

***Alone Together: An Ethnodrama of the Experiences of Student
Teachers During COVID-19***

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

Carrie Bradshaw

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Jeff Spanke

**Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana**

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Abstract

In March of 2020, schools around the country closed their doors. For the first time in their careers, teachers were left stranded—no guidance, no classrooms, no light at the end of the tunnel. Teachers were forced to teach remotely, using online resources and video calls. They were no longer in front of their students to help them, forcing the students to teach themselves in many cases. A feeling of helplessness washed over the educational world.

For thousands, their teaching career hadn't even truly begun, yet they were still thrown into the chaos of this new normal.

Student teachers ride the line between “student” and “teacher”. They balance these two lives delicately, careful not to let one overpower the other. Their entire world revolves around finishing their studies to become the professionals they so desperately want to be. But what happens when both sides are ripped away from them in one fell swoop?

In *Alone Together: An Ethnodrama of the Experiences of Student Teachers During COVID-19*, we follow the stories of six student teachers living through the outbreak of COVID-19. While the names have been changed, the stories and emotions have not. They are living through a time when nothing is certain. Will they finish student teaching? Will they be able to finish their degrees? Will they see their students again? Will they have a graduation ceremony? Will they find a job? When will the world go back to normal? Should it go back to normal?

Ethnodramas pull in research from interviews, journals, and other forms of research in order to accurately tell a true story. This method allows voices to be heard and stories to be shared. *Alone Together* pulls from hours of interviews with real student teachers, countless

articles, and real-time news sources to paint a picture of some experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through this project, we reach into the minds and hearts of six individuals who wanted to share their side of the story. They all have their own reasons for sharing their stories, though, in a nutshell, they just want to be heard. Alone Together gives these individuals a voice, and hopefully through them, the thousands like them as well.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Dr. Jeff Spanke for not only advising me for this project, but also for helping me throughout my time at Ball State. He has always been the first person I go to when I need help inside and outside of the classroom. Thank you being in my corner.

I also want to thank all my participants who let me share their stories to create this project. I know this time has not been easy for any of us, and I'm so grateful that they were willing to tell their sides.

Last but certainly not least, I want to thank my family. Mom, James, Lauren, Mamaw, and Papaw—I would not have made it this far without you all.

Process Analysis Statement

I knew that I wanted to do my Honors thesis over student teaching in some capacity, but I wasn't sure how exactly. I knew I wanted it to involve the stories of my fellow student teachers, but beyond that, I was at a loss. After talking with my advisor, we had come up with the idea to focus on the mental health of student teachers. I reached out to about ten of my peers with a short questionnaire about their experiences and mental health during this practicum. I wasn't surprised when all of them responded with stories that reflected their drained mental state. What I wasn't expecting to find, however, were their fears about COVID-19.

I had sent out the questionnaire about two weeks before any decisions were made in the United States regarding the virus. The world hadn't even reached pandemic status yet. Even then, I saw a pattern emerging among my participants. They were wondering what this would mean for their schools, for our university, for us as student teachers. They were scared.

March 13th, 2020 changed everything for us. Halfway through that Friday, all student teachers from Ball State received an email announcing that we were being pulled from our schools. It was devastating for all of us, though we all had our different reasons. If the individual schools permitted, we could continue our work as a voluntary citizen, but for most, even that didn't happen because on March 19th, Governor Holcomb announced that all k-12 schools would continue through online learning ("e-learning") until May 1st. This was later extended through the rest of the 2020-2021 school year. We would never properly see our students again.

With the world quickly changing around me, I knew that my thesis needed to change with it. I had asked my supervisor if I should include the pandemic in my project, or if that would make it too much about something else. He said, “Yes, it’ll make it about something else, but I think it should be about that instead.” We brainstormed together (safely over FaceTime) and came up with my new project—Alone Together: An Ethnodrama of the Experiences of Student Teachers During COVID-19.

I started by reaching out to six student teachers, including myself; their subjects include English, theater, and social studies. I chose these individuals for several reasons, the top being that I had already heard bits and pieces of their stories. Knowing parts of their stories, I felt that they each had a unique perspective on student teaching and COVID-19, and put together, they would create a wide picture that encompassed most versions of the story. I told my participants all about my project and what I wanted to create. Lucky for me, they were all extremely eager to share their stories.

I sent each of them a short questionnaire about their overall experiences during student teaching and their mental health during this time. I was clear from the beginning that they did not have to share anything with me that they didn’t feel comfortable sharing, but a few shared stories of diagnosed depression, anxiety, and bipolar disorder. I wanted to have these answers as a base line for where they were mentally before the pandemic hit. My hypothesis at this time was that mental health would decline during quarantine, and in some cases, I was right, but there were several individuals who saw an improvement in their overall mental health once student teaching was over.

After they filled out the questionnaire, I interviewed all of them individually; most were through some form of video call, but one was a simple phone call. I asked them all in the beginning of the interview if they were comfortable with me recording. While I would be typing notes, I knew that my quick annotations would not be as good as their actual words. Once I started recording, I assured them that everything they said would remain completely anonymous. They would choose a pseudonym and only the two of us would know who it belonged to. No one would know who I even interviewed besides myself, though if they wished to share that information with others themselves, that was perfectly fine. Not only were their names changed, but the names of their university, placement school, cooperating teacher, and anything else identifiable would be changed.

In between interviews, I was researching. I researched ethnodramas (which is a script written based on interviews, research, field work, journals, etc. to share a story) —what they are, how to write one successfully, the steps involved. I researched the value of qualitative research and the art of storytelling. I studied the Coronavirus and all of its effects—socially, economically, physically. I researched the mental health of teachers and student teachers. With all of this information in front of me, I was ready to start the writing process.

As excited and passionate as I am about this project, it was difficult to find the motivation during quarantine to work on it. Creating the timeline was the hardest part because I am obviously writing this in the future, after I know what has happened. It was difficult to put myself back in the mindset I had in January or even March. I did lots of research through my participants and online of the timeline to try to keep it as true as possible.

As for the ending, I changed it several times. Nothing seemed fitting. I finally decided on just ending it, leaving it there as if it were just another session. I felt that this would be the most realistic approach. I hope that this abrupt ending will leave the audience wondering—what happens next, is everyone safe and healthy, did they ever get a job, are they okay? I want to leave them with this feeling and these questions because that’s how we feel now every day. We don’t know what’s going to happen next. That’s the biggest part of this story.

I have many goals and reasons in writing this script, though I think my participants summed it up best themselves with their answers to a question I didn’t even come up with myself. Saldaña (2011) recommends asking a set of questions in order to remain ethical to your participants. One of which was, “What do you hope audiences might take away after seeing the production?” (p.40). Listed below are my participants’ answers.

Aussie: Just getting a different perspective of how the virus is affecting people because right now, we hear a lot from, like, healthcare workers and hear a lot from people who know victims of the virus. And I feel like we’re hearing a lot from teachers these because people are, like, really starting to see how big of an impact they make. But they get to see the perspective of people who so badly want to be in that profession but aren’t yet. And they get to see how not only this is affecting teachers, but it’s also affecting students of all ages, you know, college and high school and middle school and elementary and stuff like that. I feel like people are seeing the downfall of the virus in all senses, but [here] they get a first- hand perspective of a really, really weird time in our lives as student teachers.

Edgar: I think the uniqueness of the situation. I know everybody likes to compare this to 9/11. It's nothing like anything ever, actually. And comparing it to anything else is, I think, a folly. You can't really.... I think that's why I really like this project because I don't think it's like-- the situation isn't like anything else. And I think by showing people's opinions on it, that's the biggest thing, that you show exactly that, that it's so unique.

