

Pandemic Pandemonium: Negotiating Identities as a Middle Grades School Parent, Doctoral Student, and High School Mathematics Teacher

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Abstract

This autoethnographic study represents a reflection of my experiences as a parent of middle school children, doctoral student, and mathematics high school teacher through the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States. Navigating all three identities simultaneously presented many challenges, including fear, isolation, and exhaustion; however, it also allowed me to reflect upon and transfer methods that I perceived as effective from one of my identities to one or more of my other identities. Therefore, this study investigated how reflecting upon my own funds of identity influenced my practices as a high school mathematics teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

It is no surprise that the world experienced a huge upheaval caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many parents were mandated to work from home while others lost their jobs, teachers were forced to adapt to a new educational environment, and some students were inadvertently lost in the mix. Families struggled with a multitude of issues, including illness, death, custody, loss of wages, multi-tasking, learning, isolation, mental health, and lack of support (Du et al., 2021; Eales et al., 2021; Kumar & Nayar, 2021; McArthur et al., 2021). Identities and complex feelings were reflected upon and challenged. During that time, many of us were required to understand who we were in our respective spaces prior to the pandemic and negotiate new spaces of parenting, working and studying in the midst of a pandemic/post-pandemic world.

In this autoethnography, I first discuss the theoretical work of Deci and Ryan (2002) in relation to my experiences negotiating my three separate identities. The data collection, coding, and analysis process is explained in detail in order to describe how two emergent themes, support and communication were developed. In order to illustrate these themes, I share three separate stories, derived directly from the data, that showcase these identities. Following a discussion on the usefulness that an autoethnography has in improving the understanding of the various perspectives held by different stakeholders, I explain the methods and findings.

Funds of Identity, which is a branch of Funds of Knowledge, was first introduced by Saubich and Esteban-Guitart (2011) as “the culture-bound stories, technologies, documents and discourses that people internalize and construct in order to make sense of the events in their lives” (p. 84). Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2014) later go on to add that “*funds of identity* is based on the simple premise that people have and accumulate not only their household’s funds of knowledge but also life experiences that ultimately help them to define themselves” (p. 5). Life experiences are distinctive and change over time: Identity is not fixed; rather, it is continuously evolving (Beijard et al., 2004; Gergen, 1991; Josselson, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1995; Sarup, 1996; Torres et al., 2009; Varghese et al., 2005; Weedon, 1987), and is in constant need of reflection and negotiation (Beauchamp, 2009; Sachs, 2005).

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought about an abrupt change in people’s lived experiences. Many identities were impacted and people from different walks of life began to reflect on their identities, including athletes (Graupensberger et al., 2020; Hu et al., 2021), parents (Guy & Arthur, 2020), students (Schaefer et al., 2020; Sokhulu, 2021; Uegatani et al., 2021), and educators (Boncori, 2020; Jones & Kessler, 2020). Personal change and identity development are profound during the middle school years (Bishop & Harrison, 2021; National Middle School Association [NMSA], 2010); it was also profound for parents and teachers during this time as well.

Me, Myself, and I

Identities are complex and multifaceted (Ryan & Deci, 2012). There are many components of my identity that make me *me*; gender, religion, color, primary language, culture, marital status, family, education, and profession, are just a few of the factors that contribute to my identity. As a first generation American with non-English speaking parents, I wrestled with curricula centered around language. The lack of educational support and resources at home during my elementary, middle, and high school years made learning difficult and isolating. I continuously needed to hone my strengths and improve upon my weaknesses, especially in the areas of reading and writing. As a parent and teacher, I actively sought ways to help support my children as well as my students academically, socially, and emotionally. Support was a significant value that was deeply-rooted across my many identities.

Identities can be tricky in that they are not isolated to one space and time but rather they weave together and assist one another (Marsden & Pröbster, 2019; Vitanova, 2018). Since our identities are always present, continuous consideration and reflection is what allows human growth; at least, that is what happened with me.

