productivity due to collaborative learning. The presence of the teacher further created a bonding that promoted comfort in asking queries and sharing one's personal and academic challenges.

Further, the structure and predictability of the face-to-face classes (that was longer in duration) were considered beneficial as it provided clarity of responsibility and expectations on one hand, but on the other hand, considered disadvantageous as it provided less time for personal hobbies. The non-academic subjects like sports and the socio-emotional learning classes were preferred face-to-face. Also, the novelty of experiences through activities and the fun element of learning, which added to curiosity and excitement in learning, was considered a crucial factor of learning that was experienced primarily in face-to-face learning.

Looking at the benefits of online teaching, the participants were happy to become digitally literate and develop competence in learning recent technology, handling online learning portals, and employing several online tools for presentation and assessment purposes. They felt more independent and autonomous as learners as they developed the skill to explore, research and problem solve on their own. While the respondents could clearly define the benefits of online learning, they could also highlight the drawbacks of it. The respondents clearly missed the teachers' one-to-one connection and personalized connection. This was much evident and a significant factor, as some students also pointed out the lack of inclusion of all students due to the physical distance between the teachers and the students of the class.

In addition, students also shared that because of the virtual classes, they missed interactions with peers that provided the opportunity to play, collaborate, dialogue, negotiate, and have face-to-face conversations that aided in clearing misunderstandings. While knowledge and cognitive transmission took place through online teaching, the respondents shared that network glitches, lack of collaborative and live projects, lack of face-to-face communication were factors

that inhibited the transmission of non-cognitive and socio-emotional learning. The respondents also spoke of health concerns that ranged from eyesight fatigue to general fatigue and lowered energy level that were a result of primarily sitting online for long durations of time, too much screen time, and lack of physical education classes. Furthermore, given the long hours on virtual medium led to varied drawbacks that ranged from boredom due to monotony, reduced motivation, lack of focus, inattention, disturbance in eating routines, long spurts of disengagement, overdependence on gadgets and amplified online communication.

The students explained the good teaching-learning practices that they appreciated most and pointed out the supporting factors that accentuated their learning. They acknowledged the favorable teacher characteristics to be where the teacher was able to bring an element of fun in teaching the subject, had subject expertise, connected to every student in the class and knew them well, practically engaged the students, showed care and concern for inclusion and emotional well-being, demonstrated availability to students when they were in doubt or needed personal guidance and support, provided feedback, mentored and monitored when required, and provided a non-threatening space and comfort for students to voice their thoughts, emotions, and opinions.

Conclusions

The primary purpose of the study was to study the learning experiences of young adolescent students during COVID-19 lockdowns. Through the process of narrative inquiry, the study also explored a few key questions.

1. What were the participants' initial experiences of the COVID-19 lockdown?
2. What were their perceptions and experiences of virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic?
3. What strategies did the research participants use to engage with virtual classes?
4. What was their preferred mode of learning between face-to-face in person learning and virtual learning?
5. What were their key insights gathered through their lived experience of COVID-19 induced lockdown?

The interviews provided the scope to understand the social, personal, family, and learning worlds, providing a glimpse into the experiences and the journey of a new way of living and learning for each of the six participants. While they spoke of the first response to the school closing being that of excitement and joy, imagining that learning from home would be like a holiday and could be a lot of fun, they soon got into a second stage of confusion and chaos when they had to acclimatise to virtual learning and quickly learn the ways, structures, and schedules of online learning. This was followed by the terrible second COVID-19 wave that struck India created a lot of instability, bringing in the emotions of fear and anxiety, and along with it, a sense of responsibility to follow all the safety norms and protocols with accountability.

The participants perceived school engagement and online learning as their central responsibilities. They spoke of the important attributes and factors and the supportive conditions that enhanced learning. While each of the participants preferred face-to-face learning, they did

share that virtual learning also had certain benefits in making them smart digital learners and providing more time for the pursuit of new-found hobbies. They strongly missed face-to-face learning as they wanted to engage in collaborative engagement, work on projects in crews, sit and have heart-to-heart discussions about socio-emotional issues in their circle time classes, develop practical experience and learn through lab assignments, have the physical space and proximity to ask questions of their teachers, enjoy outdoor sports and hands-on fine arts periods, and relish spending time with friends during class, transition periods, and the breaks.