Allison: Uh, to stay the fuck home. And take it seriously, because there are people that are—there are people that are dying! And there are people who are hurting. And there are people who are missing out on things that everybody else got that now they can't have. Which it's not fair. Not saying that they should happen regardless of a pandemic or not; it's just not fair that they didn't get to have it even in the traditional sense. I know proms are getting postponed. Graduations are getting postponed. College graduations are going to have to include 2020 class with the 2021 class, which is fine. And so I feel like people that—yeah. There are people who aren't taking it seriously, so I hope that they get the message to stay home because there are people who are missing out on things. And there are people who missing out on, like, life events. Like we don't get to have a funeral for my cousin. And other people don't get to have their weddings that they've planned. So that is very unfortunate. There are also people dying, so I feel like the people who are taking it seriously will understand on all the things that are being missed and all the people who are being affected. And all the people who are saying, like, "Oh, it's not that big of a deal. The class of 2020 needs to get over not having prom. Prom isn't the end of the world when people are dying." Like, no, it's not the end of the world, but it does suck! And it's something that other people got to

experience, and they don't get to. Something that you've been looking forward to for a long time—like I've been looking forward to my [sorority] senior ceremony for a long time, and now I don't get it. And I got to watch all the other seniors three years before me get to have this experience and I don't, or at least not in the same way as them. It hurts and it's upsetting. And I feel like people should understand that just because I'm upset about that doesn't mean that I think it's more important than people dying.

'Cause there are a lot of people that still think that whenever I'm sad about missing out on things. They think, "Oh, well, at least you're not dying." Like I know that! I can still be sad! Yeah. That's all.

Stephanie: Community is key to personal success. And the arts changes lives. The arts have really gotten me through Corona.

Lucy: Teachers should be paid more money. And we should be respected more in society. And if you enter college and get an education for a job field, the government and the state and the department of education should do everything in their power to ensure that there is going to be jobs available. Schools should receive more funding because education is what separates us from the animals. And just things like that. That overall, education is important. And the way that we take care of teachers that are going into the job field doesn't make them want to stay very long.

Sam: I hope this serves as historical documentation of this weird time. But I also hope it helps people, all people. People who are struggling through Corona or struggling through student teaching. I want them to know that they are not alone. We are all struggling. And I want people to know that their mental health still matters right now.

People who have increased mental health issues right now are not alone. Their health is just as important as the people with COVID.

I hope to do them justice.

Mental Health of Teachers and Student Teachers

Finding updated information on the mental health of teachers and student teachers has proven to be the most difficult. When searching for articles about this subject, I found that almost all of the researched focused on the students and how teachers can help them. Most articles I have found that strictly deal with the mental health of the teachers themselves were from before the 1970s. These numbers drop even lower when trying to find this information specifically during a time of tragedy. This lack of research further proves the need for society to focus more on the health of individuals in a profession that is so integral to our society.

That being said, there is research out there if one looks hard enough. Woloshyn and Savage (2018) focused specifically on the mental health of pre-service teachers throughout their time in college. They tracked students' personal narratives on the mental health of themselves or loved ones. They found that, after a year or two, the pre-service teachers were able connect their in-class training to their own lives.

By revisiting their narratives through the lens of course content, participants were able to develop a sense of agency for supporting others and promoting their own wellness, replacing, in part, previous perceptions of helplessness. In these ways, students were able to bridge the theory-to-practice gap and view course content as integral to their daily experiences, (p. 13).

While most of these students did not see an improvement in their mental health, their teacher-training allowed them to identify what was causing the pain, thus hopefully preparing them to use these tools to improve their mental health in the future.

Kataoka et al. stumbled across the need for more focus on the mental health of teachers when they were researching the effects of Hurricane Katrina on students and families. Their goal was to find the barriers keeping counselors from providing effective and efficient care. While they were interviewing the school counselors, though, they noticed that the counselors themselves needed counseling. The term “wounded healers” (Kataoka et al., 2010; Jung) was a common theme. Counselors were listening to their clients’ stories, and as soon as they left, the counselor would breakdown and cry in the room, but they then had to pull themselves together before the next client came in. These counselors, much like teachers, spend their days helping others without ever finding the time to help themselves.

The Value of Stories

Storytelling and personal narrative has been around since man first roamed the Earth. Hannam (2015) describes it as a timeless tradition, saying, “[s]tory telling has undergone changes of form across time, but its purpose and message is still the same: this is what we have found to be useful, to be of value, to be true. Narrative is an historical relic, a Lamarckian artefact imbuing the ghost of the past with flesh, voice, and momentum to drive which is ancient into the present,” (p. 3). We are told stories when we are young to open our imagination and curiosity to learn. We tell stories in order to connect with other people. Stories are one of the most powerful things we as human beings can share.

Eksi (2018) focused specifically on the use of storytelling to better understand the experience of pre-service teachers. She argues

From a sociocultural perspective, narratives have contributed to the importance of reflection on teachers' experiences in the classroom and for their professional development (Barlett, 1996; Franson & Holliday, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). They help PSTs analyse how, when, and why new understandings emerge, and understandings that can lead to transformed conceptualisations of self and transformed modes of engagement in the activities of teaching. In addition, narratives bring teachers' emotions to the surface as teachers recognise contradictions in their teaching. (p.160)

She hypothesized that her research would align with this, and it, in fact, did. She found that "narratives helped them take multiple perspectives upon problems in the practicum [student teaching] context and promoted an increase in their awareness of the variables that impacted teaching and learning," (p. 171). These skills of awareness and empathy are essential to any teacher, so much so that teacher programs spend years giving their preservice teachers the tools to be able to effectively use these skills.

Carger (2005) reflected on her use of narrative to share the story of one particular family's experience when their son dropped out of school. When describing why she chose narrative, she says,

Story is the most time-honored way in which cultures preserve the past and shape the future. Embedded in the characters are the values shaped by each unique culture. In the factual information needed to survive or the inspirational example of overcoming

hardship and accepting transformation or in sharing responses to daily concerns, recounting the experiences of people is a way to see the world through a particular lens in a specific context. Recounting the stories of people represents the most fundamental way in which knowledge reveal itself. (p. 6)

In this way, there is no better way to empathize with someone's experience than to simply listen to their story. In this way, we can experience someone's story alongside them.

Ethnodrama

Saldaña (2011) describes ethnodrama as a word joining ethnography and drama, is a written play script consisting of dramatized, significant selections of narrative collected from interview transcripts, participant observation field notes, journal entries, personal memories/experiences, and/or print and media artifacts such as diaries, blogs, e-mail correspondence, television broadcasts, newspaper articles, court proceedings, and historic documents. In some cases, production companies can work improvisationally and collaboratively to devise original and interpretive texts based on authentic sources. Simply put, it is dramatizing the data. (p. 13)

He goes on to describe some of the purposes of an ethnodrama, which include historic documentation, educational or pedagogical, social awareness (for both performers and audience members), social justice or social change, and aesthetic experience.

Fellow qualitative researcher Chenail (2008) question the validity of ethnodramas. After researching the subject through Patricia Leavy's *Method Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*, he determined that, yes, ethnodramas are valid as a form of research, saying

Maybe this strange divide between art and science in research and especially qualitative research will begin to erode away as more readers... begin to realize that researchers conducting narrative, poetic, musical, performative, dance, and other visual forms of inquiry employ rigorous methods of data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation too. (p. 8)

Other qualitative researchers agree, such as Prendergast and Belliveau, who saw that ethnodramas have “the potential to expand understandings, engage audiences, and provoke new learning experiences through dramatization and performing research,” (p. 200).

When Saldaña (2003) was faced with the question “Why ethnotheatre?” he simply explained that they are meant to be performed. He says,

If the consequent monologue and dialogue consist of people merely talking, then why bother using the visual medium of the stage? Why not convert it to radio drama or reader's theatre—both valid modes by whose focus is on language no action. And because ethnography analyzes participants in actions, there are things to show on stage: descriptive replication with subtextual inferences of the way participants facially react, walk, gesture, pose, dress, vocally inflect, and interact with others. These nonverbal cues reveal much about characters—and real people. (p. 228)

He says that these stories should be shown, not told, because this makes them all the more real.

