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Educators in the Time of COVID: Metamorphosis of a Profession and of a People

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Educators in the Time of COVID: Metamorphosis of a Profession and of a People

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Educators in the Time of COVID: Metamorphosis of a Profession and of a People¹

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Life is anything but stagnant. Life is a collection of experiences, good, bad, and indifferent. Culture, ideals, and values help mold individuals into who they are, and they are forever growing. People are forever changing because of the experiences that life deals them: a birth, a playground fight, a graduation ceremony, a wedding, a year of traveling, a divorce, a promotion, a bone break, a winning ticket, a car wreck, a virus, a death (see Erdem's interview of Ayres, this issue). What one might see as a minute detail in life could be someone else's life pivoting moment. Thus, "the self is never fixed but remains in flux ... it needs some sort of mental *and* physical continuity to survive. In this respect, a person's social and ecological environment plays a crucial role" (Welz, 2010, p. 280). The challenges that people face and the victories and defeats that are experienced help in discovering identities as mothers, fathers, spouses, partners, parents, children, friends, colleagues, and lifelong learners. In life, "[t]here is room for oneself to determine and to tell how and who one wants to be, but one is also from the very start situated in a social world," and they are "transformed also by events [humankind] cannot direct" (p. 283), events like a devastating, global pandemic.

The following are testimonials, self-reflecting records, of six educators whose lives transformed overnight. Once compartmentalized and only used when needed, their separate roles and identities now merged to meet educator, spousal, and

parental demands. The first text, written by Dr. Brett S. Nickerson, PhD, shows how his life as husband and father collided with his profession as an assistant professor at a university when his wife, a dedicated nurse, was called to help others in need. Nickerson focuses on the strain that COVID-19 had on his role as a husband, father, and dedicated researcher. The second testimonial is written by Mayra A. Garcia, a wife, parent of two, and social studies teacher at a high school; she focuses on how technology was thrust upon her in a way that she had never experienced before and how her professional and parental responsibilities forced her to play many roles. The third piece, written by Claire Murillo, an educator and a mother, who experienced caring for a newborn during a hectic year of changes. She shares her tale of finding a healthy balance and understanding her roles as mother and educator as she experienced a lack of societal support. Regina J. Bustillos, a wife, mother of four, and an educator in a border town in West Texas contributes the fourth reflection. Bustillos shares her struggle to find her way out of what Gloria Anzaldúa (2001) refers to as *Nepantla*. In the fifth reflection, Dr. Qiana S. O'Leary shares her narrative about finding who she is as an educator in this unprecedented crisis. As a social justice educator with 18 years of educational service, she specializes in developing effective transformational practices for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) school communities in her role as a consultant and assistant professor for aspiring school leaders. Finally, the sixth reflection, written by Sara Abi Villanueva, a wife, mother of two, at the time, a graduate student, and an English, language arts, and reading teacher at the secondary level, pieced together a life-in-the-day reflection schedule. Her schedule highlights her struggles with remote learning, being a mother, and staying

positive; however, she also emphasizes how her victories during this challenging time are due to her loving family.

In all six reflections, we see the frustration that we can only imagine other educators around the state, nation, and world could be dealing with. These educators share tales of grief, of frustration, and of the emotional and physical tolls that most educators have experienced during COVID. The stresses that come from transitioning and modifying practices, practically overnight, led to emotional and physical strains for educators both teaching from home and in-person (Daub et al., 2021, this issue). These six educators courageously share their experience(s) of being on the precipices of defeat and despair. However, within their stories, readers will also see hope. They will see educators choosing to not surrender, but to courageously face the uncertainty that this pandemic has forced all to deal with. They will see families coming together. They will see innovative educators fighting for their students. They will see metamorphoses, changes for the better, possibly unbeknownst to the writers themselves, which promise others that dark and unknowing times *can* help mold one for the better.

Dr. Brett Nickerson
Staying Productive During COVID

Virtual Teaching Seminars

Undoubtedly, March 2020 is a point in time that many faculty, staff, and students in higher education will never forget. As an assistant professor of kinesiology, nearly all of my classes were taught in person since my arrival at Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) in Fall 2016. Therefore, the thought of having to transition from in person learning to virtual learning was daunting. Nonetheless, I was

fortunate because my wife was earning an online master's degree as a family nurse practitioner from Texas A&M Corpus Christi. I once questioned her online learning, but saw firsthand, from my wife's degree program, that teaching challenging physiological-based courses could be done in an effective manner. For instance, some of my wife's online classes were extremely difficult, which included Advanced Pathophysiology and Advanced Pharmacology. Therefore, I knew that if she was able to learn material in her classes, then I should also be able to teach my students effectively in classes such as Advanced Exercise Physiology. Accordingly, immediately when schools transitioned from in person to virtual learning, I made sure to take advantage of the virtual teaching seminars offered by my university's eLearning team. The tutorials were helpful and I noticed it quickly. I learned all the key features of programs such as Blackboard Collaborate Ultra, Echo360, and so forth. Altogether, this was the first step necessary to succeed in the midst of mid-semester transition.

Front Line Battle in the Big Apple

As previously alluded, my wife was a graduate student in spring of 2020. Not only was she studying to become a nurse practitioner, she also is a registered nurse with extensive ICU experience. Interestingly, when the shutdowns occurred in March 2020, she was in the last semester of her Master's program. Thankfully, she had completed nearly all of her clinical hours because the universities were no longer allowing students to go into clinics to earn hours. Therefore, we were sitting at home watching all of the news coverage during this time in disbelief about what was going on in New York City (NYC). In early April, she told me there were many ICU

nurses going into NYC to help fight the pandemic. I asked her if she wanted to go and she said absolutely. Therefore, she contacted a travel nurse agency and quickly signed a contract with a NYC hospital where she worked from April to May 2020.