Strongly appreciative of the school and the teacher community, the school's initiative in making a smooth transition from face-to-face learning to online learning while providing care, rigor, relevance, and connection in the teaching-learning process was deeply acknowledged by the participants. Correspondingly, their capacity to reflect, question, ponder, and connect to the ongoing nuances of digital learning and simultaneously critique the pros and cons of both the learning systems also speaks of their exposure, immersion, teaching practices, and culture of the school. The new mode of learning through Zoom sessions and the Teamie Learning Platform brought about novel challenges that the participants were able to identify, accommodate, and adjust to. This new mode of learning required student skillset training that was a prerequisite for digital literacy, the development of competency of the teacher, improvising on school digital infrastructure, and good internet connectivity.

While the participants were pleased with their abilities to become virtual learners and more autonomous in their learning, they expressed concern about the negative characteristics and structure of the virtual medium of learning, which did not allow for physical proximity, face-to-face social interactions, an effective and non-stop flow of communication, and promptness of feedback. Most importantly, they added that the need for social interaction with classmates and teachers in class, meaning making of learning through active communication and the importance of interpersonal relationships at home, was a predominant factor that added to the joy of learning

and was a strong motivating factor in wanting to come to school and have face-to-face classes as before. The recognition of the socio-emotional framework and the importance of inclusion, safety and security, student voice, collaborative engagement with the curriculum, growth mindset, decision-making capacities, and importance given to experiential learning speaks of the learning environment these participants much craved and have been a part of in their regular face-to-face classes.

Limitations of the Study

The study was qualitative research that explored the lived experiences of six students from the middle school, from Grades 6 to 8, studying in an elite progressive school. Conscious inclusionary choices were made, and the purpose of the study was to focus on the depth of experience of a particular age group and student population, thus narrowing the scope of generalising the findings to students from other cultural, social, educational, geographical, and ethnic backgrounds. The participants had volunteered for the study, which was not based on random selection, thus creating a selection bias as these students were intrinsically motivated to be a part of the study. The study was based on an individual virtual meeting with the participants and relied on digital infrastructure. And lastly, as the participants were met only once, impressions were made on the basis of a single meeting, and there was no follow-up meeting with the participants.

Potential Research Contributions, Benefits, and Implications

Contributions

The potential contribution of this study is the opportunity to see the student's perspective, understanding, and insight about the impact of COVID-19 induced lockdowns on their learning and education. The study provides a rich exploration into the hearts and minds of the six learners and a glimpse of the different challenges, perspectives, aspirations, emotions, mental formations,

and coping mechanisms that took shape and form during the time duration between April 2020 and October 2021 of the COVID-19 induced school lockdowns.

Benefits

The potential benefits the participants may experience are in their sharing of their experiences and having their voices heard, understood, and valued in their journey as virtual learners. This in-depth inquiry and the explorative process could have a direct influence on the participant, given that the insights gathered from the inquiry could positively impact their self-concept and enhance their motivation to learn. Moreover, this narrative was also a reflective process that provided the medium of expression of their struggles and the scope of introspection of the various adjustments, constructive coping mechanisms, and problem-solving strategies employed by them, as they developed into autonomous learners. Thus, the direct impact of this reflection was also the appreciation of the newfound resilience and self-sufficiency as a learner.

The research interpretations and conclusions, which are embedded in sociocultural theory, could also indirectly influence other students during collaborative learning, wherein peers interact and dialogue with each other, shaping others' responses in connection to their own. This could also impact the teaching-learning process and the pedagogy that is co-constructed in the class. Furthermore, benefitting the school I work in, the analysis will provide direct feedback, insight, research data, and an understanding of the students' journey as virtual learners during the middle school years. This analysis will thus provide the scope for the school to evaluate current practices, lesson plans, and learning goals, with the intent of creating and promoting an evidence-based, effective teaching-learning process that is most suitably implemented through the virtual medium.

Implications

The implication of this study professionally for me as a counselor has been an awareness and importance of the student voice, which is vital and needs to be present in each of the learning

decisions that must be made with them. The study was an eye-opener for me, as I not only got to witness the journey of the participants as they evolved as autonomous and self-directed learners, but also realised the sensitivity and responsiveness they exhibited in thinking as a community. The participants could not only look at the host of challenges with realistic clarity and stand-up to the emotional, social, and technological hardships, but also respond proactively and contribute towards the collective problem-solving capacity. As a counsellor and researcher, this gives me confidence in the student voice and their role in the current school scenario of moving from being beyond the classroom decision makers to becoming active partners and collaborators in decision making and designing of a blended curriculum that has a mix and strength of online and face-to-face learning models once students return to school and lockdowns are lifted. However, the study provided insights into the importance of student engagement and motivation, as well as the current gaps in the classroom. Pedagogical practices that reduce this gap and existing disparity in learner engagement need to be identified, and strategies that promote learners' self-efficacy in an online learning environment must be worked upon.