COVID-19

The human coronavirus was first discovered in the 1960s, but COVID-19, a specific virus, is new. On December 31st, 2019, Wuhan, China reported a number of cases of what was then thought to be pneumonia. It wasn't until January 12th, 2020 when China shared the genetic sequence of the disease that the world realized that this was COVID-19. A day later, officials confirmed a case in Thailand, making it the first recorded case of the coronavirus outside of China. On January 30th, 2020, the World Health Organization Director-General confirmed a Public Health Emergency of International Concern. On March 11th, 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic. (WHO, 2020)

Indiana saw its first case of the coronavirus on March 6th, 2020; the same day, a public health emergency was declared in the state. Avon Community Schools closed until March 9th, making them the first school system in Indiana to close even temporarily. On March 10th, both Indiana University and Purdue University announce that they will continue through online classes until April 5th. The next day, Ball State University announced that they will continue through online classes for the rest of the semester. On March 13th, Ball State pulled all student teachers from their schools. Kroger stores throughout the entire Midwest restricted their hours starting on March 15th. The next day, Governor Holcomb announced Indiana's new procedures, including take-out-only for all bars and restaurants. The state saw its first death from the virus on March 16th. On March 23rd, Holcomb announced a stay at home order, closing all non-

essential businesses. The same day, President Mearns of Ball State University announced that May's graduation ceremonies were cancelled. On April 2nd, 2020, Indiana Superintendent of Public Instruction announced that all k-12 Indiana schools, public or private, would continue online through e-learning for the rest of the school year. Governor Holcomb shared Indiana's 5 step plan to reopen Indiana on May 1st.

COVID-19 is spread mainly through human-to-human contact. One can become infected when they come in contact with respiratory droplets, mainly through sneezing, coughing, or talking. Because there is currently no vaccine for the virus, people are cautioned to stay home, and if they do have to go out, practice social distancing, which means staying at least six feet away from others. (CDC, 2020)

Alone Together:
An Ethnodrama of the Experiences of Student Teachers During COVID-19

Written by Carrie Bradshaw

A note to the director and actors:

As the play stands, there is not much movement or stage directions. This is done in order for the director and actors to work together in order to perform organically. The most important thing about this story is showing that these are real people with real stories. I felt that writing explicit instructions would make it feel too mechanical. The actors should perform and react naturally—laugh if they find something funny, pace if they feel overwhelmed, etc.

It's also important to note that while some of the earlier comments about COVID-19 may seem ironic or maybe even insensitive now, the characters had no way of knowing what was to come. This play is written to reflect that.

Break legs!

-Carrie Bradshaw

Characters:

AUSSIE: female in her early twenties; long, wavy blonde hair; dresses more casual and boho style; kind-hearted and passionate.

ALLISON: female in her early twenties; long, dark hair; blouses and sweaters; spunky and fun

EDGAR: male in his early twenties; dark hair and mustache; dresses clean cut, “spiffy”; intelligent and patient

LUCY: female in her early twenties; shoulder-length blonde hair, usually up; simple shirts and pants; passionate and outspoken

SAM: female in her early twenties; short, red hair; simple shirts and fun pants; caring and funny

STEPHANIE: female in her early twenties; long, dark hair; very chic clothing; spirited and creative

DR. SMITH: male in late 30s to early 40s; bald with dark facial hair; button-ups and slacks; patient

Scene 1

Late afternoon in early January 2020.

*Lights come up on seven metal chairs sat in a circle (can be changed for space). One chair is occupied by **DR. SMITH**, who holds a clipboard in his lap. The six student teachers slowly trickle into the room, making small talk when they arrive. Some have met before, some are strangers.*

*Once everyone has taken their seats, **DR. SMITH** rises.*

DR. SMITH: Hello, everyone and welcome to our first session! My name is Dr. Smith, and as you all know, I was asked by the university to lead a group therapy session every few weeks or so to help student teachers cope with this new and exciting time in their lives. *[Pause.]* Okay, why don't we just go around the room and introduce ourselves. First names only please, but go ahead and tell us your school placement, your cooperating teacher's name, and what subjects you teach.

EDGAR: I can go first. Hi, I'm Edgar. I'm student teaching at Burke High School with Mrs. Johnson, who teaches English and a little bit of music.

STEPHANIE: Hi! I'm Stephanie! I'm student teaching at Hill High School with Miss Grossman. I'm teaching theater!

SAM: I'm Sam, and I'm at Acker High School with Mrs. Taylor for theater and Mr. World for English.

LUCY: I'm Lucy. I'm at Bunker High School with Mr. Lee. I do social studies.

ALLISON: I'm Allison! I'm at Central Middle School, and I'm with Mr. Thomas for English.

AUSSIE: And I'm Aussie! I'm placed at Limerick High School with Miss Gene and Mrs. Case, who both do English.

DR. SMITH: Wonderful! Alright, so everyone has been at their placements for about a week, right? *[Pause. Everyone confirms.]* Good, good. So how's it going so far?

[Pause.]

AUSSIE: Well, so far I love it! Both of my CTs are so nice and all the kids are so great. I'm really tired when I get home, but I'm sure I'll get used to it.

STEPHANIE: Yeah, I'm the same! I really like Miss Grossman, and the students love her. We've already been talking about the show this semester! I'm so excited.

LUCY: I love my kids already. A lot of them come from rougher home lives, so I'm just really excited that I get to be a part of their lives.

EDGAR: Yeah, I'm enjoying it, too, but I do wish I was more in my field. I'm really just a music teacher, but I'm going to Germany in April to finish off my student teaching at a performing arts school, and since they didn't have many music placements, they put me with Mrs. Johnson, who teaches two music classes in the day.

AUSSIE: Oh, that kind of sucks. I'm sorry.

EDGAR: It's okay. She's a really great teacher, and she knows that English isn't my subject, so she's going to let me do a lot with the music classes.

DR. SMITH: Well, we will be excited to hear how the rest of your semester continues, Edgar. And if you would like to continue to join our group over video chat while you are in Germany, I'm sure we can set something up. *[To ALLISON and SAM]* How are the two of you finding your first week?

[Pause.]

SAM: Well, I don't think Mrs. Taylor likes me.

DR. SMITH: What do you mean?

SAM: She's kind of cold. I mean, the students love her, and she's really funny with them. But when I try to talk to her and get to know her, she doesn't respond much. She told me that she was really looking forward to having her classroom back to herself again since she's had student teachers the past couple of semesters, but the university begged her to take someone. She said she agreed because it was a split placement.

DR. SMITH: Interesting. Well, maybe she will warm up to you, though either way, it will be a good learning experience for you. How do you like your other CT, Mr. World?

SAM: Oh, he seems great! He's super excited to let me help and teach. I started in his classroom a week after Mrs. Taylor's, but when I walked in, he handed me a copy of the book we are reading and told me to start thinking of some fun lessons. I'm really excited, but I'm also kind of nervous. I feel like I'm being thrown in fast, but that's what we're here for, right?

DR. SMITH: Yes, but it can still be overwhelming. I'm sure your peers here will be more than happy to help you if the time comes. *[To ALLISON]* And Allison? How was your first week?

ALLISON: Um, well, the school I'm at is dealing with a lot of issues right now. A lot of the kids come from lower socioeconomical backgrounds, and the school itself is struggling. They've been taken over by the state to help get them back on track financially and academically. So it's just a lot to walk into.

DR. SMITH: Ah, I see. Yes, that is a lot to be thrown into, but hopefully with the state helping, you'll be exposed to even more resources. Do you like your CT?

ALLISON: He's fine so far. Not really bad, but not really good either.

DR. SMITH: And the students?

ALLISON: Well, let me tell you guys, middle school is something else. I really don't think sixth graders should be with the older kids; fifth grade and sixth grade should have their own building like a lot of schools are starting to do. They're just really immature still. But I do really like my seventh graders so far.

DR. SMITH: *[chuckling]* Ah, yes, middle schoolers. *[Pause.]* Well, how is everyone adjusting so far? Has your sleep schedule leveled out yet?

SAM: I went to bed at eight last night.

STEPHANIE: Same!

LUCY: I've been going to bed around nine or so, which is really early for me. But I'm just so tired!

AUSSIE: Yes! I feel like I'm going at a hundred miles an hour during the school day. I'm running around doing so much. So when I get home, I just crash.

ALLISON: There have been several days that I just go straight to bed when I get home.

EDGAR: Exactly.

DR. SMITH: Well, this is a big adjustment to your bodies physically. I know it feels strange going to bed so early, but you do need to make sure you are getting enough rest. And eating healthy is also very important. How has it been balancing your workload once that last bell rings?