Problem

The pandemic created many challenges; this was especially true for those of us in the field of education. In March 2020, the first stay-at-home order that forced large urban schools, including the one I taught in, to close; this was followed by hybrid learning in September 2020, with intermittent quarantines thereafter. The interrupted learning environments left many, myself included, to actively reflect on our lives and roles. The gradual and immeasurable amounts of troubles and triumphs in my lived experiences in the three decades prior to the pandemic formed many aspects of my identity leading up to that point in time. In the forced upheaval of the pandemic, I found myself face to face with a convergence of different identities. As every aspect of *normal* life changed abruptly, I teetered and found myself clinging to past values, ideas, and routines.

Almost everyone can relate to being a student. During my time as a public-school student with non-English speaking parents, I received very

minimal educational support at home. Regardless of the obstacles I faced as an English Language Learner (ELL), I loved to learn. That passion grew as I entered each phase of education and those phases became a part of my student identity. My teachers were trained and educated in their craft. During my time as a student, especially as a middle grades student, my teachers made learning relevant and engaging.

The pandemic created a major fork in the road for some in many aspects of human life; especially in education. The disease, laws, and mandates put on individuals, families, businesses, and institutions affected everyone's lives. Students were forced to learn at home from teachers who were given little-to-no remote-teaching training-time. During these unprecedented times, I, and many other teachers including teachers who were responsible for instructing my two middle grades children, lacked the technical expertise involved with distance learning. As a result, some affected students during this rocky transition suffered learning loss (Cambra-Faraci, 2022; Donnelly & Patrinos, 2021; Dorn et al., 2020) but were promoted to the next grade despite learning *gaps* that occurred. In this study, I refer to *gaps* as the discrepancy between the knowledge or skills that a student has learned and what a student is expected to have learned at a certain point in time based on the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics (2010). Navigating my parent-teacher identities, these initial gaps started out small at the middle school level but transformed into craters at the high school level for both my children and my students.

In addition to academic training, teachers were unprepared for the social, emotional, and academic support that the students would need—especially at the middle school level—to support their own identity formation. As a result, teachers, myself included, were not supported and received criticisms—indeed, sometimes verbal assaults—from stakeholders. Many teachers were left feeling frustrated, stressed, and isolated. As we continue to navigate education in a pandemic world, some preliminary reports show that many are considering leaving the teaching profession (Dos Santos, 2021; Martinez et al., 2021). Consequently, two major concurrent problems are likely to occur: (1) A shortage of qualified

educators, thus resulting in (2) Unprepared and unsupported middle and high school students.

Purpose of Paper

The main purpose of this study is to bring to light some struggles that the following stakeholders—parent, student, and teacher—have had since the beginning of the pandemic. In sharing my raw experiences as a member of each of the named groups, I explain and then share understandings that I acquired from my student and parent perspectives; I then show how these perspectives have informed my identity as a high school mathematics teacher. In the unfolding of this work, it is my hope that those who do not identify with one or more of these groups will be able to empathize with others who share the experiences that I do in one or two subgroups (i.e., parents to empathize with teachers and their children, teachers with their students and parents, and students with their parents and teachers). Additionally, stakeholders can take some of my proposed suggestions, tailor them to particular situations, or come up with their own solution(s) to better support individuals in their own educational community.

That's so Lit

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact our lives, some preliminary studies have begun to surface in academia. Scholars have explored student experience in education during the pandemic (Chiu, 2022; Schaefer et al., 2020). Chiu's quantitative work suggests that digital support can enhance student engagement while Schaefer et al. amplified the student voice through an autoethnographic telling of the daily student experience. Studies on academic mothers (Guy & Arthur, 2020; Miller, 2021) provide an insider perspective of the difficulties faced navigating dual-roles during a pandemic. As new studies continue to emerge, there currently exists a gap in the literature pertaining to individuals who simultaneously navigate all three identities—parent, student, and teacher—during a pandemic. This study aims to address that gap by providing insights into how the three identities informed each other. In other words, this study aims to be “lit” in that it hopes to help shine a light on what it was like to navigate three identities during a pandemic.