The first few steps I foresee taking, as a direct takeaway of the research is sharing the findings of the research with the School Leadership, program leaders and the professional learning community (PLC) which comprises the whole of the teaching community. Sharing the conclusions of the study and students' perspectives could help shape the future course of strategic planning and learning practices that would be implemented in the curriculum. As a pragmatic approach, the next step would be to possibly invite student representatives and take their view on the annual calendar of training workshops, classroom activities and class events that they would most prefer and think would be most beneficial to them. Having a perspective and a voice in what kind of workshops they as students would like to attend and rationalization for their choice of workshops or events they would like to conduct or be a part of is one possible implication of the study.

Future Direction

Given that the full impact of COVID-19 school closures on learning may not be known for several years, this study adds to the current understanding of the impact of the pandemic on learning as well as the implications for online learning, beyond the context of the pandemic. The study being of an exploratory and interpretative nature provides opportunities for future research, that would help refine, further elaborate, and validate the research findings. Also, this study points to various areas for further research. Because the study focused primarily on students' lived experiences during COVID-19-induced lockdowns, a more comprehensive understanding of the impact on student-teacher relationships, learning continuity and mastery of knowledge and skills, social skills and peer interactions, and emotional and mental health of students during the lockdown period while studying via virtual medium could be gained.

From the socio-cultural perspective, using a similar approach as used in this study, it would be beneficial to extend the study to explore the family dynamics and the lived experiences of the parents of the six participants as well, providing a deeper understanding of the family contribution, parent involvement, and the role of mentors/guides in the participant's learning experience. With greater access to online learning, the study was limited to the advantaged children who had the means to have an online education across the 18 months of the lockdown, and thus future studies could have a comparative study of the perceptions of children from both the advantaged and not-so-advantaged groups. And lastly, the participants did suggest certain strengths in the online mode of learning, and it is possible that once the COVID-19 pandemic settles down, there could be a continuation of online learning programs. Thus, future studies could look at the positive factors of online learning that are suggested in this study for reimagining and redesigning future learning programs for middle school learners.

Adding on, Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) framework also provides the scope for the researcher to share the narratives with the participants. The researcher could discuss the

narratives, collaborate with the participants and restory the account within the framework, thus involving them in the research process. This active collaboration, discussion of narratives and re-storying provides alternative insights, thus strengthening the researcher-participant relationship while adding varied perspectives to the narratives and reducing possible subjectivity that the researcher might have.

Final Reflection

The inquiry provided the scope to look at the narrative expression from the perspective and voice of each of the respondents, exploring their journey as online students during the COVID-19 induced lockdowns as learners. Given their vulnerable age of 13-15 years, the conversations with each of the six students provided me with a sliding door into their world, helping me gain insights into their perspective and understanding. I was reminded of a statement made by Dewey (1938), which states that the terms "life, experience, and education" are synonyms for each other. I do realise the deep truth in such a profound statement. Life is a continuous learning experience. Closure of schools, the second wave of COVID-19, fear of financial, physical, and human loss, negligible social interactions, and adapting to a new way of learning brought opportunities for the students to learn innovative ways of coping.

Hearing the narratives of the six participants made me deeply cognizant of the insights they had gathered from their experiences. The seriousness with which each of the participants shared their onus in shaping and taking responsibility for their own learning communicates a sense of perseverance, yet with an openness to possibility, wonder, and joy. Learning through fun, connections, relevance, and collaboration wherein making meaning of what was learned mattered to them. Through their stories and in their own voices, they shared their coping mechanisms and perspectives while paving their way through the COVID-19 lockdown, making sense of virtual schooling and technology-fueled learning paradigms. The deep desire for relational support and interpersonal understanding stood out in each of the inquiries, communicating a strong need for

a socio-emotional connection to the physical, social, and materialistic environment they were connected with.