EDGAR: I haven't had much of a workload yet, to be honest. I've only been in my school for two weeks, so I'm still mostly observing right now.

ALLISON: Yeah, it's the same for me.

DR. SMITH: Is that how it is for everyone so far? *[Everyone agrees.]* Well, then maybe we should move that topic on to next session. *[Looks down at clipboard.]* That's all I really had for this first session—really just getting to know everyone. Did anyone have anything they wanted to talk about today? *[Silence. A few shake their heads.]* Okay, well then, I guess that's it for today! I will see you all in a couple of weeks!

[Exit.]

Scene 2

Late afternoon in late January.

Lights come up on the same set up as the last scene—seven chairs in a circle. DR. SMITH is in his chair once again, waiting for the student teachers. The six trickle in, chatting more than before--sharing funny stories about their students, complaining about grading, etc.

DR. SMITH smiles warmly and clears his throat.

DR. SMITH: Hello again everyone! So, it's been about three weeks since I last saw you all. How is everyone?

AUSSIE: I'm doing great actually! I feel like I'm learning so much. Both of my CTs are really different—Mrs. Case is really organized and analytical, but Miss Gene is really creative and passionate. I feel like I'm getting the best of both worlds, and it's amazing!

DR. SMITH: That's great to hear, Aussie! I'm glad you're enjoying your time. Have you started teaching yet?

AUSSIE: Oh, yeah! I've been doing a couple of lessons on poetry. I've had to readjust some stuff because they weren't getting it at first, but Mrs. Case helped me tweak it, and it seems to be going over really well now.

DR. SMITH: Wonderful. How about the rest of you?

STEPHANIE: Well, when I'm at school, I'm having a good day. But when I get home, I just kind of crash. It's all really overwhelming.

DR. SMITH: Can you say a little more?

STEPHANIE: Well, I love my students, I do. But they frustrate me sometimes. They are all from a higher socioeconomic background, and I feel like they just take that for granted. Like, the school gives the iPads, right? Well, they just toss them on the ground or flop them onto their desks. They don't care. And I know that some of you guys said that your kids don't have it so easy. I just wish my students could spend one day at your schools and see how good they really have it.

DR. SMITH: Ah, yes, that would be very frustrating. Yes, you want to teach them about theater, but you also want to teach them about life. Maybe you should find a way to tie privilege into a lesson.

STEPHANIE: Yeah, I think I will.

DR. SMITH: Good. Keep us updated on that. Lucy?

LUCY: I am really getting along with Mr. Lee. The other day, I messed up on a date for a battle we were going over, but instead of calling me out in front of all the students, he very nicely told me during the passing period. I was upset with myself because obviously I don't want to give the kids wrong information, but he assured me that it was normal, and to just clear it up tomorrow. I really just appreciated how he handled it.

DR. SMITH: That's great! It's very important that your CTs respect you. Yes, you are there to learn from them, and they should help you, but I agree that it was good of him to tell you in private. And yes, everyone makes mistakes, Lucy. I take it you've started teaching more?

LUCY: Oh, yeah. I've started teaching a lot more with the current events class in the morning. We recently switched from talking about a possible World War III to talking about the coronavirus in China.

EDGAR: Yeah, I've heard about that. There's a lot of people in Wuhan with it right now, right?

LUCY: Yeah, it's been spreading a lot. We've been talking a lot about how these viruses spread very easily in China because of the way the government is set up and stuff like that. The kids aren't too interested in it, though; they'd rather talk about what's happening in Iran.

DR. SMITH: Well, wars are interesting if nothing else. Edgar, how are you doing?

EDGAR: Um, I've been better.

DR. SMITH: Let's talk about it. What's going on?

EDGAR: Well, it's not all student teaching. I have bipolar two, so that plays a lot into it. I have more positive energy during the English and music classes, but we also have some study halls, and I just feel really low during those hours. I also get low once I get home. It's like it all comes crashing in.

DR. SMITH: I see. And what are you doing for self-care?

EDGAR: Well, I get together with friends every Tuesday to play Dungeons and Dragons. That's a nice thing to look forward to every week. But to be honest, I've also started drinking more.

ALLISON: Same here!

SAM: Yup!

DR. SMITH: The three of you have been drinking more?

SAM: Yeah. I mean, I'm not getting drunk or anything. Or even drinking every night. But I definitely have been drinking more than usual.

ALLISON: Yeah, same. I would say this is the most I've drank in my whole college career.

DR. SMITH: Alright, well you are all adults, so it is perfectly fine to have an occasional drink. But you do need to make sure you are still drinking responsibly. This is something we should probably keep an eye on. Nothing to be ashamed of! Just be careful is all. And keep me updated. *[Sam, Allison, and Edgar agree.]* Sam, how are you doing besides having a few more drinks?

SAM: Well, I think Mrs. Taylor is starting to warm up to me. And so are the kids. So that's really great.

DR. SMITH: That's great! And you and Mr. World are still getting along?

SAM: Umm, yeah, for the most part.

DR. SMITH: What does that mean?

SAM: Well, he's said a couple of things that I just don't agree with. We have a trans student, but Mr. World refuses to call him by his preferred name or pronoun. He calls him by his last name, which I guess is a start, but still. And he made a comment the other day about how women lie about getting raped. We're reading a book where it comes up, and I just don't like how he handled it. It made me uncomfortable and really upset honestly.

DR. SMITH: I can see how that would be upsetting. Have you talked to your university supervisor about it?

SAM: Yeah, I have. He's been really supportive of it, but he did remind me that this is Mr. World's class, so I need to be respectful, but that this is a really great learning experience of how I don't want to be.

DR. SMITH: I would have to agree with him on that. I know it's hard, but this is a good learning experience either way. Know that we are all here to support you. *[Pause.]* Allison, how are you? How is your classroom going?

ALLISON: Well, I don't really like Mr. Thomas, to be honest. He just doesn't really seem to care. And he's not letting me do anything, either. I keep coming up with some fun lesson plans, but he just wants to do it his way.

DR. SMITH: I can imagine how frustrating that must be. Have you gotten teach any lessons yet?

ALLISON: Two.

DR. SMITH: Is Mr. Thomas at least a good teacher?

ALLISON: Nope. Like I said, he just doesn't care.

DR. SMITH: Well, then your situation might be like Sam's in that you can learn how you don't want to be. But I am sorry that the two of you are not having a good experience. *[Pause.]* How is everyone's mental health doing outside of the classroom? Edgar, I know you're not doing too well. Anyone else?

SAM: My depression right now mostly stems from not getting to see my friends. I just don't have time, or when I do have time, I'm too tired. I'm definitely an extrovert, in that I get my energy from other people, and not having that has been hard.

ALLISON: Yeah, I'm really in the same boat. I had to take a leave of absence from my sorority because I just don't have the time, so I'm really missing all of them.

LUCY: I'm doing pretty good, actually. This is the first year that I've gotten to actually live with my fiancé instead of living four hours apart, so that has been really nice. We live with his best friend, who has been pissing me off more than usual. We agreed on a temperature for the house, but he keeps fucking changing it! So I made a contract, and he signed it, so we'll see if he keeps his word. But yeah. I love living with my fiancé. I love him.

AUSSIE: That sucks about the roommate, but you're so lucky you live with your fiancé. My boyfriend just moved down to South Carolina for school, and I miss him like crazy. I haven't seen him in almost a month now, which is the longest we've ever gone, and it's going to be even longer. But I'm going down there during spring break, so I'm super pumped for that!

DR. SMITH: That'll be fun, Aussie. A well-deserved vacation. Stephanie, how are you?

STEPHANIE: Eh, not great honestly. But it doesn't really have anything to do with student teaching.

DR. SMITH: That's okay. We aren't here to just talk about student teaching. We're here to talk about all parts of your lives right now.

STEPHANIE: Okay, well, my boyfriend and I have been fighting a lot more. We just don't get to see each other as much now, and when we do, I'm usually working on grading or lesson planning.

DR. SMITH: That certainly sounds like it's related to student teaching—not having time.

STEPHANIE: Yeah, I guess. I also have been out of my medicine for a while now. I just haven't had the time to go refill it. My school is out of town, so I have to drive like an hour, so by the time I would get to the doctor's office, they're closed.