Methodology

In my life experiences, across all shared identities, reflection is perpetual. It can be as simple as considering whether to address parents by their first name or as complex as revising a unit on polar curves from beginning to end. As such, autoethnography helps to voice these reflections through the telling of lived experiences. “Autoethnography is a research method that uses personal experience (‘auto’) to describe and interpret (‘graphy’) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (‘ethno’)” (Adams et al., 2017, p. 1). I realize that it is not common for a person to be positioned in three different areas of education at the same time; however, my insider knowledge and my self-reflection, through autoethnography, can illuminate the intersectionality of these experiences to better acknowledge the struggles and triumphs. Reflection is a major component of autoethnographies (Ellis, 2004; 2009). As Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) explains, “Core reflection supports the integration of all the levels in a fundamental and authentic way, and helps to build professional growth on the teacher's sources of inspiration and personal strengths” (p. 67).

Researcher Positionality

To better situate my experiences, it is important to juxtapose my positionality pre and post pandemic. I am a first generation American, with immigrant parents, who had little knowledge of the English language. I resided in a racially diverse city in the Northeastern part of the US. In primary, middle, and secondary school, due to my language barrier and caramel tone of my skin, I was routinely perceived as Hispanic by peers and teachers alike; oftentimes, adults would attempt to speak to me in Spanish, rather than Portuguese, which I would have understood. My parents did not have the knowledge, language, or training to help support me in my education. With each milestone, I had to creatively reflect on approaches that propelled my understanding and success as an independent learner.

As a non-white parent in a diverse city, employed in a small affluent suburban school, with the means to support my family, my doctoral education, and profession, I am aware that I have financial and educative advantages that others do not. I acknowledge that there exist hardships outside the scope of this study that

may not impact me directly; however, the unification of my identities allow me to empathize, analyze, and view others' circumstances using different perspectives.

Data Collection and Analysis

In order to provide insights into my lived experience, data was collected from March 2020 through March 2022 using four distinct platforms: social media, emails, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and text messages. All data was extracted, screenshot, and organized in a word document. Emails were accrued from three separate accounts: personal, student, and professional. Data obtained from LMS consisted of Canvas and Google Classroom. Group and individual text messages were obtained from iMessage on my iPhone. Social media posts were solely from Facebook.

The data collected from my personal account were all email exchanges between myself and my children's middle grades teachers. A search for each teacher's name in the email finder search bar resulted in eight threads that resulted in a total of 41 exchanges. Additionally, a text message exchange between myself and my son was added to this data pool that related to one of the email threads.

The forms of data collected from my experience as a doctoral student consisted of eight email threads that were obtained by searching for professors' names. Reviewing archived and current doctoral courses, 20 messages and discussion posts were retrieved via the LMS canvas. One group chat with doctoral candidates in my cohort consisting of 1,023 text, video, emoji, and gif exchanges.

Due to the voluminous amounts of emails sent to my professional email account during the COVID shut down and hybrid learning, a pragmatic approach was conducted. An email search of notable parent, student, and teacher names were investigated. Five email threads consisting of 82 exchanges were obtained. Additionally, 15 thorough student reflections using the LMS Google Classroom were also acquired and examined.