Further, as the participants deconstructed the changing instructional hierarchies in the virtual classrooms, they showed optimism for the democratising momentum of technology and the formation of online communities. Also, while accepting the digital transformation and accommodating to the teaching pedagogy, the participants also demonstrate resilience to continue in their role as learners while valuing friendships, social collaboration, student-teacher interactions, and the desire to be back at school where they enjoy the togetherness of learning. Beyond experiencing self-sufficiency and digital autonomy, the true essence of social collaboration, emotional sharing, and understanding each other without the need for words, and including every student in the class, which was possible in the shared physical space of a classroom, seemed significant to the participants. More essentially, the narratives communicate the need for each of the participants to maintain access to that essential part of one's inner self that transcends the routines of the 18 months of virtual teaching, with a hope that is miraculously present, perhaps only in childhood, and yet this hopeful anticipation was realised in a pragmatic manner. They had a sense of reality that coming back to physical space may only be possible after a year or so while understanding what was working for them in the virtual learning space and what was not.

While the respondents took the COVID-19 induced lockdowns seriously and were deeply impacted by the loss and damage caused by the second wave to their homes, families, neighbourhoods, and vicinity, they viewed virtual learning as a temporary arrangement that is designed in adjustment to the challenges of the COVID pandemic. The sudden upheaval in learning and home environments and then adapting to the change gave rise to the openness to embrace unpredictability and develop resiliency. The key lesson learned through these 18 months has been to have an authentic sense of face-to-face connections and a genuine sense of

community, with the happiness of being with the classmates in the same physical space as the corridors come alive with movement and laughter. This momentum of hope, alive with the joy of learning and the desire to want to come to school and learn together in a collaborative setup, while holding to the autonomous, resilient, digital learners that they had now become, spoke of students who were ready to look at experiences with an open mind. Theorists who motivate this study provide evidence that it is through interactions that we engage, and it is through this engagement that we become human.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Permission Email to the Principal

Dear Yakshi

As you are aware, since August 2019, I have had the opportunity to pursue the Masters of Education program at the University of Ottawa, Canada. This opportunity has not only allowed me to update my knowledge as an international student on the current pedagogies in education but has helped me establish more robust counseling processes, develop student-support systems, and co-construct professional development seminars within the school system. Currently, I am designing a research study and will be working under the supervision of Barbara Graves, Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. The purpose of the study is to understand the learning experiences of young adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns. This is important because as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a need for the schools to close down and for students to learn through the virtual medium. The research study aims to hear the student's voices, thoughts, and perspectives in connection to their learning journey during the last year.

Background Information

Journalistic accounts have reported the profound ways in which the global pandemic is impacting student learning and explain the challenges that are being experienced by the schools, teachers, parents, and students due to the sudden closure of schools. The lockdown has led to the need for virtual learning instead of traditional face-to-face learning in a formal classroom. Studies report that students who had access to online learning faced challenges such as increased screen-time struggles in managing time and new learning routines, the need for high-fidelity internet speed, and above all a need for parental support and assistance through the day in their learning process. However, these accounts did not focus on the perspectives of the

students and their personal experiences during the process of online learning in a virtual classroom. Since the students are key stakeholders, it is important to hear their voices in order to understand how the sudden change in the teaching-learning medium has affected them.

My personal interest in taking up this topic

I have a personal and professional interest in conducting this research as I have worked in the capacity of a school guidance counsellor for nearly two decades. As a result of COVID-19, I have witnessed the sudden transition of students at all grade levels, from a face-to-face classroom-learning medium to an online learning environment. Parallel to my professional experience is also my own academic journey, as a result of the pandemic, learning online has personally been a process and an adaptation for me as a student as well and this awareness has made me more sensitive to the experiences of the young learners who like me have been forced to study online. As a guidance counselor, I have observed students of middle school (Grades 6 to 8, aged 11-14 years) show a keen interest in voicing their thoughts and opinions and thus I am keen on conducting my research with students of this age group. The objective of the study is to understand the perspectives of the students, in their own voice through the methodology of the narrative inquiry which allows the students to recount their journey as virtual learners through narratives and stories of their lived experience.

Research Process

The research study would involve me (as a researcher), in conversation with six students as research participants, (two students from randomly selected sections of Grades 6, 7, and 8 respectively). Using the methodology of narrative inquiry, each interview will be in the form of a conversation that would need no prior preparation on the part of the student. The conversational interviews will take place on the Google Meet virtual platform and last for 1 to 1.5 hours. The conversational interviews will be in English and/or Hindi, based on student preferences, and will be audio and video recorded. Each interview will then be translated into English and transcribed.