Everyone I talked to about the situation thought it was a bad idea, but they do not understand my wife. She is a former NCAA Division I softball player who also won a Texas high school state championship in softball. She is a leader who likes helping lead efforts for various causes. Therefore, she did not listen to what other around thought and did what she felt was the right thing to do. She is the kind of person you need around when something bad happens because she keeps her cool and figures out answers and solutions.

I fully supported her despite having to stay home in Texas with our two kids while she was in the epicenter with so many unknown questions regarding the disease. This is the point in time when the pandemic was the toughest for me. I essentially took on the role as a single parent, but knew that my wife was doing something she would never forget. One of the most memorable moments of 2020 is when I dropped her off at the airport in Laredo, Texas. The flight from Laredo to New York had a connecting flight in Dallas. I told my wife to call me as soon as she landed in Dallas so I knew she was ok, which she did. While waiting in the Dallas airport, I asked her if there was anyone traveling, and she said the airport was almost completely empty. About an hour later she calls me and says that a big group of nurses and other medical professionals just showed up to her gate and were all headed to NYC on the same flight as her. She said that it felt as though she was on a team that was about to go fight against COVID. That helped ease my mind a little because she felt like she had friends she could lean on when needed. Nonetheless, the

two months she was gone would become really tough because I not only had to switch to virtual teaching for my college classes, something I had limited experience with at the time, but I also had to ensure my kids were adjusting to virtual learning. At the end of the day, I was able to make the adjustments. I simply took it one day a time. Sometimes that meant having my kids interrupt my virtual classroom, asking for help with their class work, seeking attention from me, or simply wanting to say hello to my class. I think many higher education professors with children can relate to this. My students would laugh when seeing my 5-year-old come up to me and ask me questions about her school. Accordingly, it was tough for the kids not to see their mom for that length of period, but I always reminded them of her bravery and how the people in NYC were sick and in need of people's help, from people like their mom.

Stress of Simultaneously Teaching Kindergarten and College

One of the hardest adjustments to the pandemic was helping my 5-year-old daughter adjust to virtual learning. This was a major commitment I had to make; time management was essential. I constantly thought to myself, I am having a hard enough time teaching college students; teaching kindergarten is even harder. Granted my daughter's teacher did her best, but you cannot expect one adult to control 20 kindergarteners online without the help of the child's parents. Therefore, balancing the time spent with my daughter and prepping material for my college courses became very important. It is worth pointing out that my son was in fifth grade at the time, but he is very independent and did not demand the same amount of attention as my daughter; it helped that he had his work

station set up for virtual learning (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Nickerson's Son at His Computer Work Station



However, he is a kid that constantly needs encouraging. Therefore, I had to think of different ways to make sure he did not get bored with the new virtual learning format. It took some time, but I was eventually able to get my daughter to the point where she did not demand attention every minute of the day. During these periods, I was working on material for my college courses. However, it was a big struggle for me. I remember one day thinking to myself how easy it would be to give up the hassle of trying to have my daughter learn online. However, I thought of the importance of establishing a good foundation, especially when in kindergarten. Moreover, I could not give up on her although it would have been the easier option. Therefore, we pushed through it. I can say it was well worth it. This year she is in the first grade, and all of her classes were taught virtual. However, she is almost completely independent, which has made things a lot easier than they were before. Therefore, if I were to attribute success to two things, it would be passion and patience. For instance, I am passionate

about my children doing well in school. However, I knew the challenges were real and that if we were going to get past the tough parts then I would need to instill patience. Collectively, these two things helped me the most when working with my daughter. I never expected to invest so much time into one of my child's schooling. Thus, I jokingly told my friends back in May 2020 that I was happy to officially graduate kindergarten. I am sure there are many parents that can relate to this, and they are to be commended.

Emergency Data

I have always heard the expression of having emergency funds that can cover 3–6 months' living expenses. However, I also like to apply this strategy in the world of higher education. For example, there are data sets I have strategically yet to publish in case situations like this occur. I initially used this strategy when transitioning to my current role (i.e., from PhD student to assistant professor). As you might be aware, it takes time to set up a laboratory and get research going when beginning a new job in higher education. When I first got to TAMIU, it took nearly two years to get my research laboratory set up how I liked since one of the machines I use produces small amounts of radiation. Thankfully, I had "emergency data" (see Figure 2) as I like to call it that allowed me to publish many manuscripts within this period.

Figure 2

Nickerson's "Emergency Data"

I quickly realized early in my career the need to have additional data in the event that there was down time for research and data collection (e.g., transitioning to new job). I never thought this strategy would pay dividends because of a pandemic. However, ensuring I have an emergency data set has allowed me to stay productive during the pandemic. For instance, I complete human subject research in the area of body composition. However, human subject research at TAMIU was stopped in March 2020 and will not pick up again until August 2021. This might be different depending on the university. For example, many of my colleagues have reentered their laboratories and have resumed collecting data for their research projects. Therefore, the pandemic can be a huge hurdle for some professionals whom might not have emergency data, and even more difficult for individuals who have had to cancel human subject research for long periods. Accordingly, one of my recommendations is to keep this in mind going forward. Sometimes researchers jokingly say one can never have too much data. Nonetheless, the pandemic has taught me that it is important to keep a data set or two handy in case something out of my control were to happen. This is particularly true for individuals who complete quantitative research involving human subjects.