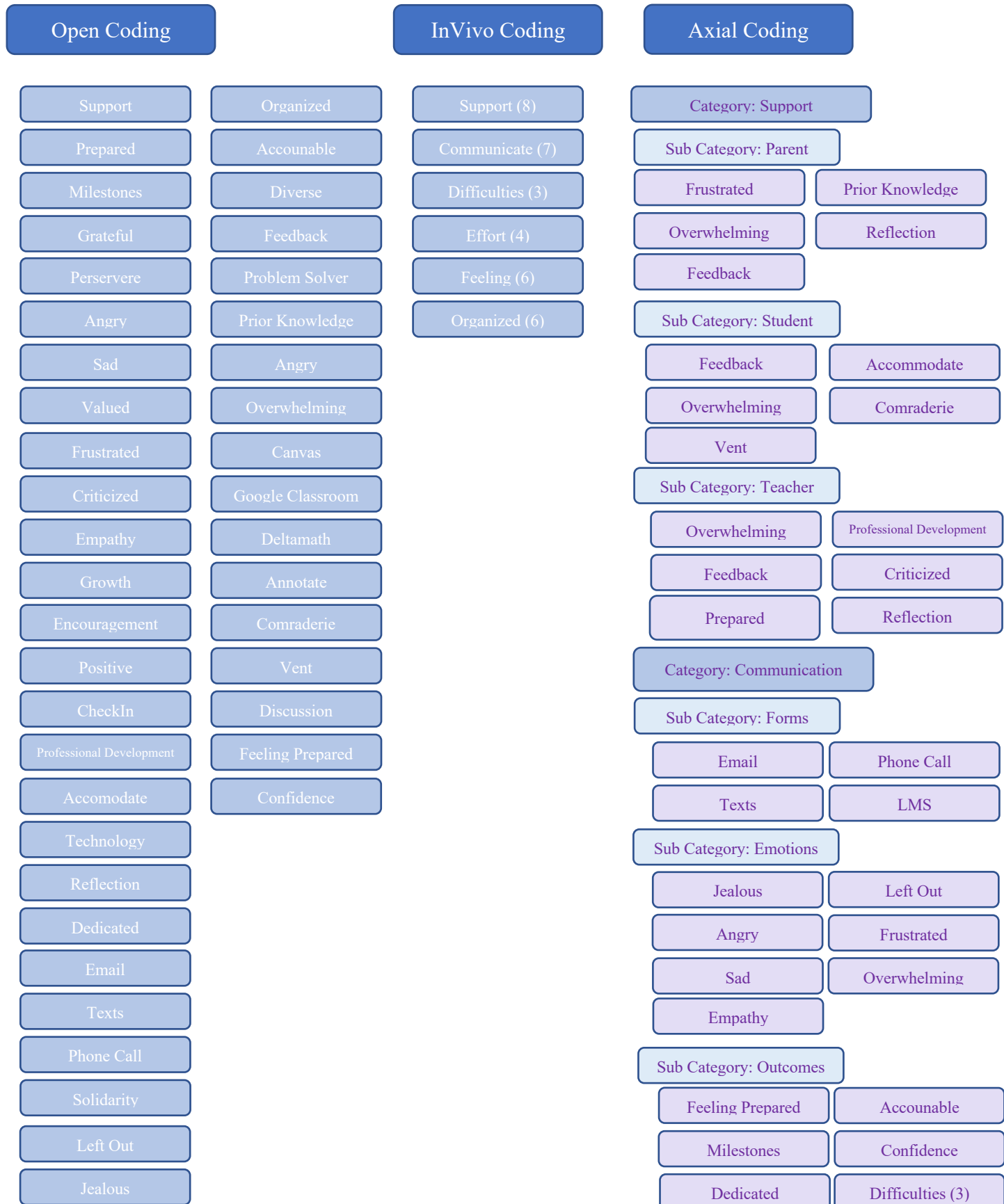
During this time, eight social media posts and their respective comments were documented. Five of the posts were published in the first two months of the COVID shut down while the remaining three were disbursed over the remaining year. A culmination of 811 likes and 387 comments resulted from these posts.

