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## Using the 5 Anchors of Impact in Unpredictable Times

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### Abstract

COVID-19-19 has brought many challenges to the collegiate and the K-12 educator. Teaching "online" has taken on a new perception and a new look. The 5 Anchors of Impact, which include Organization, Politics, Safety and Order, Traditions, and Teaching and Learning can be used to help teachers navigate these challenging times and keep grounded with their teaching ~ regardless of their circumstances.

Keywords: 5 Anchors, teaching online, challenging times

The 5 Anchors of Impact are the right tools that can help educators understand how to navigate the challenges that may be thrown at them. Especially after the year of COVID-19-19 restrictions and the unpredictable weather, it is clear that the 5 Anchors can be used to guide educators on how to be successful during these uncertain times. All educators, and teachers especially, have been affected by the past year's challenges, and the many changes that have come to education are most likely going to stick. This means that a whole new paradigm of what education will look like including skills, ideals, and pedagogy that have not been taught in preparation courses or professional development will be the new expectation. Having the 5 Anchors as the foundation for moving forward with this new paradigm is imperative.

### The 5 Anchors of Impact

The 5 Anchors of Impact are tools that can be applied to any situation in order for educators to understand the situation. Additionally, the Anchors provide an opportunity for educators to look at all sides of the situation and collect the data/information that surrounds the situation in order to make a data-driven decision, or critically think about a situation by focusing on the facts (Love, 2020). They are literal anchors that "anchor" an incident so that it can be dealt with in a professional and data-driven manner. The 5 Anchors include: Organization, Politics, Teaching and Learning, Traditions, and Safety and Order (Trujillo-Jenks & Fredrickson, 2020a). As each Anchor is expounded upon, it should be noted that the examples are for both practicing teachers and pre-service teachers.

**The Organization** is the main system that also includes all other sub-systems. The Organization may be referred to by other synonyms, but for the purpose of this article, organization and system are interchangeable. The main system affects the sub-systems and the subsystems affect the main system. For this reason, it is imperative that the leader and teachers of the organization are familiar with each system within the organization and how each system functions. For example, within a campus, each grade level is a system. The office, cafeteria,

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custodial engineers, and each elective and special population room is a system. How those systems interact and function together can be seen through a master schedule, a duty schedule, a tutoring schedule, and/or a meeting schedule. When a system is down or not functioning properly, then it will affect the rest of the organization, whether it be negative or positive. When both practicing teachers and pre-service teachers understand what is involved within an organization, it becomes easier to understand how each subsystem functions and affects the organization.

The second Anchor is **Politics**, which may be anything that could include support, recognition, promotions, games, ploys, manipulations, and/or threats that allow for certain outcomes to occur. Politics is a strange anchor because it can affect the organization in many ways. The effect may come from a single person or several persons within the organization, or it can come from an external source that could affect the organization. It is not uncommon that politics may creep into a seemingly non-political situation, such as how a teacher dresses, but it is necessary to be prepared for politics to be a reason for dissatisfaction within a school. One area that has become a political hotbed are teacher mailboxes. If one teacher is allowed to place invitations to an event, like a Tupperware party, then all teachers should have the same opportunity to place items in teacher mailboxes regardless of the type of party. This could lead to a possible set of invitations to an X-rated party to be placed in teacher mailboxes, which could create a political storm.

External stakeholders also play a large role in the politics of education. Formal structural stakeholders, such as members of the school board, can implement policy that will impact the daily lives of administration, faculty, staff, and students. Other external stakeholders, although not in such a structured manner, can play a vital role in political aspects of an organization as well. These can include the parents, the Parent, Teachers, and Organizations (PTO) boards, philanthropists who donate money to the schools through special programs as well as internal programs (such as the arts, athletics, agriculture, etc.). When people/groups donate large sums of money to an organization, they often get a larger, informal, play in the political aspects of that environment.