This rich text would then be analyzed, and the findings would be used for the interpretation based on the sociocultural theory that would be a part of the thesis. The University of Ottawa Ethics Review Board will review the research proposal and all the necessary approvals will be sought. The students will choose pseudonyms so that identifying information of the participants, their class and section, the school, and any third party mentioned would be kept completely confidential. The identity of the individuals will be safeguarded by anonymization of data. Also, the researcher's profile in the school will not be revealed or stated in any future publications or research, in order to maintain the confidentiality and conservation of the data. The data will be securely conserved for 5 years following the completion of the thesis.

Process of recruiting participants

1. Write to the class teachers and program leader of the randomly selected section of Grades 6,7 and 8 and request them to send my invitation letter addressed to the students of their class through the common class email. The letter of information for the parent will be attached to the invitation letter.
2. After reading the research invite, interested students will be encouraged to discuss with their parents and share the letter of information with them. The students then are required to send their acceptance to participate, if interested within 3 days of getting the mail by emailing me at (researcher's email to be inserted here).
3. From the emails received, I will then send an email to two randomly selected students of the class and arrange to meet the students and their parents inviting for a virtual meeting at their convenience of time, to help them understand the research process and answer any questions they might have.
4. In the virtual meeting, after answering the student and parent queries, I will ask the interested parents' and students' consent for the student to participate. The verbal consent

will be recorded with the parent's permission. A written consent would also be emailed to the students and their parents for further reference.

I seek your permission to conduct this research in our School. I would be happy to share more information that you might have about the research process. As a core faculty member of the School, I would ensure that the confidentiality data, principles of the school, integrity of the student, parent, and the learner community would be maintained at all points of time.

Regards

Vaishali Thukral

Appendix B: Information Email to Program Leader & Class Teachers of Grades 6,7, and 8

Subject: Information on conducting research with interested students of grades 6,7 and 8

Dear Teachers,

As you are aware, since August 2019, I have had the opportunity to pursue my Masters of Education program at the University of Ottawa, Canada. This opportunity has not only allowed me to update my knowledge as an international student on the current pedagogies in education but has helped me establish more robust counseling processes, develop student-support systems and co-construct professional development seminars within the school system.

Currently, I am designing a research study and will be working under the supervision of Prof. Barbara Graves, Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. The purpose of the study is to understand the learning experiences of young adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns. This is important because as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a need for the schools to close down. The research study aims to hear the student's voices, thoughts, perspectives in connection to their learning journey during the last year.

Research Process

The research study would involve me (as a researcher), in conversation with six students as research participants, (two students from randomly selected Grades of 6, 7, and 8, respectively). Using the methodology of narrative inquiry, each interview will be in the form of a conversation that would need no prior preparation on the part of the student. The conversational interviews will take place on the Google Meet virtual platform and last for 1 to 1.5 hours. The conversational interviews will be in both English and Hindi and will be video recorded. The students will choose pseudonyms so that identifying information of the participants, the school, and any third party mentioned would be kept completely confidential. The data will be securely conserved for 5 years following the completion of the thesis.

I had shared the research study with Ms.Yakshi and she has given me permission to conduct the research. I request you as teachers of the Grades 6,7 and 8 to kindly distribute the attached invitation letter to the students and information letter to their parents through the class email.

Thanking you for your assistance.

Regards

Vaishali Thukral

Appendix C: Invitation letter to students

1st July, 2021

Vaishali Thukral

(Researcher's address to be inserted here)

Subject: Invitation to be a part of a Research Project, "The learning experiences of young adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns: A narrative inquiry

Dear Student

Greetings!!

My name is Vaishali Thukral, and I am pursuing my Masters course at the University of Ottawa, Canada. I write to you as students of Grades 6, 7, and 8, in order to invite you to participate in a research study that I am undertaking this year. As an educator and guidance counselor of The Heritage School, Rohini, I have been curious to know the experiences of students during the lockdown and closure of schools during COVID-19. I wanted to know more about your journey, thoughts, and feelings, as a student, while learning online.

For the study, I would like to interview two students each from randomly selected sections of Grades 6, 7, and 8. This interview would be an individual conversation on the Google Meet virtual platform. The conversation would last 1-1.5 hours. No prior preparation is required for this meeting. If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them. I would request that you discuss your interest in participating in the study with your parents/ guardian. I have attached a letter of information for them.