DR. SMITH: Well, that is a serious issue, Stephanie. Medication is not something to play around with. I know it's hard, and I'm glad that teaching is such a priority for you, but you also need to make your health a priority, too. I'm sure Miss Grossman would not be upset if you left early one day so that you could get to the doctor.

STEPHANIE: Yeah, you're right. I just need to make time.

DR. SMITH: Good. Well, we're about out of time. Is there anything else anyone wanted to talk about? *[Silence.]* Alright, well then, I guess I will see you all in another couple of weeks. Remember that you can reach out to me anytime—you all have my number. In the meantime, stay healthy, and keep teaching!

[Exit.]

Scene 3

Late afternoon in mid-February

Lights up on the circle of seven chairs. DR. SMITH is in his usual seat. AUSSIE and ALLISON are also seated. STEPHANIE and EDGAR come in next, with LUCY and SAM not far behind. Everyone greets each other. It is clear that the six student teachers have become friends even outside of the circle.

DR. SMITH: Hello! How is everyone doing today? [*“Good”s in some form go around the circle.*] Good! Well, let’s get started. Sam and Allison, I know the two of you were starting to have some issues with your CTs last time. How is that going?

SAM: I hate him.

DR. SMITH: Wow, okay. I take it something happened?

SAM: Not really, honestly. It’s just a bunch of little stuff. He’s absolutely got his favorite students, which whatever. We all do. But the kids know; he completely ignores the ones he doesn’t like, or if they aren’t as lucky, he just constantly yells at them. He’s not even a good teacher. We’ve been working on the same skill all quarter now. And it’s easy stuff. He’s just not actually teaching it. And that book we started the first week? We’re still on it.

LUCY: Jesus, how long is that book?

SAM: Like, two hundred pages! We should’ve been done weeks ago. The kids are so bored with it, which sucks because it’s a fun book, just not when you’ve been reading it for two months.

AUSSIE: What’s the skill you’ve been working on? Maybe we can help come up with something they will understand.

SAM: I really appreciate that, but they all get it now. Mr. World was gone for a day last week, so I subbed for him. I finally got to actually teach something, and the kids finally understood it. With one lesson! I just put it in a different form. And the kids all told me how much they don’t like him, which I cannot blame them for. There’s one student in particular who hates his guts, and hated mine at first, too. But I’ve just been really nice to her and actually talk to her, and now we get along really well! She still disrupts class, but at least now I can get her back on task without her storming out of the room, which is a huge win.

DR. SMITH: Well, I’m glad you’re making connections with your students, Sam. But I am sorry that Mr. World isn’t a good CT, or even a good teacher. But again, just think of it as learning what you don’t want to do.

SAM: I am. And Mrs. Taylor has been really great with it all, too. She's going to have me help direct some scenes for the show we are doing later this semester! We just started reading the play as a class, and they are so excited!

DR. SMITH: That's great to hear. Let us know when you've picked dates for the show; I'm sure we'd all love to go. Allison, how has your classroom been?

ALLISON: About the same, honestly. I just feel like he's not letting me do anything.

DR. SMITH: Have you talked to your supervisor about it?

ALLISON: She's not much help, to be honest. I feel like I'm kind of floating out here on my own.

DR. SMITH: I know sometimes it can feel really lonely, but that is precisely why we are all here, to support one another, and to make sure you know that you are not alone in this. We are all in your corner.

AUSSIE: Yeah, Allison. I know it sucks, but you've got this! I'm sorry your CT is a jerk, but you are amazing—I've seen you teach before. You're a natural.

STEPHANIE: Absolutely! And you're still learning so much.

ALLISON: Thanks, guys. I guess it also isn't helping that the standardized test is coming up. The kids are all super stressed about it, and so are we honestly. Our school *has* to do well. Everything we've been doing the past week or so is all kind of boring, but we have to teach to the test so they can pass. It's all just really frustrating.

EDGAR: Well, I know the state has been talking about doing away with ISTEP, so hopefully next year will be better, but I understand it sucking right now. We've been doing the same thing at my school.

DR. SMITH: That is true. Hopefully next year will be better. Edgar, how have you been doing? Has it gotten any better?

EDGAR: Not really. We are starting to prep for a big performance later this semester, so that has given me something to look forward to, but overall, I'd say I'm about the same. My energy levels are just always so low. I'm starting to see an increase in bad days.

DR. SMITH: I see. And how is the drinking? Has that gotten worse?

EDGAR: No, I don't think so. I still probably drink about the same, but at least now I'm conscious of it and making sure I'm still being responsible.

DR. SMITH: That's good. Allison and Sam? How has your drinking been?

ALLISON: I'd say the same as Edgar, honestly. I'm seeing that increase in bad days, too, but I don't think there's been an increase in drinking from last time, so that's good.

SAM: Yeah, same.

DR. SMITH: Well, as long as you are still staying safe then I am happy. You do need to find some more forms of self-care, though, for when it is a bad day. Try going on a walk or reading a book. Catch up on a TV show. That's what I want you to work on for next time, okay? That goes for all of you, actually. *[Everyone agrees.]* Stephanie, how are you? Last time you talked about fighting with your boyfriend and not getting your medicine. Have either of those situations been resolved?

STEPHANIE: A little bit. My boyfriend is a choreographer, so he's been coming to rehearsals and helping out. It's been really nice to spend more time with him and share what I've been doing with him. We've been fighting less because of it, I think.

DR. SMITH: Good, good! And have you seen your doctor yet?

STEPHANIE: No, I haven't. I just really don't want to miss a rehearsal. They count on me, you know? *But* the show will be over in less than a month, and I've already made an appointment for after then.

DR. SMITH: Well, that is certainly progress. I'm glad to hear it. If things get worse, though, you need to see your doctor sooner. *[Addressing everyone.]* Remember guys, I know you all became teachers because you want to help people, but you cannot help someone properly when you yourself need help. Carl Jung called you "wounded healers". You are not being selfish if you take a day off to help your mental health. The kids can survive one day without you. *[Everyone nods their heads and smiles.]* Lucy, how are you?

LUCY: Still doing mostly well, actually. I've been tired mostly, and I really miss my friends. When my fiancé and I got the house, we moved to a different city than my friends and family because it was in the middle for us, so it's just been hard being away from everyone.

DR. SMITH: So then maybe your self-care assignment should be finding a time to go back to your hometown. How has it been with the roommate?

LUCY: God, not any fucking better. I've started turning the thermostat way down at night just to piss him off.

[Laughter from everyone.]

DR. SMITH: Well, as long as you haven't killed each other yet, I suppose. And how is life inside the classroom? Are you still teaching a lot?

LUCY: Yes! Mr. Lee has me completely teaching the current events class now. The kids are starting to enjoy learning about corona and what's going on in China and Italy.

DR. SMITH: Ah, yes. Let's take a moment to talk about that. How are you all feeling about the coronavirus? Have your schools started to talk about it at all?

STEPHANIE: Honestly, my kids and I have been joking about it a lot. It's kind of funny.

SAM: Yeah, us too! Someone sneezed the other day and one of my students joking tossed hand sanitizer at them.

AUSSIE: We are in the same boat at Limerick. I kind of think everyone is blowing it out of proportion.

ALLISON: Exactly! Just wash your hands!

SAM: God, every day at lunch we eat with Mr. World's buddy, Mr. Samson. They are so concerned about the coronavirus getting to us. Every day they talk about it. Like, the school is in the middle of nowhere—it's not coming for us. And, the other day, they were talking about how worried they are for Putnam University because they have so many Asian students studying there.

LUCY: But... they've been here the whole time.

SAM: That's what I said!

LUCY: Jesus, that's the dumbest fucking thing I've ever heard.

DR. SMITH: Edgar, have you heard anything about your program in Germany? Is that still going to happen?

EDGAR: Oh, yeah. They sent us all an email just last Tuesday telling us that everything should still be a-go. They are keeping a close watch on everything, but they think this will all blow over by the time we are supposed to leave. I'm actually more worried about a friend of mine who is studying in Italy right now.

AUSSIE: Oh, are they okay?