After organizing the data in their respective word files, I reflected upon my experiences in each of the three areas and created an analytic memo. Analytic memos are "a place to 'dump your brain' about the participants, phenomenon, or process under investigation by thinking and thus writing and thus thinking even more about them" (Saldaña, 2021, p. 58). The analytic memo consists of my recollections, reflections, and interpretations of the thoughts and feelings I recalled having during the time period when the data were sent and received, as well as my reflection after some time had passed.

I analyzed my analytic memo through three rounds of coding: Open, InVivo, and axial coding. Initially, as Saldaña (2021) suggests, I open-coded line by line, looking carefully for recurrent ideas. After analyzing the codes carefully, I detected that many codes were used frequently and in the data itself. As a result, InVivo Coding—which places emphasis on the actual spoken words of the participants—was used. As a final step of the coding process, I used axial coding to create sub-categories and then categories. To better illustrate this, 'frustration', obtained in open coding, occurred as a result of not having support while 'prior knowledge' helped me better support my child in his studies. LMS helped as a form of communication between home and school, while 'text' conversations was the main form of communication between my colleagues and I during times of isolation. After thoroughly analyzing the data and codes, I developed the following themes: Support and Communication. (See Figure 1 for the codes obtained in the process.) Each of these themes threads throughout each of my formerly distinctive identities. Following a description of each identity, I use the two themes to show how my identities were threaded, negotiated, and positioned in ways that helped me learn from them.

Figure 1

Coding



Findings

Veronica as a Parent

At the beginning of the 2021 academic year, after enduring a mixture of remote and hybrid learning in his final two middle school years, my newly enrolled high school son came home extremely upset and overwhelmed as he expressed his frustration towards one of his classes. His frustration centered mainly on his teacher. After hearing his explanation, I decided to email his teacher to get her take on how we might best support my son and the teacher herself during this difficult time. After numerous emails and attempts to communicate by phone, I too became frustrated. Emails went unanswered, scheduled phone calls were forgotten and after 10 days of no resolve, I reached out to my son's guidance counselor to ask for their help in setting up a meeting. This in-person meeting allowed us, his parents, to voice our concerns and be heard, and allowed for the teacher to define her three major concerns: lack of prior math knowledge (i.e., scientific notation, metric conversion, and trigonometry), lack of active participation during instruction, and working independently during collaborative group work. The guidance counselor was an important liaison and mediator in this process. The named concerns were all a result, whether directly or indirectly, of the pandemic. As it pertains to math, my son's current qualified teacher assumed that the students were well-versed and taught these skills in middle school as these topics were part of the seventh and eighth grade common core math learning standards. Due to the pandemic, there were gaps in his knowledge that did not support his learning or growth in this particular course. At this meeting, it was clear that the communication between middle school and high school teachers were minimal or nonexistent as the teacher expressed disbelief when I pointed out that these topics were not covered during his middle school years. In my opinion, these major curricular gaps should have been a major topic of conversation among educators in this district prior to this meeting. As a parent of middle school children during a pandemic, it was, and still is, imperative and helpful for me to know that my child was not participating or engaging in group work during class, as this is something I cannot physically observe myself and am genuinely interested in hearing about; however, it is something I can encourage and support as a parent.

Circumstances that occurred via the pandemic created an atmosphere, in middle school, that lacked participatory learning and thus impacted his preparation and involvement in certain high school courses. The collective feedback and clear communication that I received at this meeting was critical in initiating the appropriate academic and social supports, at home and in school, to ensure a successful school year for my child. Immediately after this meeting, I was able to communicate to my son the responsibilities of being an active member of a high school classroom. Through our conversation, it was evident that the lack of practice in middle school—due to remote and hybrid learning—affected class participation and group work in high school. Additionally, we created a home schedule where I would fill in the mathematical *gaps*, noted by his teacher, to further support and practice prior curricula so as not to impede on future studies. Furthermore, in-school extra help supports, from his teacher, were utilized before and/or after school.