Once you have discussed this with your parents, if you are interested, please email me back within three days of receiving this mail at (researcher's address to be inserted here) . I will then randomly select two students who have sent their interest from your class. The selected students will receive a mail, arranging a Google Meet to meet them and their parents at a convenient time to answer any questions they might have.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Vaishali Thukral

(researcher's address to be inserted here)

Appendix D: Consent letter to Parents

1st July, 2021

Vaishali Thukral

(researcher's address to be inserted here)

Subject: Letter of Information for student participation in Research Project, "The learning experiences of young adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns: A narrative inquiry

Dear Parent

Greetings!

Let me begin by introducing myself. As a Guidance Counselor and Head of the Counseling Dept, I have been a part of The Heritage School, Rohini since February 2002. Keeping the School Dharma as the basic principle, I have enjoyed interacting with students and working with the teaching community in ensuring the emotional and mental wellbeing while promoting academic and social inclusion of all our students. Since August 2019, I have had the opportunity to pursue a master's course from the University of Ottawa, Canada. This opportunity has not only allowed me to update my knowledge as an international student on the current pedagogies in education but has helped me establishing more robust counseling processes, develop student-support systems, and co-construct professional development seminars within the school system.

Currently, I plan to take up a research study and will be working alongside Barbara Graves, Professor, Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. The purpose of the study is to understand the learning experiences of young adolescents during COVID-19 lockdowns. This is important because as a result of the outbreak of COVID-19, there has been a need for the schools to close down. Students began with the virtual learning process in March 2020. This has had an influence on their learning process and has likely influenced students in many other ways. I aim to hear the student's voice, thoughts, perspectives in connection to their learning journey during

the last year. On receiving the interest of participation from the students, on the basis of random selection students would be selected for the research study. The research study would involve interaction with the student for 1 to 1.5 hours on the Google Meet virtual platform. The discussion would more or less be a conversation that would need no prior preparation and would be video recorded as data for research purposes. The data will be used for my thesis assignment and would be kept securely for five years by the researcher. Please note that the name and details of the participants would be kept confidential.

If you have any questions, I will be happy to answer them in a Google virtual meet with you and your child. Please indicate a time which will be convenient for you both. I thank you for your time and valuable consideration to be a part of the research process.

Regards

Vaishali Thukral

(researcher's address to be inserted here)

Appendix E : Consent Form for Parents (on letterhead)

***Project title: The learning experiences of young adolescents during COVID-19
lockdowns: A narrative Inquiry***

Names of researchers and contact information

Mrs. Vaishali Thukral

Master's student

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

(researcher's address to be inserted here)

Barbara Graves, Ph.D.

Professor

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

(Prof. address inserted here)

Invitation to Participate: My child has been invited to participate in a research project conducted by Mrs. Vaishali Thukral under the supervision of Professor Graves as part of her course, MA Teaching and Learning (Thesis) at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to collect information on understanding the learning experiences of students during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Participation: My child's participation will consist of participating in an interview about experiences learning online during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The time needed for this activity is approximately 60-75 minutes. The interview will take place as a virtual meeting at a time convenient to my child. The researcher, Mrs. Thukral, will audio and video record my child's response. The possible topics of discussion could include

- Understanding the general weekday and weekend activities of my child during COVID-19 lockdowns
- Exploring thoughts, attitude, and feelings of my child connected to virtual learning.
- Understanding the past experiences, present actions and anticipations of my child and future expectations as a student.

Assessment of risks: My child's participation in this study entails no foreseeable risks. However, if my child experiences any discomfort, Mrs. Thukral has assured me that she will make every effort to minimize this discomfort and be conscious of any verbal and non-verbal cues of discomfort that may arise during the inquiry. She will ensure to be sensitive and steer towards the best possible action in bringing my child back to an emotional and psychological comfort of being, if such a discomfort arises. This could include changing the question, not probing further in the question that brought the unease, and focusing on questions that my child is more comfortable answering. My child may decide to stop the interview at any time.

Benefits: By participating in the research, my child may experience the satisfaction of having their voice being heard, understood, and valued as a virtual learner. This in-depth inquiry and explorative process could provide my child insights that positively impact their self-concept and enhance the motivation to learn. By expressing about the learning experiences, my child will contribute to an enlarged understanding of the subject from the perspective of a virtual learner during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Privacy of participants: I have received assurance from Mrs. Thukral that my child's identity will be safeguarded by anonymization of data and my child will be given a pseudonym. The class and section of my child will not be disclosed in the study. The information my child will share will remain strictly confidential.