EDGAR: Yeah, they haven't been exposed to it or anything. But their program might get cut short.

AUSSIE: That really sucks. But I'm glad they are okay.

DR. SMITH: Yes, our thoughts are with our friend, Edgar, and I hope they continue to stay safe. Aussie, we haven't gotten to you yet. How are you?

AUSSIE: Still loving life and loving teaching! Though, my exhaustion after school has definitely gotten worse, not better. I really thought I would have been used to it by now.

DR. SMITH: Are you getting enough sleep?

AUSSIE: I think so. It's just me beating myself up when I get home. Thinking about how I should've done this, or I should've said that.

DR. SMITH: What you are feeling is completely normal, Aussie. It's part of why you are student teaching, so you can learn and grow more. It is not something you should beat yourself up over.

AUSSIE: I know. And I talk to my CTs about it a lot, and they have been incredibly helpful. They reassure me that they still do the same thing, but at the end of the day, they know they did their best.

DR. SMITH: Exactly. And what have you been doing for self-care?

AUSSIE: Well, I've been making sure I plan at least a couple of days in advance so that I'm not stressed about it later. And I FaceTime with my boyfriend every night before I go to bed.

ALLISON: Oh, yeah! How much longer until you see him?

AUSSIE: Less than three weeks! I'm so excited!

DR. SMITH: Oh, yes, your spring break is coming up. Will you still be joining us that week, Aussie?

AUSSIE: I'm set to get back a couple of days before our next session, so I should be good!

DR. SMITH: Wonderful. Everyone else?

SAM: My school's spring break isn't until the last two weeks of March, so I'll be here! But I am so ready for it-- I'm planning on spending all my time with my friends all week so that I can recharge for the second half of the semester. I miss them all so much.

ALLISON: Same! A couple of sorority sisters and I are planning a little get together, so I'm really looking forward to that.

EDGAR: I'm like Sam— spring break last week of March, so I'll be here, too. I'll just be chilling around here with some friends, catching up.

LUCY: Mine is when Aussie's is, but I'll be here. We are cleaning up my grandma's house so she can sell it. She moved in with my mom a while ago, but we just haven't had the time.

STEPHANIE: I think my boyfriend and I might go back to my hometown for a couple of days to visit my family, but I should be here for the session that week.

DR. SMITH: Wonderful. It sounds like you all have a fun spring break when its time. Only a few more weeks! [*Looks down at notes.*] Well, that's all I had planned for this session. Did we cover everything you guys wanted to talk about? [*Nods.*] Alright, well then I'll see you all in three weeks!

[*Exit.*]

Scene 4

Late afternoon in early March.

Lights up on the circle of seven. DR. SMITH is in his chair. STEPHANIE, LUCY, EDGAR, and ALLISON are already in their seats. They are all chatting and catching up with each other. SAM and AUSSIE come in shortly after. DR. SMITH smiles.

DR. SMITH: Hello again everyone! It's been about three weeks since I last saw you all. I hope those of you that had your spring breaks already enjoyed it. Aussie, I know you especially were looking forward to seeing your boyfriend! How did it go?

AUSSIE: I didn't get to go. The plane company cancelled the flight because of corona. There are no flights right now. I don't know when I'll see him next.

STEPHANIE: Oh my God, Aussie, I'm so sorry. I know you really wanted to see him.

AUSSIE: Yeah. And I don't know how long until this corona thing all clears up. It's starting to freak me out a little bit. I'm living at home right now because it's closer to the school, and my parents sat us down for a family meeting the other day. They are kind of going a little crazy with everything. We aren't allowed to have anyone over, no going out unless it's necessary. It's a little overboard.

LUCY: My school has started reminding everyone every morning to wash their hands and cover their coughs. It's starting to feel a little more real for me, but I still don't know.

DR. SMITH: Edgar, is your study abroad program still on?

EDGAR: It got postponed until the beginning of May, but as of right now, yes. I'm still optimistic about it.

ALLISON: Well, that's good!

EDGAR: Yeah, I thought so, too, until they emailed me back and said, "Don't be."

ALLISON: Oh.

[Silence.]

STEPHANIE: My school has started to cancel afterschool activities. Our show is in a week, so they are still letting us do it for now. But I'm worried.

SAM: Yeah, as of right our show is still on, too. But Mrs. Taylor and I have been really open and honest with the kids about the possibility that it will be cancelled. I really hope not. They are all so excited. We have several kids who are finally getting a shot, and a few seniors, too.

EDGAR: We're in the exact same boat.

[Silence.]

SAM: We're going to get pulled, you know.

AUSSIE: What do you mean?

SAM: Well, Mrs. Taylor's husband works at Dune High School—you know, the one on campus where all of the professors' kids go? Well I guess the other day a kid came back from Italy from spring break. And he went to school. He was immediately escorted out and they disinfected everything. But that afternoon the university pulled all of their students from the school. They're done with their student teaching, observations, everything. Just like that.

ALLISON: They can't do that. They can't pull everyone. I mean, we *have* to finish. I haven't even finished my portfolio to graduate.

LUCY: We pay money for a whole semester's worth of education. They can't pull us. That's bullshit.

[All eyes turn to DR. SMITH, waiting for answers.]

DR. SMITH: *[Pause.]* There's a lot up in the air right now, and to be honest, I don't know what's going to happen. But the university is talking about closing. At least for a little bit.

LUCY: My fiancé goes to Trail University. They sent out an email last night that said they would be closed for the next two weeks—everything will be online.

EDGAR: Yeah, Putnam, too.

STEPHANIE: But that's only two weeks. That's not too bad. Right?

SAM: But that's what I'm saying. It might not be just two weeks.

[Eyes once again turn to DR. SMITH.]

DR. SMITH: *[Pause.]* I really don't know, guys. I just don't know. No one does right now.

[Silence.]

ALLISON: There have been a lot more fights breaking out at school. They're all stressed about COVID.

LUCY: I'm worried about the kids. A lot of them don't eat at home. They get their meals from school. How are they supposed to get food if they are stuck at home? *[Getting angrier]* And what about the kids who have abusive parents? Are we really just supposed to leave them there for two weeks with no escape?

DR. SMITH: I know you're upset, Lucy. You all are. But there's not much we can do for them when they are home. If there's a student you think is in an abusive situation, you need to report that. But as far as helping them during a quarantine, you just have to stay in touch with them through elearning and remind them that they have someone in their corner.

[Pause.]

ALLISON: What happens if we do get pulled? Will we still be able to graduate?

DR. SMITH: There's a lot going on behind the scenes right now. I'm not sure what it will look like, but I can assure you that you will all still graduate on time. Legally speaking, this week you've all hit the minimum requirement for time. Everyone has gotten in at least three observations from their university supervisor, right?

EDGAR and STEPHANIE: No.

DR. SMITH: You both need to contact the university right away, then. *[Seeing the panicked look on their faces.]* Don't worry! Everything will be fine! These are weird times right now; they will find a way. You will graduate. Everyone—you will graduate.

[The group does not look convinced.]

[Silence once again.]

AUSSIE: It's only two weeks away from our students. That's what the CDC says, that you just have to be quarantined for two weeks and then you're fine. So, I'm sure we'll open back up after two weeks of elearning. That's not bad! We can do this! And we'll learn a whole new set of skills with the elearning.

SAM: *[Halfheartedly]* Yeah. It'll be like an extra vacation. I think it'll be kind of nice. I'll get to spend, like, a whole month with my friends! I'll be so recharged for the second half of the semester.

DR. SMITH: That's a great way to look at it, Sam. *[Pause.]* I know this isn't ideal, but we'll get through it. You'll finish your student teaching, you'll graduate, and then you'll go off to have your own classrooms! *[Pause and smiles at everyone.]* I'll see you all in three weeks?

EDGAR: Looking forward to it.

[Exit.]

Scene 5

One week later. Late afternoon in early March.

Lights come up on everyone already in their seats. Tensions are high. There is not much conversation. DR. SMITH clears his throat.

DR. SMITH: Hello, again everyone. I know I saw all of you just last week, but I figured after all changes and announcements, you would all need to meet. *[Pause. Looks down at clipboard.]* I know you all got pulled from your student teaching placements on Friday, so I'm sure emotions are high. Let's all take a deep breath *[Breathes in deeply. The others follow suit.]* and remember that this is a safe space. You can feel however you feel here. Every reaction is valid. *[Pause. Looks around the group.]* Does anyone want to start?

[Silence.]

STEPHANIE: The show got cancelled.

LUCY: What? Weren't you supposed to perform over the weekend?

STEPHANIE: Yup. Opening night was supposed to be Thursday, but they decided to push it back until Friday, which sucked, but not that big of a deal. But Friday morning they announced that everything was cancelled, including the show. A lot of the kids cried. I cried.

ALLISON: Oh, my god, Stephanie, I'm so sorry. I know how hard you've been working on it.

STEPHANIE: Yeah, it really sucks.

[Silence.]

SAM: I didn't even get to see my theater kids on Friday. I was subbing for Mr. World all day. I didn't get to say goodbye.

LUCY: Me neither. It was an elearning day, so I was at home. I had just eaten an edible when Mr. Lee called and told me to come to the school to get my stuff since we wouldn't be there for a while. My fiancé had to drive me there and back before it kicked in.

[Halfhearted chuckles from the group. Silence once again.]

EDGAR: Well, I think it's bullshit.

STEPHANIE: Edgar—

EDGAR: No, it is! I've been waiting four years for my abroad program. Four fucking years. And now the university just decides that they're going to pull everyone and cancel everything? I'm not even *allowed* to go to Germany anymore. I didn't get to do jackshit for music this semester because I was supposed to get all the experience in Germany. And now I just don't. The university gets to just ruin lives just because they don't want to get fucking sued.

SAM: That's not really fair.

LUCY: No, he's right. If they really cared about our education, they'd let us stay on and we'd continue through the elearning, which would actually be incredibly beneficial. But they just don't want to get sued.

ALLISON: I kind of agree. I think they are blowing it out of proportion. We just need to wash our hands more.

STEPHANIE: I think it was the right call. It's what's safest for everyone. And what if something were to happen? It would be their fault.

SAM: I agree. They are trying to slow the curve so this thing doesn't get any worse. Yeah, it sucks, but I think it was the right thing to do.

DR. SMITH: Aussie, what do you think?

[All eyes turn to AUSSIE, who has been quietly trying to keep herself from crying.]

AUSSIE: *[Quietly]* I don't know.

ALLISON: Aussie....

AUSSIE: *[Starting to cry.]* I don't know, okay? I don't know if I think it was a good decision or a bad one. All I know is it just really sucks. This shouldn't be how it ended. I was supposed to get another three months with them. I was just starting to really hit my stride. I know that some of you didn't have that great of placements, and I'm really sorry for that, but mine was amazing. Everything I ever dreamed of. And now it's just over.

[DR. SMITH hands AUSSIE a tissue.]

DR. SMITH: I know that this is not how you all wanted to end your student teaching but remember that you can continue with your placement as a volunteer citizen, if you choose.

LUCY: But what would that even look like? Legally I mean.

DR. SMITH: Well, it depends on the individual schools and what policies they have in place. Who would like to continue your student teaching once the schools open back up?

[LUCY, AUSSIE, and STEPHANIE all raise their hands quickly. SAM, ALLISON, and EDGAR are more hesitant.]

EDGAR: I mean, I think I'd like to, but I was supposed to end my time at Burke High School in the next couple of weeks anyway, so I don't know. I don't know if I'm allowed of if I'm even wanted.

SAM: I absolutely want to stay on with Mrs. Taylor and the theater kids. As of right now, the show is still on. Mrs. Taylor said that if we keep with just the one week of elearning after spring break, then we can still do it. So yeah, I really want to see that through. But I don't know about Mr. World.

DR. SMITH: That's valid. You didn't have a very good experience with him.

SAM: Exactly. I'd want to stay on for the students, but I really can't stand him. And to be honest, I'm not sure how he'd feel about me staying either.

DR. SMITH: Well, you have the two weeks of spring break to think about it. You don't owe anyone anything, Sam. You need to do what's best for you. Allison, what are you thinking?

ALLISON: I just didn't really enjoy my time. I didn't get along with Mr. Thomas. I didn't get very close with any of the students. Well, I take that back. I loved my seventh graders, but not really my sixth graders. And it wouldn't feel right just staying with some of the classes. So I just don't know.

DR. SMITH: Well, again, you don't owe anyone anything. You have all been given the choice on how to proceed, and it's true that it's not completely up to you, either. Your cooperating teachers and the school also have to decide how they want to proceed. The most important thing during this time is that you are all staying healthy, physically and mentally. Things are changing by the hour, so keep up to date on everything as much as you can. Keep checking in with each other. I think we should all go home and get some rest—and it's been a stressful weekend. As long as nothing changes, I'll see you all in three weeks.

[Exit.]

Scene 6

Late afternoon in early April.

*Lights up on the seven chairs, though this time, they are all empty. After a few moments, a projection of **DR. SMITH** lights up the wall. He smiles and waits patiently as a ringtone plays in the background. A few more moments go by. An image of **EDGAR** pops up on the wall.*

EDGAR: Hey, Dr. Smith! Can you hear me okay?

DR. SMITH: Yes, I can, Edgar! How are you doing today?

EDGAR: I'm doing pretty well today. Just finished playing—

***EDGAR** is interrupted as an image of **ALLISON** appears.*

ALLISON: Hey! How are you guys?

*[The two begin to answer as an image of **STEPHANIE** pops up, followed shortly by an image of **LUCY**.]*

***STEPHANIE** and **LUCY'S** next lines overlap each other.*

STEPHANIE: --Hey guys!--

LUCY: --What's up dudes?—

DR. SMITH: Hello, girls! How have the two of you been?

STEPHANIE: I've been doing really well, actually! I woke up early this morning and made myself a cup of coffee and did some yoga. It was great!

DR. SMITH: I'm glad to hear it!

*[An image of **AUSSIE** pops up on the wall.]*

DR. SMITH: Hello, Aussie!

AUSSIE: Hi, everyone!

DR. SMITH: Alright, we are just waiting on Sam, now. Has anyone heard from her?

LUCY: I texted her earlier, and she said she'd be here.

[As if on cue, a black image appears on the wall.]

SAM: Hey! Can you guys hear me?

ALLSION: Uh, yeah, we can hear you, but we can't see you.

SAM: Damn it, I've been trying to get this thing to work for ten minutes now!

EDGAR: Try hitting that green button on the top left corner of you screen.

[Pause. The black screen changes into an image of Sam.]

EVERYONE: Hey!

DR. SMITH: Wonderful! Well, let's get started. So we've all been I quarantine for about a month now. This is obviously a big change from our normal lives. How is everyone handling it?

[A moment of silence as everyone politely waits for someone else to begin. Then several people begin to answer at once.]

DR. SMITH: Okay, well, that's not going to work. Stephanie, why don't you start us off?

STEPHANIE: Well, I've actually been doing really well. I think my mental health overall has really gone up since all of this.

DR. SMITH: That's great news! Is there anything in particular that has been helping?

STEPHANIE: I think it's really a combination of stuff. My boyfriend has been staying with me because his roommates haven't been quarantining at all, so it's been really nice to get to spend more time with him. I'm still student teaching through elearning, but I'm only doing three classes, so my workload has gone down so much. I have time to focus on me now, so it's just been really great!

DR. SMITH: That's really great to hear, Stephanie. I'm glad you're doing better. Lucy, how about you?

LUCY: I'm about the same as before, really. I'm still student teaching online, but I've pretty much taken over all of the classes, so my workload has gone way up. Making lesson plans, making sure they work for online classes, emailing students, emailing parents. It's been crazy. We really should get paid more as teachers.

DR. SMITH: Are you handling the stress well?

LUCY: Yeah, I'd say so.

DR. SMITH: Good! And how has quarantining been for you?

LUCY: It's not great, it's not awful, you know? My fiancé is quarantined, too, so we've been doing work together at the kitchen table, which is nice. Our lease is up in a couple of weeks, so we are moving back home after that. We've got to make sure to be extra careful because we'll be living with my grandma until we can get a new place.