Veronica as a Doctoral Student

In my journey as a life-long learner, I always planned on pursuing a doctorate degree. Interacting with others in education, researching effective methods, contributing to math scholarship, and educating future teachers based on my knowledge and experience is a future I always envisioned for myself. However, I did not expect, nor could I ever imagine, that I would be starting that journey completely online at the cusp of a global pandemic.

The workload—reading, writing, and analyzing—was overwhelming. Although Canvas, a LMS, assisted in keeping track of my numerous deadlines and discussion posts, it too was a learning curve. It had been 15 years since I had attended any formal classroom, let alone virtually. It all felt very different than my prior graduate school experience. Put simply, graduate work was no joke. Between my high self-expectations and inexperience as a student myself, I oftentimes questioned my abilities (but never my motives).

As soon as my graduate studies began, the workload increased exponentially. There was an overwhelming amount of literature and required readings for each course. The literature that most benefited my research interests brought me the most joy and easiest reads, while the ones that did not increased my frustration. Many

nights were spent rereading articles in their entirety in order to understand the relevance of their main points. Enrolling as a full-time student, while having other full-time responsibilities, meant finding pockets of time to dedicate to my academics. I used lunch breaks, car rides, and sporting events. I also used weekends. At times, I felt I had no down time, no time for myself. In my mind every millisecond of *free* time had to be productive or else I risked falling behind on deadlines or not having ample time to ask professors for help.

Most recently, I had put my blood, sweat, and tears, figuratively speaking, into an empirical study I had been working on. After receiving feedback from professors and classmates, my work warranted comprehensive revisions due to a rabbit hole I had gone down. Initially I was devastated. Feelings of self-doubt began to resurface. *Do I know what I am doing? Can I handle this? What am I missing? How did I not see this? Do I need to use jargon? Am I out of my league?* As far as academics were concerned, I was my own worst critic, and held myself to extremely high standards. Through periodic check-ins from my professors, mentor, and classmates, I was able to share the struggles and insecurities I faced. My colleagues in the doctoral program empathized with me and shared that they too had had similar experiences. They ensured me that it was all part of the process and their solidarity provided me relief. Our group and private texts offered solace in times of uncertainty. Through this journey they experienced my growth first-hand, validated my writing abilities, and encouraged me to continue my important work in mathematics research. I laughed when a silly gif or video was sent, I felt supported when I saw “we got this,” and more importantly, I felt a sense of camaraderie and community outside of the formal classroom that propelled me to continue this meaningful work. At that moment, communication through text and email was the emotional support I needed.

Veronica as a Teacher

Prior to the pandemic, in my teaching as a high school math teacher for advanced classes (i.e., PreCalculus and Advanced Placement Calculus), most of my instruction included challenging math manipulations, abstract thinking, and elevated problem-solving skills. It had also been common practice to include review of prior skills within each unit to generate confidence within

my students’ abilities as well as to expand and apply their skill sets. The way I executed instruction varied. At times it was “traditional” in that I illustrated graphical representations and math manipulations on the board, while the students wrote in their notebooks or on graph paper. Other times, I provided handouts and they engaged in group work. I made myself available for extra help and set high expectations for my students through this rigorous work.

During the COVID shut down, I decided to alter my instructional approach to keep students engaged. At times, I used Zoom and my expo board at home to provide live instruction, other times I screen recorded my lessons and created newly developed “virtual handouts” to accommodate students’ schedules and keep them organized. Although some of my colleagues felt reprieve from the cancellation of state exams, I did not have the same luxury. The Advanced Placement (AP) Exams would continue as scheduled but adapted to a virtual form. At that time, I did not have time to feel anything. It was *go* time. My students depended on me, and I needed to prepare them for this assessment in one month. These amazing students needed me to finish the curriculum and support them in achieving college credit through passing their AP Exam. Through their continuous feedback via email, live instruction, and Google Classroom I was able to develop a new system to help support hybrid learning in a math classroom. The amount of time it took to develop new materials and content, responding to emails, and providing feedback on assignments electronically consumed my day. I was exhausted but continued to support my students.

