

Journal of Graduate Education Research

Volume 3

2022

The War at School

Reagan Donald

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/jger>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Donald, Reagan (2022) "The War at School," *Journal of Graduate Education Research*: Vol. 3 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/jger/vol3/iss1/4>

This Feature is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Scholar Works at Harding. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Graduate Education Research* by an authorized editor of Scholar Works at Harding. For more information, please contact scholarworks@harding.edu.



HARDING
UNIVERSITY

The War at School

Reagan Donald

West Memphis School District

How to cite this article:

Donald, R. (2022). The war at school [Feature article]. *Journal of Graduate Education Research*, 3, 6-8.

What is more exemplary of “The War at School” than writing this article and having my computer betray me by deleting it? Perhaps being an English teacher and still beginning a professional, educational article with a question, as if this doesn’t turn me into a full-blown Tell-Tale Heart madman when my students do it.

There are many options for what could currently be considered “The War at School” (CRT, banning books, etc.), but the COVID war has completely transformed our schools and my life to the point where I would feel like a traitor if I did not speak on it. Although we have hopefully not turned completely into any of Poe’s madmen, mental health has still been a major casualty in this war. Teaching a research unit that consisted of eight different types of mental illnesses made me realize this even more. Several of my students could relate to at least one of these illnesses; mainly anxiety and depression, but some could even heavily relate to PTSD.

While I can observe my students to see how they are faring through this war, I can also relate to being a student during Covid. I still had a year left of undergrad when this all started, and I was able to see the major shift between pre and post-Covid (post- here meaning after *knowing* about Covid and unfortunately not its demise) schooling. As a first-year teacher, I have many moments of “Has this always been so difficult or is it just a Covid thing?” I knew what it was like to be a college student, though, so I was able to recognize how everything became significantly more difficult and stress-inducing.

I remember having a conversation with my mom, a retired educator, who mentioned that she had never seen schools close the way they did in March 2020. We knew then that schools would have to reach a different level of normal, even if the ones in charge continue to try and make it seem like we are back to pre-pandemic normality.

SPRING 2020 - THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR

A normal semester. Spring semesters are always the hardest for me mentally, and this one was no different. Before Covid even made its debut to the United States, I had already cried several buckets of tears and decided to change my major. I only had to make it through the rest of the semester before I would finally be happy with my educational decisions and be one year away from a degree.

It is so strange being in school and knowing, via the syllabus, that many hard assignments are coming up, and then BAM! Covid—a disease you’ve literally never heard of—comes out of nowhere and suddenly these assignments become a thousand times more difficult because now they have to be done through Zoom with a bunch of people who have no idea how to use it or

over the phone because it's a group project and you can no longer meet in person.

It was so difficult to get through this semester as a student, and as I get more comfortable in my own classroom, I empathize even more with my professor at the time. Having to learn new technology and figure out how to transfer information that you have been teaching for years in a way you have *never* had to do before could not have been easy. Although I could recognize it then, I recognize it even more now after being exposed to so many different perspectives. This war hit every part of the education system and made it hard for us all.

SUMMER 2020 - MAYBE IT'LL BE OVER SOON?

This time period was such a joke. I was planning to study abroad. STUDY ABROAD. So many people thought this would be an overnight war. A "Yeah, just give it a couple months and we'll be back to normal" war. Yet here we are heading into year three.

I decided to take classes during the summer, so I could complete my degree with the least amount of stress possible. Oddly enough, I feel that this was the only time this war was taken as seriously as it should have been. All classes were moved online. One good thing that came from this is that I took the best class of my life during this term; however, it was slightly clouded with pandemic misfortune.

1. This class was amazing, but would have been *spectacular* if Covid did not exist, and I could have taken the course in person. I had this professor for another class later on, and she is so stunning, yet I never got to meet her in person. I am thankful that she cared about her students' safety, but I wish the war would not have started in the first place, so I could have learned so much more from her.
2. My anxiety had gotten so bad that I could not even hold down food for several weeks. I began taking medication that has only increased in dosage as this war continues.

So many wonderful opportunities continue to be lost because of Covid, and I weep for those that were missed and will be missed as the war wages on.

FALL 2020/SPRING 2021 - YEAH, THE WAR IS STILL GOING ON

By Fall, I felt like the baby in the Judgment of Solomon. The professors had the choice to make their classes online or in person, and I felt like I was being split in half by all the different decisions being made around me. It seemed (and still seems) unfair that other people were given the opportunity to dictate how I had to deal with this war of a pandemic.

So for a year, I had one professor each semester who had me sitting in a classroom, worried I might bring Covid home to my mother. I sat in a classroom with people who complained about the protocols that the school had in place. I sat in a classroom with a professor who said I was exaggerating when I asked for our class to be switched to a room with appropriate social distancing.

I would imagine that in other wars, it was very easy to tell what side everyone was on. There is usually some kind of loyalty

associated with those around you and the fight for a common cause. I spend a lot of time on the internet, so I knew that there were other people out there who were also very anxious about being pushed back into the world too fast, but in person I felt so isolated. I did not know who was on campus and dreading every second of it like I was or who was happy to pretend like life was normal again.

FALL 2021 - NO ENDING IN SIGHT...NO MATTER HOW MUCH WE PRETEND

By Fall 2021, I was the head of my own classroom (terrifying). As mentioned previously, this semester was difficult, but I was never sure if it was because of typical first-year struggles or if it was the struggles of Covid.

Attendance was a HUGE problem this semester. From the way the administration talks about it, it seems a lot of this does have to do with the pandemic. Last year, students were able to move freely between virtual and in-person. That was not the case this year. Many of my students were dealing with a lot both mentally and in their personal lives and did not like being back at school. Either way, it is hard teaching students who are not in person, and it made me feel very inadequate seeing some of the grades in my class.

Phones were a war all on their own. I know this is mainly a first-year pain. Discipline and conflict are quite difficult for me already. I also believe students were used to being on their technology non-stop during Spring 2020 and when they were virtual in that next year as well, so they have become even more addicted than before.

Many veteran teachers mentioned that this is such a hard year to start in. They do not necessarily give details on why this is, but I think it has a lot to do with the fact that this year we tried so hard to make everything seem normal when we are still clearly in a time that is far from normal. With Covid finding new allies within these variants, I hope that my first year still finds a way to get better instead of more difficult. I am working on ways to better my mental health and become a better teacher because we need great ones during a time like this.

THE SPOILS OF THE WAR

With all the deaths the pandemic has caused, I cannot in good conscience say that there is any good coming out of it. I definitely cannot say it is an experience that we needed to go through. I can say, however, that it has taught me and many others a lot. Covid has taken so much from us, but the knowledge we have gained can be considered our spoils. Whether the people in charge make note of this knowledge or not, it is important to remember:

- Mental health is important for all of us in the education field and our students. We are all experiencing something that we have never seen before. We need all the help we can get.
- Take care of your fellow people or give them better options to take care of themselves.
- Hit save so that you do not have to retype a whole article.

I do not think we will ever be free from the shackles of this Covid war, but I have hope that one day we will learn to adapt.

It seems that in some capacity, we are learning that the school system can change, and I hope we settle on something that makes this war a bit more bearable.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Reagan Donald is a 26-year-old graduate from Arkansas State University. She is currently surviving her first year of teaching and having a fun time getting to know the youth in her community through this job. Her current career goals are trying to get other English electives offered at her school and trying to get every student to like at least ONE book.