Finding a Place to Clear Your Mind

One issue that presented a challenge to me during the shutdowns was the closure of health and fitness centers. I enjoy working out at my institution's recreational center. However, it was closed at the beginning of the pandemic. For me, the recreational center is a place I am able to clear my mind and focus on me. During these times, I actually have my best thoughts concerning research. I enjoy typing down ideas onto my

phone during a workout session, and I feel as though exercising at the recreational center improves my psychological health. Accordingly, I consider it essential to exercise. This really became an issue of mine early on in the pandemic. Fortunately, I was able to make use of my garage space while the TAMIU Recreational Center was closed. Although it was not the same, my garage space provided me a temporary place to go and clear my mind. As an assistant professor of kinesiology, one might assume that I have a nice home gym. Sadly, my home gym is far from nice. It consists of objects laying around the garage not intended for use of exercise. For instance, I have a heavy floor jack that I use to lift my car and change my truck tires (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Nickerson's Home Gym With Floor Jack



I ended up using the floor jack for bent-over rows, which is a back exercise commonly completed in recreational centers with free weights. I also had some heavy 24- x 24-inch floor tiles laying around that I used for military presses, which is a shoulder exercise commonly completed in recreational centers. It was not the same as free weights and dumbbells. Nonetheless, I enjoyed being creative when developing exercises with things laying around in my home garage, which I never would have considered using for exercise prior to the pandemic. Altogether, my ability to adapt, when prohibited access to the TAMIU Recreational Center, provided me a brief satisfaction that I needed each day to get by.

Mayra Garcia The Multifaceted COVID Teacher

Technology Integration. This is a term regularly used during staff development and evaluations, with teacher expectations attached to it. In reality, most classrooms are set up based on the late 21st-century system, which includes students and teachers engaged in lessons using paper and pencil with a computer and projector to assist in the process. In reality, while most students have access to technology in school, the copy machine and printers consume most of the energy.

COVID-19 arrived in Laredo in March 2020. Thinking back, I never imagined a whole year of virtual learning. All I could imagine was possibly getting an extra week of spring break. Instead, we finalized the year at home, trying to reach students the best way possible. Summer came and left, and with it, the promise of normalcy. As COVID-19 numbers increased, fear equally surged. Suddenly the halls, classrooms, and even printers went silent. The only thing left for educators to do was the daunting task of transitioning into fully integrated virtual classrooms and trying to reach students across a small screen. It was then that I realized how limited I was in my application of technology in the classroom.

I, the Teacher

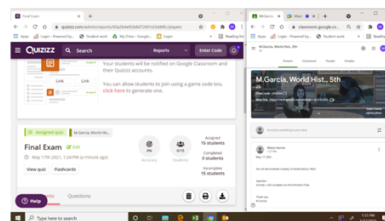
Before COVID-19, I worked almost aimlessly to figure out the “perfect” technology integrated classroom. Technology is constantly evolving, and so are the generations of school-aged children. Therefore, as a teacher, I had to either adapt or risk losing effective ways of providing engaging lessons. While I consider myself tech-savvy, and am familiar with many programs available for classroom usage, I was nowhere near creating an all

technology-integrated classroom. My students worked on group poster projects to decorate the classroom, completed 3D models of monuments, participated in class debates, and completed research papers and multimedia presentations. I thought of it as a good balance bringing together the old with the new. When the all-virtual education plan was introduced, I was not ready. I worked hard to transition my classroom lessons to virtual-learning-friendly ones. I felt like a first-year teacher trying to find my groove while converting my paper files to computer files.

I learned to integrate Nearpod, Newsela, Canvas, Quizizz, Google Classroom, and Google Suites routinely. Those are just a few of many systems available to educators. At times, many of these programs and applications were open simultaneously (see Figure 4). I was tired but optimistic. However, an even more complex challenge appeared, engaging students with different environments facing continuous interruptions. The internet outages, the home responsibilities, the friendly text messages, and the TV all beat my world history lessons on Mesopotamia and Julius Caesar. How do I reach students who are possibly not there?

Figure 4

Garcia's Computer Screen With Multiple Programs Opened



Usually, I would redirect the students' focus on the task or lesson or remove the distraction. How could I redirect my students' focus now? My answer was simple: parents. I have called more parents this year than I have in my entire 6 years of teaching. Even though not all calls were about classroom victories, I found many

warm and empathetic voices on the other end expressing gratitude towards my commitment to their children's success. I have a newfound respect for the term "it takes a village to raise a child." Without the support of the parents, my journey would be one filled with more obstacles.

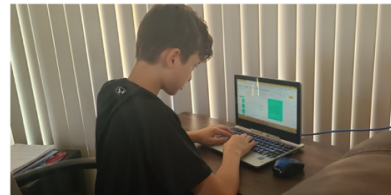
I, the Teacher and Mother

At the beginning of the school year, the city went into shutdown. Teachers and staff were relegated to work from home. While I was relieved to work from home since it protected my family from COVID-19, it created a conflict between my personal and professional life. I am a 33-year-old mother of an 11-year-old sixth grader and a 5-year-old kindergartener. Consequently, virtual learning gave me a variety of new titles. I am now the custodial staff, counselor, cafeteria chef, teacher assistant, principal, and transportation services director of my two virtually educated children. All services are expected instantly and simultaneously; otherwise, pandemonium ensues. It was an endless frenzy of "feed me," "help me," "give me," while I taught world history to 16-year-olds across the screen. Fate also mocked me, as all three of us had different lunchtimes. All I needed was some Disney magic, perhaps Tinkerbell's pixie dust, or Marry Poppins's bag of wonders. But there was no magic for me. Instead, I felt like an octopus trapped in a human body trying to multitask. In the end, I often sacrificed snack time or my children's homework to be a better teacher. After all, I work from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.; I am a teacher first and a mother second during those hours. The reality is more complex, resulting in my two worlds colliding. I often found myself sacrificing my planning time to feed my children lunch, and having to plan at 10 p.m. while my children slept.

Four weeks after the start of the school year, I returned to campus. I was worried this would expose my family to COVID-19, as I did not know what to expect at school. I also had to figure out what to do with my children during working hours. My husband could take time off, but not an entire year or semester. Who would care for them, feed them, and help them with schoolwork? I debated sending them back to school in an alienated setting operating similarly to the one at home. My children attended a different school district than mine, and their teachers' return schedules were different from those in my district. If I sent them to school, they would be limited in assistance and socializing in empty classrooms, so I set them up for virtual learning at home. My son has his virtual learning setup, and my husband and I make sure that he has everything he might possibly need for a productive school day (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Garcia's Son Working at His Virtual Learning Setup at Home



Ultimately, I asked my family for help. My husband and I are not from Laredo, but my parents live in a town less than 2 hours away. They kindly gave up their vacation time to help care for my kids. Thus, I coordinated a two and half month schedule rotation between my mother, father, sister-in-law, husband, and myself (see Figure 6). My children would continue to attend their virtual classes from the safe comfort of home.

Figure 6

Garcia's Planner That Details Family Schedule

In the End

Despite all the challenges COVID-19 brought me, I admit that I grew both professionally and personally. My organizational skills improved. I now say that my classroom and curriculum are fully integrated with technology. I can better empathize with my students and the difficulties they each face at home. Just as I struggled to do my best as a teacher and parent, my students struggled, whether from the constant distraction of the television, cellphone, video games, assisting their siblings with schoolwork, or the consequences of COVID-19 shutdowns. In the end, we all persevered. This year might not have been best for academic growth, but it provided a wealth of information about issues that educators were unaware of. I look forward to next year's face-to-face instruction, where I will apply my developed skills. My future has potential.

Claire Murillo

Teaching and Parenting during COVID: A Skipping Stone

A skipping stone leaps swiftly across a pond, and as it takes its final leap, without warning, it plunges into water. This serves as a perfect example of how the COVID-19 pandemic raged across every inch of the world.

The skipping stone is a solid symbol of my life. As soon as I think I have my footing and a grip on the pandemic way of living, I sink straight down without warning. Before the pandemic, I gushed about the thought of

planning for a second child. When I found out I was pregnant, I envisioned myself strolling through the mall or park while I waited to pick up my oldest from school. To my surprise, my postpartum life stretched miles away from the picture-perfect reality I imagined. Instead, mask wearing, hand sanitizing, and social distancing reigned supreme over everyday living.

During my pregnancy, I juggled teaching on campus and remotely. Because the COVID-19 virus surged near the end of spring break, I did not have to return to teach on campus. I was able to nurture my body and mind at home while finishing off the school year. Never did I expect to spend the latter part of my pregnancy at home.

Technology vs. Education

However, teaching from home posed several challenges. To mend the errors of technological advances through a screen, phone call, or text message is as impossible as trying to reach the highest shelf in a kitchen pantry without a stool, at least for me. Rescuing students from barely-there internet signals complicated online meetings and access to course content. Inevitably, students struggled to complete most tasks and lost social and emotional experiences that aid in academic success.

I was given the opportunity to freely upgrade to the premium version of several learning platforms from several educational software programs as a gift and solution to tackling distance learning. In the end, no matter how fantastic my virtual reality tour of the NASA Space Center appeared or how intimately vivid the words of Ray Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" sounded from an enhanced audio recording, the use of the upgraded platforms was unreachable to most of my learners.

Aside from the technological dilemmas, assisting my son with his online learning

posed several obstacles. His workload involved multiple assignments that kept him working well beyond the average school day. As I helped him with his daily assignments, I wondered about the workload I was assigning my students and if the deadlines I placed were achievable and appropriate for all learners. My son's assignments shed light on a rat-race effort and approach to cover state standards at all cost. Despite all the struggles of the 2019–2020 school year, state standards still played a major factor in a teacher's daily planning. So much so that assigning a million assignments was a last-ditched effort to say everything was covered within the school year. In a pre-pandemic world, ensuring all standards were covered was essential. In the 2021 school year, the focus should be people first, standards second.

After giving birth to my daughter, my thoughts about standards, society, culture, and education magnified as I grappled with breast feeding and pumping. As human as we are, nothing is human centered about the way we live, including the way society perceives nursing women. Mountains of data exist that expressed the benefits of breastfeeding a child for the first year of life, yet society does not support women in a capacity to achieve a yearlong nursing relationship with a child. How could this be?

To establish my milk supply within the first weeks of nursing my daughter, I pumped every two hours from dusk until dawn. Every morning the rhythmic beats of krrrr-poosh, krrrr-poosh, krrrr-poosh greeted me for an uninterrupted 20 to 25 minutes (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Murillo's Pumping Machine, A Morning Ritual

Pumping to sustain the little supply I achieved became a chore. Some days I wanted to give up, and other days I was a breastfeeding/pumping queen. Miraculously, I managed to sustain a healthy supply of breastmilk 8 months postpartum. However, society did not make my breastfeeding journey easy. Every time I attempted to nurse my daughter out in public, I received stares and chatter. Usually, I would nurse in my car if I was out, but sometimes I needed to nurse wherever I stood and nursing while wearing a mask is not a pleasant experience.

Nursing and Pumping: A Constant Challenge

After my 12 weeks maternity leave ended, I dreaded returning to work and trying to pump. On top of figuring out my pumping schedule, I now had to familiarize myself with all the new software to teach virtual learners and in class learners. Stress manifested into an anti-milk producing blocker and I slowly lost some of my milk supply. I cried over several aspects of trying to be the best mother, wife, teacher, and employee. I cringed at choosing to pump, work on grades, or write my lesson plans. Pumping at school forced me to take sanitizing to a whole other level, and hand washing became painful from the dryness caused from the soap.

Breastfeeding, teaching, and parenting pre- and post-pandemic opened my eyes to how much women do and how little they are

acknowledged. Women birth, nurse, and raise children (and tend to the home) while adapting to social constructs society argues to be fair and equal. However, women receive lower wages and are viewed as the weaker gender. Add in a pandemic, and the situation worsens, forcing a skipping stone to plunge into the deep end of a body of water.

Ultimately, breastfeeding strengthens my role as a woman and my capacity to teach. I allow myself a little bit of grace when I miss a pumping session or when my pumping output is far less from what I imagined I would express for the day. And as difficult as it has been to express milk while maintaining my professional and family commitments, I would not change not one aspect of my life. Having been pumping and nursing, exclusively combined, I approach my lesson planning process with the human aspect first and the standards second. I find that my lessons are more personal and relatable. And because I am human, I am kinder to myself.