**Teaching and Learning** is the third anchor and it focuses on the continuous cycle of teaching and learning occurring throughout the campus. Teaching can mean anything that involves someone telling/showing/illustrating information about something that helps another person understand. Learning is the understanding of information given about something that has been told/shown/illustrated. It is also the focus on ensuring that all students, no matter their background or diverse learning needs, get individualized teaching and learning so that they may succeed (Knight-Manuel & Mercaino, 2019), and which is culturally relevant (Muñoz, 2019). Essentially, teaching and learning go hand in hand and may occur between any person(s) on a campus. In a classroom, a teacher teaches a subject and students learn what is being taught. A teacher learns from his students; what information is being understood and what information is being lost, and he may ask students to work with their peers in helping them understand a concept. Additionally, this is the teaching and learning cycle.

Another example of teaching and learning is during faculty meetings. Usually, some type of important information is being discussed and shared by a leader and everyone within the meeting is learning about this new information. After the information is learned, it may be taught to other persons as needed. A great example of this is when a principal explains a new student code of conduct rule that will be implemented to all of the teachers. The new rule is shared, discussed, and learned, then it is taught to the students in each classroom. Again, the cycle of teaching and learning is

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constantly occurring on a campus.

The fourth anchor is **Traditions**. Traditions are easy to see on a campus, because it is what is held as unique and sometimes sacred to individuals. Traditions may be written or unwritten, and they are usually the expectations that all must follow. A blatant example of Traditions is Friday Spirit Days, where students, teachers, and staff have the opportunity to wear spirit clothing to help boost excitement for an upcoming game. Other examples would be annual parties celebrating passing student test scores, ice-cream socials, Homecoming dress-up days, and even parent drop-off and pick-up procedures. The traditions of a campus help define what is important to those within that organization. The Traditions anchor is often the one that is most quickly forgotten in times of strife or stress, such as COVID-19, however, these are the things that may hold the morale of campuses or organizations together. These are often the sacred events of the organizations, and the people and systems within the organizations can become lost when they are gone. A new example of this is graduation during COVID-19; for many schools, it was held virtually instead of in person.

The final Anchor involves **Safety and Order** and may be the most significant since the safety and order of an organization can either compromise or enhance an organization. Safety and order are the rules, the code of conduct that students and parents follow, the procedures that teachers follow, along with expectations set forth by the campus administration, the superintendent, and the school board. It involves all persons responsible for enforcing and abiding by these rules, which may include the school resource officer, the truant officer, the registrar, attendance clerk, custodians, and all educators.

Safety and order become apparent when a crisis occurs on a campus. For example, after a kindergarten group of students attend a field trip at the zoo and return back to school, a teacher may find that one of the children is missing. This may lead to a lockdown of the school building and a call to the police to search the zoo. Another example is when at a high school basketball game, parents become angry with the coach who refuses to play certain players. When the parents charge the coach and interrupt the game, the parents may be verbally reprimanded, thrown out of the building, or arrested. These actions are to keep safety and order within the gym so that the students who are playing the game and everyone else in the gym are not harmed.

An example of how all of these Anchors are visible during a challenge can be taken from our current situation with the discussion about whether or not schools should have students and teachers come back to school in full force or continue to allow parents and students to choose their preferred learning platform: face-to-face (F2F), fully online, or blended. Due to the COVID-19 year that we all have and are still going through, the *organization*, as a whole, has changed and each sub-system has changed. Additionally, each sub-system has developed strategies to help meet most decisions that will be made for future semesters, like how instruction will be delivered and where students will be (F2F or online), but there may be a situation that arises that may find a sub-system unprepared.

Furthermore, because the organization has changed, the *traditions* have changed and how things have always been done will change to meet the needs of the current state of education for each school. The *teaching and learning* also has changed and the expectations of the teachers have become more flexible, meaning that in person, fully online, and blended learning are all learning

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platforms that teachers must become not only familiar with, but exceptional at in order for students to continue to make progress toward success. With different types of learning platforms, there will be new ways that *safety and order* must be ensured that students feel safe on campus and online. There must be order to how things are done so that all persons on a campus are ultimately successful. This tremendous change in such a short period of time encourages *politics*, which may be positive or negative, but which will also change the organization, traditions, teaching and learning, and safety and order of the campus. The 5 Anchors of Impact can be seen in all that has happened in this COVID-19 era.

## Challenges

With each crisis comes challenges, and educators have found challenges that they were not prepared for this past year. Therefore, it was important to find out what specific challenges both practicing and pre-service teachers faced as they learned how to be professionals in a new type of educational environment. Several groups, including practicing teachers and administrators, pre-service teachers, and professors of certification programs were asked the following questions through an informal interview and focus group process to help understand and gauge how practitioners in the field were working and navigating the changes that have occurred since COVID-19 hit the school systems.

*What challenges have you seen due to COVID-19 amongst your colleagues and students?*

- Isolation: Many faculty members now feel that they have lost their sense of “team” and are working completely on their own in isolation.
- Internet access or the technology concerns: Many students and faculty do not have the bandwidth or even the internet access to complete assignments, have virtual meetings, create videos, or engage with others online.
- Communication with faculty members or other students: Students are missing the intellectual discourse that happens in a higher education setting. Discussion boards, jam boards, and virtual sessions, are just not able to duplicate the true discourse that happens in a classroom.
- No sense of urgency: Through COVID-19, faculty across the nation were told to be sensitive to the needs of their students. This allowed a laissez-faire environment to emerge in many classes, often without the faculty welcoming it or wanting it, that lacked the sense of urgency to complete assignments, readings, or projects.
- Time management: Time management changed for faculty as well as for students. As people were not leaving their homes, they either had additional time on their hands, or had less, depending on their circumstances. If they had children at home, where they were having to do school for them as well as their own jobs, it became two full time jobs. If they were exclusively working from home, the impact on their time management when all education is done completely online. Not necessarily for the better or the worse, it just forced changes that people had not previously considered.
- Ability issues: Faculty were often faced with the limits of their own ability when asked to pivot their courses overnight into a fully online model. Faculty, who felt perfectly confident in their in person instructional pedagogies, had to quickly adapt and learn new pedagogical strategies to teach their courses. This became frustrating for many faculty and students alike.
- Missing the human interaction in class: Students and teachers are missing the opportunity to dialogue with one another in a personal space that is not in a virtual environment

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*How did COVID-19 impact practicing teachers?*

- Teaching Kindergarten online: Keeping a kindergartener engaged in a virtual environment for an entire day is challenging ~ at best. However, teachers were expected to still deliver instruction to all students, via online environments, and keep their students focused and engaged.
- Teaching and having kids at home: Many teachers were working to teach their courses and students while still having their own children at home and needing assistance with their classes as well.
- Lack of technology: Teachers may have had access to technology, but if they had their own personal children at home needing computers for their classes as well, lack of household technology, and internet access/bandwidth, quickly became a problem for many teachers.

*How did COVID-19 impact pre-service teachers?*

- Lack of practice: At mid-semester, the student teachers had to leave the classroom. This was the point when many of them had just taken over their classes or had moved to their second placements. This left these student teachers with very little time to truly practice teaching before they were certified and graduated.
- Out of the loop: Many student teachers were almost completely cut off by their mentor teachers as they were forced to move into an online environment. This was due to multiple reasons including the mentor's lack of comfort with the online environment, their concern with turning their classes over with the level of uncertainty of the time, or even the school district's inability to move the student teachers into the learning management systems.
- Sudden success: Some student teachers had a completely different experience. As they were still in school, and some programs were working with emergent technologies and how to enhance their pedagogical skills using technology, some student teachers were in a good place to teach virtually. They served their students and their mentor teachers and brought new technologies to the classroom to assist in the move to a virtual environment.

*What challenges do pre-service and novice teachers face in today's classrooms?*

- Expected to do it all, on day 1: Novice teachers are expected to enter into the classroom as experts in the field. They are not. They are novice teachers and need that learning curve that has traditionally been available to first year teachers. Unfortunately, many first-year teachers are left to "fend for themselves" and are having to learn how to do it all on their own.
- Teaching virtually and in person ~ simultaneously: As many schools have moved to offering online instruction as well as in person instruction, teachers are being asked to teach in both methodologies at the same time. This is challenging for veteran teachers, much less, novice teachers.
- Lack of understanding: As many novice teachers had less student teaching experience, one of the areas that did not get addressed with some students was how to navigate the different systems within a school and the politics of schools. They usually have been exposed to teaching and learning within the first part of their student teaching experience, however several expressed concerns about not understanding the politics within the school or how all of the systems worked together.

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*What can university programs do to help prepare pre-service teachers to be prepared for their future classrooms?*

- Address the 5 Anchors earlier: Many of the 5 Anchors of Impact are practical in nature (political, organizations, and traditions) and usually taught to students during their clinical experiences, these ideas could be addressed earlier in their education courses, they would at least have an understanding of the roles the 5 Anchors play in schools.
- Follow up with graduates: Few university programs have a follow-up program that follows students into their novice years of teaching. Graduates often do not realize, until it is too late, that they need continued support once they have entered into the classroom. Programs that follow-up with graduates can give students the chance to seek additional assistance, increase retention, and in turn, assist the programs with remaining more embedded in the schools.
- Online and in person pedagogical practices. Teacher education programs need to change the way they are operating and make sure that they are giving their students the skills and pedagogical knowledge to be successful in the classroom as well as in a virtual classroom. This will require a large commitment from teacher educators and programs to make these changes, but novice teachers need these skills to be successful in today's classrooms.
- Encourage students to enter the classroom sooner: School districts have long known that their best teachers come from within, thus the continued development of "Grow-Your-Own" programs for students, para-professionals, aids, and staff within a school. Teacher education programs may want to encourage their students to begin working within the schools as an aid, para-professional, staff member, or substitute teacher, to gain valuable experience and skills before even entering into the student teaching experience.

The answers are enlightening and may help Educational Preparation Programs (EPP) in developing relevant curriculum for their pre-service teachers and show a great starting point to use the 5 Anchors.

### **How Can the Anchors Be Used?**

The 5 Anchors are a great tool to work through problem-based issues while also learning from them. They can be used in professional development, as a team building activity, and as a way to begin a faculty meeting discussion. The easiest way to use the 5 Anchors of Impact are to identify a problem/issue/concern/challenge on a campus, apply the 5 Anchors, and work through what elements of the problem/issue/concern/challenge are preventing the persons involved in moving forward. The following are two case studies that are examples of how teachers can use the 5 Anchors.

#### ***Case Study 1***

The elementary principal of a school has informed all of the teachers on a campus that all lesson plans must be written for both F2F and online delivery beginning next semester. The principal gives each teacher a template of what the lesson plans should include and informs the teachers that optional professional development that will focus on instructional delivery, learning strategies, classroom management, meeting the needs of diverse learners, and pacing of a lesson

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plan will be available each Tuesday and Thursday from 12-1. The persons who will be delivering the professional development will be the district level curriculum directors and coordinators, which numbers 7, and which will be traveling to give professional development on every single campus within the district. All 32 campuses will have at least one hour a week with at least one curriculum director or coordinator, with the elementary schools having the most professional development hours given.

Some teachers became angry and voiced their concerns about the professional development days being optional and scheduled during the time that the principal has given to all teams to have their Professional Learning Committee (PLC) meetings. One teacher asked if the professional development days and times could be moved for after school to better meet the needs of the teachers on the campus. The principal answered, “No”, and explained that because of having only 7 persons readily available to give the professional development to 32 schools, the days and times given to the school were not discussed with him, nor was any principal given a choice on what days and times would better suit their teachers. Another teacher voiced that because each team would most likely NOT attend the professional development days due to the conflicting schedules with the PLC meetings, her team would create their own professional development that would be given before and after school for anyone who is interested in attending. Other teams jumped at the chance to develop their own professional development to help each other develop lesson plans that would need to be delivered both F2F and online.

At the monthly principal’s meeting, many of the principals let the superintendent know that the professional development days that the curriculum and instruction director and coordinators had planned would not work for their campuses due to conflicting schedules, the superintendent stated that she would like the principals to make them work. She agreed that it wasn’t the best solution, but that the seven C&I gurus were taking the time to learn new ways of dealing with the evolving educational paradigm shift and we as a school district should show our appreciation by having our teachers attend the professional development. When one principal spoke up and said that it was not in the best interest of her teachers to rearrange their schedule of team meetings and teaching to avoid hurting the feelings of the seven C&I gurus, the superintendent assertively stated that all teachers will be attending all professional development and that it is no longer optional. She added that each principal needed to inform their teachers that if they do not attend the professional development scheduled for their campus, they will be written up for insubordination.

### ***Case Study 2***

Jonathan, a pre-service teacher who is in his last semester, which is his student-teaching semester, is thrilled to be at an elementary school learning how to teach the little ones in Pre-K through 5th grade. He will have a second placement in middle school half-way through the semester, which he knows he will enjoy, but since he has never worked with small children, he is excited to learn how to teach them how to be active and healthy. As he meets the coach he will be working with, he becomes deflated and disappointed in what he may be learning this semester.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions that the elementary school has had to abide by, all elective teachers have had a truncated schedule that now includes helping the core teachers tutor and co-teach students in their home classrooms. Because all electives classes have had their class time decreased across the school district, the superintendent announced that he wanted all

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principals to have all elective teachers work with core teachers in helping deliver instruction to online students. He asked that elective teachers who have more than one certification help in the area of their other certification, so that students, specifically learning online, have contact with a teacher who is ready to answer questions and help with learning. For example, the current PE coach has a degree in Kinesiology and a minor in Math, which means that she has been assigned to not only teach her PE classes but to also help the 5th grade teachers teach math to all of the online math classes. For those elective teachers who were only certified in their elective areas, each principal was to find a duty station for the teachers that they would be responsible for (i.e., hall duty, lunch duty, parent escort duty, etc.).

After Jonathan learned about this expectation, he quickly contacted his university supervisor and asked what he should do. According to the schedule that he received from his cooperative teacher, he may not be able to earn all of the student-teaching hours in his area of Kinesiology needed to meet the certification requirements of the state. He was worried that he would not be able to graduate at the end of the semester since his schedule would include him working with core teachers more so than working with the PE teacher. Jonathan was not going to learn how to be a teacher at this elementary school; he was counting the days before he would beat the middle school.

### ***Solving Each Case Study***

As you read each case study, first identify the 5 Anchors of Impact, and then show how they are being defined. Once the Anchors have been identified and defined, discuss what events took place to cause the problem/issue/concern/challenge, so that you have an idea of how to avoid the problem/issue/concern/challenge in the future, if possible. Then, identify the events that have taken place after the problem/issue/concern/challenge has been presented and what plans of action have been decided on for implementation. Finally, ask and answer the following questions:

1. How does the overall problem/issue/concern/challenge affect the progress of all on the campus, specifically the students and the teachers?
2. If teachers are to be judged on their teaching performance according to the Texas-Teacher Evaluations and Support System (T-TESS), how will the problem/issue/concern/challenge affect that evaluation?
3. What can pre-service teachers do to become prepared to teach in schools and at districts that do not seemingly value elective teachers or their certifications?

As you answer the questions above, think about how you could use the 5 Anchors of Impact in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The 5 Anchors of Impact is a timely resource that can be helpful to teachers who may need to understand, analyze, evaluate, and solve issues that creep up within their schools. Using the 5 Anchors as the foundation for understanding why certain events occur on a campus may help teachers see that they can make a difference and help improve their organization (Trujillo-Jenks & Fredrickson, 2020b). One way of understanding is to find the challenges



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that may be preventing success on a campus and working through those challenges through case study discussions.

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