Confidentiality and conservation of data: The data will be used for the purpose of the research study and will be kept for five years following the completion of the study. I have been assured that my child's interview and audio-video recording will be kept on a

password protected computer at the researcher's home during the research, and upon completion of the research study will be stored on Professor Graves' password protected computer. In the end of the five years, all material data will be shredded and electronic data will be erased. Also, the school's name and the researcher's profile in the school will not be revealed or stated in any future publications or research, in order to maintain the confidentiality and conservation of the data.

Voluntary Participation: My child is under no obligation to participate and if my child chooses to participate, my child can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions, without suffering any negative consequences. If my child chooses to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____ [*Name of parent*], agree to permit my child to participate in the above research study conducted by Mrs. Vaishali Thukral as part of her M.A Thesis, at the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa under the supervision of Professor Graves.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researchers, Mrs. Thukral, or Professor Graves.

If I have any ethical concerns regarding my child's participation in this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, (613) 562-5387 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

My verbal consent will be audio recorded and I will receive a copy of the consent form.

Parent's name

Signature: Date:

Vaishali Thukral

Researcher's name

Signature: Date:

Appendix F: Consent Form for Students (on letterhead)

***Project title: The learning experiences of young adolescents during COVID-19
lockdowns: A narrative Inquiry***

Names of researchers and contact information

Mrs. Vaishali Thukral

Master's student

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

(researcher's address to be inserted here)

Barbara Graves, Ph.D.

Professor

Faculty of Education

University of Ottawa

(Prof. address inserted here)

Invitation to Participate: I have been invited to participate in a research project conducted by Mrs. Vaishali Thukral under the supervision of Professor Graves as part of her course, MA Teaching and Learning (Thesis) at the University of Ottawa.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to collect information on understanding the learning experiences of students during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Participation: My participation will consist of participating in an interview about my experiences learning online during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The time needed for this activity is approximately 60-75 minutes. The interview will take place as a virtual meeting at a time convenient to me. The researcher, Mrs. Thukral, will audio and video record my response. The possible topics of discussion could include

- Understanding my general weekday and weekend activities during COVID-19 lockdowns
- Exploring my thoughts, attitude, and feelings connected to virtual learning.
- Understanding my past experiences, present actions and anticipations, and future expectations as a student.

Assessment of risks: My participation in this study entails no foreseeable risks. However, if I experience any discomfort, Mrs. Thukral has assured me that she will make every effort to minimize this discomfort and be conscious of any verbal and non-verbal cues of discomfort that may arise during the inquiry. If I am uncomfortable, she will ensure that she does not probe further in the question that brought the unease, and would instead focus on questions that I am more comfortable answering. I may decide to stop the interview at any time.

Benefits: By participating in the study, I may experience the satisfaction of having my voice being heard, understood, and valued as a virtual learner. The in-depth inquiry and explorative process

could provide me insight that positively impacts my self-concept and enhance my motivation to learn. Also, by expressing about the learning experiences, I will contribute to an enlarged understanding of the subject from the perspective of a virtual learner in the given situation of virtual learning during COVID-19 lockdowns.

Privacy of participants: My identity will be protected. I have received assurance from Mrs. Thukral that my identity will be safeguarded by anonymization of data and I will be given a pseudonym. The information I share will remain strictly confidential. The class and section will not be disclosed in the study.

Confidentiality and conservation of data: The data will be used for the purpose of the research study and will be kept for five years following the completion of the study. I have been assured that the interview and audio-video recording will be kept on a password protected computer at the researcher's home during the research, and upon completion of the research study will be stored on Professor Graves' password protected computer. In the end of the five years, all material data will be shredded and electronic data will be erased. Also, the school's name and the researcher's profile in the school will not be revealed or stated in any future publications or research, in order to maintain the confidentiality and conservation of the data.

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate, I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered until the time of withdrawal will be destroyed.

Acceptance: I, _____ [*Name of participant*], agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Mrs. Vaishali Thukral as part of her M.A.

Thesis at the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa under the supervision of Professor Graves.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researchers, Mrs. Thukral, or Professor Graves.

If I have any ethical concerns regarding my participation in this study, I may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 154, (613) 562-5387 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

My verbal consent will be audio recorded and I will receive a copy of the consent form.

Participant's name

Signature: Date:

Vaishali Thukral

Researcher's name

Signature: Date: