

Editorial Remarks

Educating Teachers and Young Adolescents in the COVID Pandemic

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One of the many great things about editing *Middle Grades Review* is the opportunity to read the impressive work of middle grades researchers, theorists, and practitioners and, then, to bring that inspiration to others who care deeply about young adolescents and middle grades education. Throughout the year, we stay abreast of new developments and are always excited to read the latest findings, breakthroughs in thinking, and new applications that authors share. The articles in this latest issue of the *Review* are no exception.

Early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, we published a theme issue that conveyed the status of middle grades education during this challenging time. Two years later, this current issue examines how middle grades teacher educators, teachers, and learners have persisted in this context. Issue 8(2) of *Middle Grades Review* contains two research studies and three practitioner perspectives, all of which push our thinking about what middle grades education is and might be, in a pandemic era.

This issue opens with Griendling and colleagues' mixed methods study on remote teaching and learning environments. Using a convergent mixed methods approach, these researchers evaluated remote teaching to understand the strategies employed in remote classes, as well as the extent to

which remote learning environments were perceived as supportive of young adolescents' basic psychological needs. Despite their acknowledged limitation of a small sample, Greindling et al. offer a nuanced perspective on the experiences of middle school students, their teachers, and their parents and guardians. While the study revealed ways in which remote environments fell short of meeting these human needs, the authors simultaneously remind us how important it is for "adolescents to feel competent and cultivate positive relationships that facilitate feelings of belonging in order to become autonomously motivated to engage in learning and achieve in school."

Next in this issue we feature Cambra-Faraci's autoethnographic study of navigating three identities during the pandemic: teacher, student, and parent. To analyze this experiences, Cambra-Faraci drew upon two years of digital data sources: social media, emails, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and text messages. This researcher situates the work in their funds of identity, which allowed "individual identities to be highlighted independently as well as intertwined in order to highlight three of the prominent roles in educational communities today." Through this study, we are privy to the complexity and opportunity inherent in Cambra-Faraci's identity-

intersections and we are inspired to reflect upon our own.

In “Persisting in the Age of COVID-19: School-University Partnership to Promote Equity-Oriented Teaching and Learning,” a group of teacher educators and novice teachers share their experience partnering for equity during the pandemic-related schooling disruption. In the absence of an onsite course, Leonard and colleagues wondered how they would introduce teacher candidates to young adolescents to emphasize the importance of relationships in teaching. True to these priorities, these authors leveraged and strengthened their own relationships in order to adapt and innovate. In this Practitioner Perspective, they share several strategies and artifacts that bring this innovation—and these relationships—to life.

This issue’s second Practitioner Perspective offers a glimpse into the life of one middle grades teacher as she enacts an “adolescent-centered community of care.” Co-authors Ellerbrock and Highfill push back on the narrative of learning loss and a district focus on acceleration. They thoughtfully describe what a responsive classroom community looks like in pandemic times, in terms of organizational structures, teacher characteristics and practices, and peer relationships. In so doing, they underscore young adolescents’ need for adults who know them well enough to respond to their needs holistically.

Our final piece treats us to a reminder of the power of play. This Practitioner Perspective offers an evidence base for games as central to learning, and subsequently presents a socially interactive model that encourages collaboration, mastery, and fun. Author Thorgersen describes how their middle

grades classroom leveraged a student-crafted and executed game, inviting readers to consider analog games as a strategy to allow increased student autonomy and promote social engagement.

At a time when youth wellbeing has been deemed a national crisis, the articles in this issue of *Middle Grades Review* provide a glimpse into the middle grades education two years into a pandemic. Collectively, they paint a picture of both concern and hope. These articles emphasize the importance of building relationships among teacher educators, teachers, families, and students, a call that takes us back to the foundation of middle grades practice: to know ourselves and our students well so we can create safe and nurturing places to learn and grow.