To accommodate hybrid learning due to immediate quarantines, I developed learning packets for each unit. Each included an organized list of the lesson titles, homework associated with those lessons, and blank pages inserted sporadically throughout to examine tangential questions or revisit prior skill sets. Additionally, I used a program called Annotate (<https://annotate.net>), where I uploaded a PDF of this resource. Using this software and my iPad I was able to write directly onto the document. In real time, my students, whether at home using a Chromebook, or physically in the classroom space via the smartboard, were able to follow along with the lesson and engage in classroom discussion and math practice.

Through continued student and parent feedback, the unit packets continued to be a valuable source of delivering instruction in the 2021-2022 school year, especially with forced quarantines that would typically interrupt learning and instruction; however, a new set of issues ensued. Retention and mastery of math skills taught during the past two years inhibited student growth and confidence in the classes that proceeded this time period. To illustrate this, I will provide a few concrete examples. In Precalculus, students are expected to factor higher degree polynomials such as $x^5 + 10x^3 + 24x$, but most could not properly factor or recall the methods of factoring the quadratic trinomial $x^2 + 10x + 24$, which is an eighth grade and Algebra 1 Common Core Math Standard (2010). Similarly, during a review lesson in my AP Calculus course of writing equations of lines—an Algebra 1 standard—to develop the skills of writing equations of *tangent* lines, the students could not recall the definition of *tangent*—a Geometry standard—and therefore could not deduce what the problem was asking or how to execute it. As gaps in learning continued to manifest throughout the year, the students often referred to these as *COVID math*—topics they were probably taught but never fully grasped or *marinated* in. Through dialog and feedback, most of the students admitted that they used apps on their phone such as Photo Math (<https://photomath.com/en/>) to complete previous assignments in past courses. In hindsight, many of my students told me that this method hurt them more than it helped.

Parents and guardians expressed their thoughts, opinions, and concerns via email and phone. Some parents expressed offensive and hurtful remarks towards me, my colleagues, and the entire education system; I felt demoralized and unappreciated with all the time and undertakings that went unseen. Other parent comments were kinder and expressed appreciation; I felt valued and respected. Although their approaches were different, ultimately these parents sought to identify supports that their children could take advantage of to assist with current and future learning. I made sure that each reply concluded with encouraging the student to make an appointment with me for extra help during a common free time or to come unannounced to after school math help.

After collaborating via email with other math educators, I discovered that many found Deltamath (<https://www.deltamath.com>) to be a useful tool on a regular basis. Deltamath is an online math program with many practice problems and video lessons from sixth grade math through AP Calculus. Within the math department where I teach, we continue to assign practice problems on current lessons as well as infuse topics from prior grades to exercise and refine student skills. Overall, student feedback shows that Deltamath supports their learning with the added benefit that the program provides instantaneous correct results or thorough solutions to incorrect answers. In essence, using various technological supports I was able to communicate math instruction effectively to my students both in the classroom and at home in real time.

Discussion

Reflecting on and negotiating my three identities during the pandemic was critical in supporting my continuous reflection and growth as a high school mathematics teacher. As a parent, I witnessed the difficulties my middle school children endured with virtual learning as well as the gaps in their learning that were created as a result. Thus I negotiated my pre-pandemic teacher expectations to accommodate this shift in learning. My identity as a parent, witnessing my son's frustration in a particular course in the beginning of his high school career, forced me to take a step back in my identity as a teacher and wonder how many of my own students—who do not have academic parents—were also feeling this way with the added detriment of no help at home. The struggles and gaps that I witnessed, as a parent in my son's learning illuminated the fact that if this was happening to him, then it was most likely happening to many of my students.