Regina Bustillos **Finding My Way Out of *Nepantla***

Ne-pant-la (noun)

- a: an in-between space; unnatural bridges, unsafe spaces
- b: a feeling of being unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always in transition, lacking clear boundaries
- c: a tolerance for ambiguity

(Anzaldúa, 2001)

The Mind

The once taught pedagogy for an English language arts and reading course became obsolete with COVID. Beginning a class with a bell ringer, then moving to guided practice and independent practice, and finishing off with some sort of informal

assessment were stomped on by the pandemic. Ironically, the pandemic brought back personalized instruction and curriculum. However, state assessments, district non-negotiables, and time preceded this pedagogy of personalization. The pandemic did not really change learning and teaching, but rather reminded teachers of how learning and teaching should be. Educational gurus such as Bruner (1977) pointed teachers in the direction of “spiraled curriculum.” This included taking skills taught in previous years and connecting them to new skills. However, remembering old skills and learning new skills presented a challenge for remote learners. Their focus was on the screen in front of them and what was going to happen with the pandemic; their minds were not able to focus because of the distractions—COVID, social distancing, quarantine, rapid testing, and remote learning—around them. Students found the distractions more relevant than the teachers’ lessons and assignments.

Historically, teachers put an emphasis on learners’ needs. If the student was showing symptoms of anxiety, for example, then teachers rechanneled that energy into journaling, thereby personalizing instruction. Today, if students are showing symptoms of anxiety, teachers refer them to the counselor or an outside agency instead of personalizing instruction to address needs. Mitchell (2017) explains how teachers’ identities and learners’ identities undergo “a new individualism” with personalizing lessons (p. 102).

As the economy, society, and technology changed, the students and the teaching also changed. Prior to COVID, personalizing instruction and curriculum was not a novice idea. Not only did the pandemic remind teachers to personalize instruction and curriculum, but also forced teachers to put emphasis on technological needs. In addition, educators were occupied

with other assigned duties that pushed aside, yet again, personalized instruction and curriculum. However, it was crucial for teachers to bring back personalized instruction and curriculum because it was the key to increasing student engagement, which was missing with remote learning. At first, students turned their cameras on for the first 5 minutes of class, but then the students would magically disappear. Unfortunately, after numerous reminders to keep cameras on and to participate actively, more student absences occurred. For a plethora of factors, students did not engage with curriculum and did not engage with peers in class. Pre-COVID, educators worked in loud, face-to-face classrooms; however, the pandemic introduced to teachers and students a virtual and eerie classroom of silence. This just showed how necessary it was for educators to make learning relevant for their students. Personalized instruction and curriculum needed to be reinforced, especially during the pandemic. However, my numb mind was in a state of *nepantla*. I had to find ways to step out of my comfort zone in order to create creative lessons. Literally speaking, I found myself looking for inspiration to create lesson plans in the middle of the dried-out Rio Grande in New Mexico (see Figure 8).

Figure 8

Finding Inspiration: Bustillos Sits in the Rio Grande Riverbed, in New Mexico, With her Chromebook and Literature Books



The Body

Even with 15 years of experience, I felt as if my hands during remote learning were moving at jet-like speed, but my feet were stuck in quicksand. In one area of my house, my 22-year-old was struggling to connect to Wi-Fi before submitting a college paper. My 14-year-old was stammering in Spanish. My 10-year-old was stabbing his dinosaur school-issued Chromebook keys. My 5-year-old was stuttering to find purpose in saying his ABCs repeatedly to a computer screen. All while I occupied an *in-between space* in the house, I strenuously kept my composure, day after day, in hopes of providing some sense of normalcy for both my kids and my students. Internally; however, I was a mess.

Initially, I utilized one computer, the Dell laptop, craftily juggling the transition from an attendance window, to an annotation window, to a discussion post window, and lastly a Kahoot! window. Shortly after, I began utilizing two screens, the Dell and now the bigger and better Samsung to multi-task quantitative job functions and qualitative teaching. Although the two screens did provide some ease with remote learning, student engagement seemed to be another pandemic I needed to deal with. Not only did I have to switch screens, but also, I had to switch the type of questions I was asking, the type of writing prompts I assigned to avoid Google searching, and the type of assignments I asked my students to complete. To get my English learners to participate, I had to provide the sentence stems to get them to voice their opinions on Zoom. To get the at-risk learners to participate, I had to color code my slides with a move-over mouse to show my place while on Zoom. To get the gifted and talented learners to participate, I had to offer choice menus on Zoom. Between screens and Zooms, and Zooms

and screens, I found myself transcending more and more into nepantla.

The Soul

Despite all the instability, I tolerated it all. I built a tolerance for ambiguity. I took what I had learned in my education and English courses about personalizing instruction and curriculum, and I applied it to home schooling my children and to teaching my students using Zoom. Assigning zines, or journaling, provided me with an insight into the way a student thought and why they reacted to certain situations. Requesting students to include a picture of themselves on a class Google slide added authenticity to their work. Placing students in breakout rooms on Zoom helped them regain their confidence and voice in projects when collaborating with their peers. Breaking down rhetorical situations in relevant articles provided survival skills to help cope through the pandemic. Addressing the learners' needs through reading or writing helped them stay focused and motivated to keep learning. This tolerance for ambiguity meant that I had to be consistent, a multi-tasker, structured, empathetic, organized, a great listener, and a creator of a purposeful curriculum to address the needs and time for relevancy.

When there was no time before, the pandemic gave people time: time to reflect. After a year of working remotely, after a year of working on personalizing instruction and curriculum, I learned to talk to the student again, to listen to the student again, and to get to know the student again. The pandemic reminded me of why I became a teacher in the first place. I had found my way out of nepantla.