DR. SMITH: How is your grandma? Is she healthy?

LUCY: She's recovered from a broken hip about two years ago, so she's pretty good. We are just being extra cautious when we have to leave the house to get groceries.

DR. SMITH: That is very smart. Aussie, how are you? I know getting pulled was especially hard for you. Have you been able to keep in touch with your students since everything has gone to elearning?

AUSSIE: Yes! I've been teaching several classes now. We are about to finish our unit on *Macbeth*, and I gotta say, the kids and I have both loved it. Newest Shakespeare fan right here! My last day is in about two weeks, so that's going to be really tough.

DR. SMITH: It will be tough, but I'm glad that you've gotten the extra time with your students. How is your mental health through this quarantine?

AUSSIE: Um, not super great honestly. I just really miss the little stuff, you know? Like going to McDonald's with friends or going to the movies. And I don't really get along with my stepdad, so that's been extra hard.

DR. SMITH: Were you living at home before this quarantine?

AUSSIE: I was, yeah, but I was spending all my time at school, so I never even really saw him. But now we are all home all the time.

DR. SMITH: I see. That would be a difficult transition. What have you been doing for self-care when your stepfather upsets you?

AUSSIE: Well, my sister moved back home since the quarantine, and we've always been close, so it's nice having her around. *And she recently got a new dog, so he's been staying with us, too! Do you guys want to meet him? [Speaking to someone/ something off camera] Luke! Come here, boy! [Pause. Suddenly a small wiener dog jumps into AUSSIE'S lap.] Everyone, this is Luke, my wonderful nephew. Say hi Luke! [AUSSIE takes the dog's paw and has him wave.]*

SAM: Oh, my god!

ALLISON: He is so cute!

[AUSSIE strokes the dog some more before he jumps off her lap and out of frame.]

AUSSIE: So, yeah. That's Luke, and he is the source of my joy these days.

DR. SMITH: I'm glad you've found something to keep you occupied during this time. Sam, how are you?

SAM: I'm doing alright. My stress levels have certainly gone down since I'm not student teaching anymore. But I just really miss my friends. And I feel so restless and bored all the time. I still have some stuff I need to get done before graduation, but I just don't have the motivation. But overall, I'd say I'm doing okay.

DR. SMITH: Well, I'm glad you're doing alright. That did bring up something I wanted to talk about, though. Graduation. How are you all feeling about the ceremony being cancelled?

EDGAR: I'm okay with it, honestly. I mean, I wasn't going to be here for it anyway, so it doesn't really affect me. That being said, I know it's been hard on some of my friends.

LUCY: Yeah, I don't really care either. I just wish we could've gotten our money back.

ALLISON: Well, I'm incredibly upset about it. There's a whole list of things that got cancelled for me that I was supposed to get my senior year. And it just really sucks. Graduation, my sorority ceremony, my orientation leader send off. Everything. And I know that not having those things isn't the end of the world. But it does really suck, you know? Like I've watched all my peers get their senior moments for four years, and now that it's my turn, I just don't get it.

DR. SMITH: Yes, not having those things is not the end of the world, but you're right—it's hard. These are things that you guys have worked incredibly hard for, things you deserve. Just because terrible things are happening around us does not make your pain any less valid. It's important that you all understand that.

STEPHANIE: I understand your pain, Allison. My grandparents are getting pretty old, so this was probably the last big event they would get to come to.

SAM: I'm pretty upset about it, too. Not for any big reason like you guys, but just because I was actually really looking forward to it.

DR. SMITH: You all lost something here, and it's important to recognize that. It's okay to be upset about it, but it's also okay to not be upset. You all should celebrate your achievements in some form, though. It's important, and you all have accomplished so much. *[Smiles and pause.]* Edgar, let's switch to you now. I know you were pretty upset with the decision to pull you. How are you feeling about it now?

EDGAR: I actually think it was the right call. I think it was Sam who said it last time, that they are just trying to slow the curve. I think this this is a lot bigger than any of us originally thought. I mean, hell, three months ago, we were all cracking jokes about it! We've just never experienced anything like this.

DR. SMITH: You're exactly, right, Edgar. All of this is so new to everyone. How is your mental health during all of this?

EDGAR: It's definitely worse, if I'm being honest. Not having a routine has really gotten to me. I can't even remember to take my medicine half of the time. I'm moved back home with my parents, and they're great, but not having the social support from friends has also been tough.

DR. SMITH: I see. Have you thought about getting counseling?

EDGAR: Yeah, actually, I just started counseling last week. It's all video chat like this, but I'm optimistic for it.

DR. SMITH: Wonderful. Keep making those appointments, okay? And—

[A voice off camera cuts off DR. SMITH. It seems to be coming from ALLISON's camera.]

VOICE: Hey! Do you want to sneak out and go get some ice cream?

ALLISON: *[Speaking to someone off camera]* Oh, yeah! I'm in a meeting right now, though. Can we go after?

VOICE: Yeah, but Mom will be home in two hours, so we have to be back by then.

ALLISON: *[Speaking to someone off camera]* Got it! *[Back to the group]* Sorry, that was my sister. My mom has been kind of crazy about quarantine—we aren't even allowed to go to a drive through to get a Coke. We sneak out every once in a while, just to get out. I promise we're being safe, though!

SAM: That's kind of rough, Allison. I'm sorry.

ALLISON: Yeah, I feel like I'm fifteen again.

DR. SMITH: How is that affecting you mentally, Allison?

ALLISON: It really sucks. I can't see my boyfriend. I can't see my friends. I mean, I have to sneak out of my own house at twenty-one years old just to get ice cream. I feel like I'm caged in. I've been crying a lot more, too. I'm just sad all the time.

DR. SMITH: Have you been doing anything for self-care?

ALLISON: Yeah, actually, I have! And I'm pretty proud of it; I've even gotten my whole family in on it. So every Wednesday, I get dressed up and look all cute and everything. I picked Wednesday because my friends and I used to go to a bar every Wednesday, so it's almost like I still am. It's just been really nice to have something to look forward to every week. Something to count down to.

LUCY: Oh, I really like that idea. I might start doing that.

STEPHANIE: Yeah, me too!

DR. SMITH: I think that sounds like a wonderful tool that we all could use. They say it's especially important to keep a routine during this time. *[Pause.]* How has the actual virus itself affected everyone? Is everyone still healthy and doing okay?

EDGAR: I've been really lucky. I don't know anyone who has gotten it.

AUSSIE: My boyfriend's aunt tested positive. She's the sweetest lady, and she doesn't have any kids herself, so Mark is really close to her. We think she'll pull through, but I don't know for sure.

LUCY: I'm so sorry, Aussie. I hope she'll be okay.

AUSSIE: Thanks. She's not too old, so hopefully.

SAM: A couple of my mom's coworkers have tested positive. She sat next to one of them in a meeting just last week.

STEPHANIE: Oh, wow. Is your mom okay?

SAM: Yeah, we think so. It doesn't look like she has it. But we are keeping an eye on it. My mom is pretty healthy, so I'm sure she'd survive it, but she does have some health issues, so I think it would be harder on her than the average person.

LUCY: Well, hopefully, she just won't have it.

SAM: Yeah, hopefully.

[Pause.]

ALLISON: My cousin passed away two weeks ago. It wasn't COVID related, but we can't have a funeral for him.

EDGAR: I'm so sorry for your loss.

[Pause.]

LUCY: I read an article the other day that said that domestic violence in my area has increased by two hundred percent.

SAM: Jesus.

[Pause.]

AUSSIE: Quarantine just really sucks. Like, I understand why we have to have it. I just wish we didn't.

STEPHANIE: Amen.

DR. SMITH: That's just it, Aussie—it does suck. But I'm proud of all of you. You've all be through so much this year alone, but you did it. You graduate in two weeks. Soon enough you'll be full-fledged teachers in your own classroom, teaching your own students. You're going to change lives. *[Pause and smile.]* Is there anything anyone wanted to talk about that we didn't get to today? *[A series of 'No's]* Alright, well then, I will see you all again in three weeks when you're all college graduates! Stay safe!

[A series of 'Bye's as the screens go black.]

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