In my experience as a doctoral student, I did not appreciate what I perceived as “busy work.” Busy work was what I called readings or assignments that I felt did not contribute to my growth, or felt like a waste of time. As a student, I appreciated when an assignment was meaningful to my studies and not redundant because it allowed me to add to my repertoire of knowledge and expand my thinking. Therefore, every assignment that I created for my own students was purposeful, received feedback, and essential in their individual growth. In creating an atmosphere where feedback and collaboration

was encouraged, my students were supported by a community that inspired them to learn and grow or look for help. This helps students to have affirmative experiences that contribute to their funds of identity (Ryan & Deci, 2012) and this in turn will empower them to “contribute positively to the world around them” (Bishop & Harrison, 2021, p. 207).

The nuances that I perceived between my son, myself, and my students allowed me to be more empathetic, supportive, adaptable, and accommodating to individual needs and struggles. In actively being involved in my middle grade son’s remote and hybrid math learning instruction, I had first-hand knowledge on the math learning standards that were and were not met. I was able to vocalize that to his educators professionally, given my background in math education. Periodically checking in with my middle grade childrens’ teachers, via email, allowed for a supportive school-home line of communication in order to bring mutual awareness about the struggles occurring in and outside the home. Additionally, in witnessing the math difficulties among my students and my own children, utilizing an organized unit packet while educating myself in various forms for technology such as annotate and Deltamath helped assist my students’ individual educational needs in the event of school closures or sudden quarantines. In reviewing student reflections and checking in with students periodically, my lens was widened, and I was able to empathize with their personal and academic struggles. Thus, I tailored assignments to accommodate the emotional needs of the students in the pandemic world. Although more work needs to continue in this area, the gaps have started to minimize and self-confidence through student reflection and feedback began to increase. In essence, I treated and supported my students the way I wanted my own son (and myself) to be considered. My various roles allowed me to view situations from different perspectives. Thus the adaptations in my teaching, through these funds of identity, provided the support needed to increase confidence and preparation in my students within themselves. At this juncture, I toggled my three identities—parent, student, and teacher—reflecting holistically on the needs of each stakeholder in this new world of education.

In my experiences as a teacher, pre and post pandemic, I understand the importance of open communication between the school-home-

community. As a doctoral student, I have been exposed to literature that supports that communicating to families benefit middle grade students (Briesch et al., 2021; Burgess & Anderson, 2020; Garbe et al., 2020; Pace et al., 2020). As a parent, it is important to communicate to a child’s teacher respectfully when a concern arises. After experiencing an array of emails that ranged from extremely hurtful to extremely kind, as a parent, I make sure I read any email I send to my children’s teachers three times: first as a concerned parent, second as the student who is being spoken about, and third as the teacher receiving the email. I make sure I convey my support to both the child and the teacher, while communicating a learning goal clearly. A parent has insider information that can help a teacher support their students. As a teacher, due to the lack of communication I received as a parent, I have increased communication with my students’ parents via email. Initially, I ask parents to share things about their child that might help me *help them* in the classroom as well as provide information on ways to seek support at school and at home through the use of annotate and Deltamath. In our new world, actively communicating is key to supporting student growth.

Conclusion and Questions to Consider

In autoethnographic studies, reflection and lived experiences play a central role in understanding various perspectives. As we continue to live in a world that is ever changing, hearing individual stories can be beneficial to many in the educational community. No matter what your identity or role is, communication is key. For those that are fortunate to share dual (or triple) roles, your funds of identity provide you with invaluable experiences that promote learning. For those who cannot relate to the experience in one of the aforementioned identities, continue to educate yourself and ask someone who does. This research provides opportunities for individual identities to be highlighted independently as well as intertwined in order to highlight three of the prominent roles in educational communities today.

Although this autoethnographic piece encapsulates the reflection of *my* lived experiences, it would be beneficial to the educational community to hear from other voices; primarily that of students. How did support and communication help the middle

grade student? How did the shift in separate educational formats contribute to the student's confidence in curricula?

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