Dr. Qiana O'Leary Social Justice Educator

The unprecedented experiences of COVID-19 have made a tremendous impact on the American educational system. The 2020–2021 academic year shifted how schooling in America was traditionally offered. Confronted with a global health crisis, school districts across the nation opted to adopt various virtual instruction models to provide K–12 students with distance learning. Ultimately, this shift has taken a toll on children, parents, teachers, and all school site and district staff members. The once-masked socio-economic disparities, learning gaps for marginalized learners, lack of early childhood development supports, and the digital divide have all come to the surface, making it highly challenging to educate children. Honored to serve in my role as a 12th grade English teacher, I have been stretched this year beyond limits. In all my 18 years of education, I have never felt instructionally irrelevant for the next generation of world changers.

The New Norm in Education

Educators began the first six weeks of the school year teaching virtual instruction. On day one, my alarm went off. I took a shower and got dressed, brewed my coffee, and sat at my home office desk with my laptop ready. I logged into the virtual classroom through Microsoft Teams, and all I saw were photos and blank screens. District policy offered Students the right to privacy, which meant they were not required to show their face on the computer screen, and they were not required to use the microphone to respond audibly. Thus, my primary source for student engagement was the chat feature in our virtual learning space.

A vital component of my instructional pedagogy was hindered. Building rapport with students is one of the most foundational elements of creating a safe learning community that promotes critical thinking and academic discourse. Determined to overcome this social barrier, I spent many hours researching and learning about new technologies that would allow me to establish healthy relationships with my students within this restricted academic setting. It was difficult for me to accept that I could teach a student for 185 days but never see their face or hear their voice. This was beyond abnormal. It was utterly disheartening.

My seniors and I managed to overcome the hurdles of the first weeks of virtual instruction. Wi-Fi interruptions, broken computer parts, misplaced computer chargers, conflicts with student job schedules, and low assignment completion rates had become a part of my daily dilemma list. However, I successfully created strong virtual relationships with my students, which resulted in high attendance rates. Since my district offered in-person instruction during the second six weeks of school, I was greatly looking forward to returning to the classroom to implement a hybrid instructional model. Both excited and intimidated, I wanted to make sure that I had the best setup for my students who opted to learn virtually, as well as for those who opted to attend class in person. The Saturday before the second quarter began, I went to Best Buy. I spent approximately \$500 on the latest technological devices to ensure that my classroom was well equipped with sound, lighting, and video cameras. I hoped to eliminate as many challenges as possible as I chartered this new teaching territory.

The Struggle is Real

The end of quarter one was devastating. Nearly half of the students were failing at least one or more classes. These outcomes were not unique to my campus. Houston-area schools in multiple districts were wrestling with the same struggles. In the early winter of 2020, a reporter from the *Houston Chronicle* reported direct impacts between the novel pandemic and student failure rates (Carpenter, 2020). Many students failed because they did not log in to their virtual classrooms and/or they had many missing assignments. To remedy the results, I created an intervention opportunity for students to complete work during the winter break. I offered all students the chance to complete a mini packet of assignments that would demonstrate their mastery of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) taught during the first 12 weeks of instruction.

Additionally, students who needed my assistance could reach me for one-to-one tutoring sessions or contact me to answer any questions about the assignments. To my dismay, only 10 of 117 failing seniors completed the packet (see Figure 9) causing the majority to be offtrack with high school graduation requirements. This personally affected my self-efficacy as a teacher. Although my peers had nominated me as a teacher of the year, and I held the highest attendance rate at my school, I did not feel that I was supporting the success of my students. Many times, students need interpersonal skills from their teacher to support their achievement in the classroom. In the past, I have been able to high-five my students to affirm their critical thinking or offer class competitions to build morale. Still, with this new norm in education, the virtual barrier made it challenging to connect with disengaged learners. Even partnering with parents did not assist. The

momentum to connect within class would most often be short-lived after parent/teacher meetings.

Figure 9

O'Leary's Winter Intervention Packet

Winter Break Intervention
Due: January 28, 2021 @ 6pm

(All activities must be complete to receive credit. Partial credit will not be given)

Instructions: Complete all activities listed below on one document. Use MLA format and be sure to add a title for each activity.

Activity 1 - Memoir About An Elder (100pts)

Step 1. Interview an elder (80 years or older) in your family or community. Ask questions about a significant event that occurred in their life.

Step 2. Write a **memoir** about the event. Be sure **not to write a biography** about their entire life but only focus on one specific event.

Activity 2 - Analyze the Conflict (100pts)

Step 1. Read the article linked [here](#).

Step 2. Identify which of the six types of conflict the protagonist is experiencing.

Step 3. Identify the theme of the text.

Step 4. Write a one page analysis of how the conflict in the story connects with the theme of story (remember there can more than one theme and more than one conflict so be original)

Activity 3 - Persuasive Paper (100pts)

Step 1. Read the article linked [here](#).

Step 2. Choose an argument or claim from the text.

Step 3. Summarize the argument or claim, and then explain why you agree or disagree with it.

Step 4. Support your position with evidence from the text.

Note. Highlighted sections are emphasized for O'Leary's students

Examining Student Experiences

The majority of my students were drowning, and I did not have a lifeline to give them. An end-of-year survey (see Figure 10) was given to 119 of my high school senior students, all of whom reside in the southern region of Houston, Texas. The majority of these students self-identified as Black/African American (49%) and Hispanic (46%) between the ages of 17–19. When asked about their virtual learning experience, 73% reported they struggled with the distance-learning model. However, 89% of the student participants perceived their academic performance to be satisfactory before COVID-19. Although the student participants did not identify a primary source for their challenges with distance learning, 50% of them became employed after the pandemic, a 21% increase before the pandemic. Of those recently employed students, 47% indicated their families suffered financial hardship as a direct result of the pandemic, leading to more than half of those simultaneously working full-time jobs while completing their senior year of high school. For many

families, education for their children has become secondary to their health and financial stability.

Figure 10

O'Leary's End-of-Year Student Survey

CLASS OF 2021

End of Year Survey

Please complete this anonymous survey for Dr. O'Leary's research data collection.

My current age is

16

17

18

19

My gender is

female

male

other

I identify myself as

Hispanic

Black/African American

White

Pacific Islander

Asian

Biracial

Other

Concluding Thoughts

Education has entered a new era. The new norm in education requires dismantling irrelevant systems of schooling. This shift forces all stakeholders to reevaluate how we educate our babies. Standardized testing data will no longer be the final crutch for determining student success. As educators, we have to think differently and creatively. We have to resolve this by trying unorthodox approaches to engage students. Educators have to be innovative because students are experiencing something never seen since the first public school was established in 1635. As educators, we have to be honest to admit that none of us are experts. This is not a competition, but it is a crisis. I am optimistic that we will overcome, and by using this disruption in the school system to disrupt inequity and

classism issues, educators can powerfully prepare children for an unimaginable future.

Sara Abi Villanueva

Teacher's Log: Stardate, 12102.6

(21st century, 21st year, 02nd month, 6th day)

4:30 a.m.

I hear the sounds of my husband fumbling in the dark for his uniform. He tries his best to let me sleep. A *Godsend*.

4:55 a.m.

He kisses me goodbye and tells me to have a wonderful day. I reply with a “be careful” and “I love you.”

5:15 a.m.

I force myself to get up knowing that another 5 minutes will throw my morning schedule off. Today is a treadmill day, so I quickly put on some workout gear and turn on my treadmill. Today's goal, like most of my other mornings, is 25 minutes. At a 4% incline and a decent, yet challenging speed set at 3.5. I walk up the imaginary hill with my Kindle safely placed in front of me. Today's text, *Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI*, by David Grann. When I forget to charge the Kindle, which is sadly often, I have my hard copy of Lee Child's *Night School*. I read a little bit of everything. Except horror. Never horror.

5:40 a.m.

Sweating, but full of endorphins, I grudgingly save my page and head to the shower. I need to be showered and dressed by 6 so I can have enough time to make and eat breakfast before having to wake up my littles. I think I will have some *chilequiles* today.

6:00–6:15 a.m.

A semblance of freedom and tranquility. Today, I choose to watch the news. More travesty around the world, but I choose to also focus on the hope that I see in a few of the lighter stories.

6:15 a.m.

As if by clockwork, my 11-year-old son comes dragging his log-like body looking for his breakfast. “Your parfait is in the fridge.” Yes, I make him a homemade parfait because I am not making daily trips to McDonald's. *I am a teacher, not a millionaire*—at least that is what I tell him all the time. Though technically a preteen, he needs a good 20 minutes of me constantly reminding him to wash his face, brush his teeth, quickly eat, get dressed, comb his hair, brush his teeth (yes, again), and set up his learning station on the dining room table.

6:30 a.m.

Once I see everything is set to go for both my son and me, it is time to awaken the *Kraken*. Wait, I mean my very active and attitudinally challenged 4-year-old-daughter. Unlike her brother, who moves like molasses on a cold wintry day, she is a torpedo at full speed, which is why I choose to wake her up last. She quickly brushes her teeth, puts in her breakfast order (right now it is between chocolate cereal, the tiger cereal, or pancakes), and makes the all-time important decision of what to wear. What will it be for today? “I'm going to wear the flower dress, mommy,” she says decisively, her words bordering between strong suggestion and assertive statement. I stand there slightly proud, but ever conscious that her attitude does not lean towards the latter.

6:45 a.m.

My daughter is dressed and sitting at her table waiting for me to bring today's choice—pancakes. It does not take too long.

I have learned how much flour it takes to make only two pancakes during this quarantine. An umpteenth reminder goes out to my son to quickly finish eating and to start setting up his learning station.

7:00 a.m.

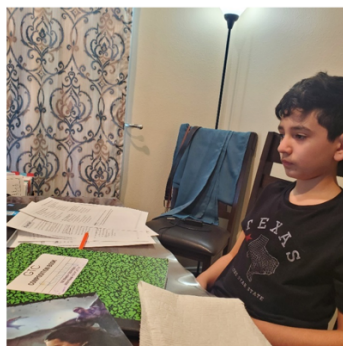
I begin to clean up the kitchen as much as possible and to hasten my son's movements; I begin to clear space for his workbooks, as my attempts to hone in on any telekinetic abilities seem to prove fruitless. No X-Men qualities today.

7:30 a.m.

My son begins his independent reading (see Figure 11). My husband and I are so grateful that we have found audio books for him to listen to. He learned to never make excuses for having dyslexia. "Where there's a will, there's a way!" I repeat to him as he chooses his book for today. His reading choice for today—a text about WWII code talkers. He begins to listen to it. I have 15 minutes before I need to set my daughter up for her virtual classroom, which I have set up in my home office.

Figure 11

Villanueva's Son Sitting at the Dining Room Table, Listening to an Audio Book



As he listens to his audio, I ask him to pause and reflect on what he just heard. My attempts to model these metacognitive skills will hopefully pay off in the end. I remind him that if he needs any help, to just head on over to my office and ask. There have been

issues in the past where he does not want to bother me with questions, leaving my son and me puzzled by his assignments; it has taken quite some time for him to feel comfortable enough to ask the teacher questions as well. A virtual classroom leaves little room for privacy when questions are asked in front of everyone. I am sure it is an unnerving experience for many.

7:45–8:15 a.m.

My daughter sits to the left of me at my L-shaped desk. She has her school-issued iPad propped up by a letterbox of mine and her bag of colors and pencils next to her. All the energy that once existed as she readied herself for school has now faded away. I think the idea of school is much more entertaining for her than the actual reality of it, at least the virtual reality of it. Though she is in pre-kindergarten, she is not a stranger to an academic environment. She has been in daycare since she was 6 months old. I think it is because of her lifetime experience with school that she does not seem to like *actual* school. She was formerly actively engaged in a community, a hands-on approach, to dancing and conversing. Now, she is asked, like all other students, to sit quietly in front of her device ... zombied-out ... camera on ... microphone off.

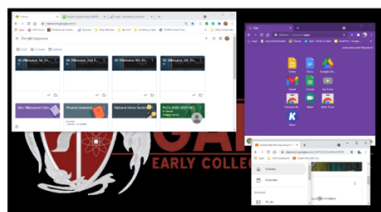
I will say this though, for both my children, I know they miss their friends, and I know that they definitely miss the movement and fluidity of a busy school day, but their teachers have really gone beyond to make this already difficult challenge a lot less boring and sad. As my daughter listens (I hope she's listening) to the prerecorded announcements, I sign in to my Google classrooms, answer my work emails, and make sure that my agendas, journals, and assignments are ready to go. I have them scheduled to open, an option that Google classroom provides, at specific times. However, as educators all know by now:

technology is great when it is great, but frustrating when it does not work the way it needs to work.

By 8 a.m., my son's teacher has already started with the announcements and attendance. I have the door to my study ajar, so I can keep an ear on him—as much as possible. I actually have multiple Google windows open to keep track of my son and daughter (see Figure 12). Helicopter mom to the max! I have to be, especially when I am expected to work and homeschool at the same time.

Figure 12

Villanueva's Screen With Multiple Google Classroom Windows Open



Note. In the upper left corner is my Google classroom set up. In the upper right corner is my son's Google window. The bottom, right corner is my daughter's Google window.

8:20 a.m.

I am fortunate enough that my daughter has asynchronous work when I begin my high school English 1302 support class. I log in with my massive headphones and then let the students know that their journal is posted; they begin to work on it while I get my school issued iPad ready to take attendance. So many devices. Today my students and I are discussing the concept of borders and how they need to incorporate this concept in their unit 1 essay.

My son quietly walks in and signals that he has a question. "Can you message Mrs. T to let her know that my math assignment doesn't want to upload?" It is his asynchronous math time, and he is worried about getting late points deducted. As much of a change that this year has been, the change in environment and lack of social distractions has actually helped him focus on his work. While my students wrap up their journal writings, I quickly send a message to my son's teacher about his concern.

8:30 a.m.

My daughter has begun her reading lesson. Today's lesson is about the letter D. I try my best to discuss the lesson objectives with my students and to not distract my daughter who sits, once again, zombied-out with her pink headphones, hopefully listening to the teacher play a video about the letter D, *D...D for dinosaur*.

9:00 a.m.

Fortunately, it is asynchronous reading time for my daughter. I take her assignment from her folder and re-explain what I assumed the teacher asked her to do—circle all the letter Ds. I continue with my explanation and examples of how to incorporate the concepts of borders within the body paragraphs, and at 9:25, I excuse my students for their asynchronous work, which is to continue drafting, reminding them that I will stay connected in case they have any questions.

9:50 a.m.

My second block starts. My daughter decides that she has enough time to go grab a toy, ignoring my requests for her to sit down and ready herself for science.

10:00 a.m.

My son peeks in and whispers that he is about to start gym. He goes to his room for that because ironically, he *does not* have enough room in the larger dining room to do sit-ups; he clarifies that it has nothing do with having toys in his room. Not having enough time to point out the skewed logic in his argument, I just simply nod my head.

My daughter is logged back on for science, and sits with the largest pout on her face because I confiscated her unicorn. The pout will stay on for a good 10 minutes after, of course. She sits, unamused, and seemingly *done* with online schooling (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Villanueva's Daughter "Done" With Online Schooling



I repeat the same lecture with my second block. As they are busy looking at the examples I post in the chat box, I turn around and give my daughter her science sheet and a much-needed look of encouragement.

She is learning about seasons. I can see her teacher pointing to specific colors, so I tell my daughter to color in the seasonal pictures. I ask, "What colors do we see in the summer?"

My question seems to be rhetorical because she grabs four different colors and begins her rainbow masterpiece in the box labeled autumn. I just breathe and return to my students.

10:30 a.m.

My daughter begins her math lesson. I begin playing a helpful revising and editing video I made for my students the evening before. This is the toughest time for me. My daughter, though only 4, seems to really struggle with identifying her numbers, at least when they are out of order, so I try my best to pay attention to what she is doing during her math time. I am glad to hear that a teacher aid will be providing extra help during a small group session. I ask my students to patiently give me a minute while I log my daughter from one class to another. I think they see me trying to juggle everything, so my 16- and 17-year-old

students smile, and some of them even write in the chat box, "no worries ma'am." With so much terrible in the world, it lightens my heart to see compassion still exists. My daughter and I wait, and wait. The teacher sends a message apologizing, but the teacher aid cannot be reached. No small group today.

I once again worry, as I see my daughter continue to struggle with her numbers. I make a mental note to spend some time to review them with her after dinner.

10:55 a.m.

I excuse my students for their asynchronous work. My son pops in once again and lets me know that he is going back to the dining room to log in for social studies. I cringe when I see him grasping the laptop, the charger, and his book in one hand, and his water bottle in the other. "Carry it correctly," I remind him; once again, my prayers for telekinetic powers are raised to the skies. *Nope. Still no powers.*

11:10 a.m.

Planning time. By this time, my daughter is done with her half-day schooling, and I send her to her room across the hall. She is reminded to leave her door open so I can keep an ear open for her while I grade, email, and call parents. I seem to be a few ears short.

My son walks in and lets me know that the dog is crying. Should he play with him for a while? I remind him that he should be in class, and that the dog will survive a few hours of him not playing fetch. He sulks out of my room. *That was obviously not the response he was hoping for.*

12:00 p.m.

My eyes are done. I cannot look at the screen anymore. Anyways, it is just a little shy of my lunchtime, so I take the time to

start putting together meals for the kids and me. My son's lunch is at 12:30, but if I wait too long, I will not have time to make him lunch. I have to start on it now. Today's treat: homemade pizzas. Premade dough that cooks up in the oven in 6 minutes. Cannot go wrong with that. It is Friday, anyways.

As I prep lunch, I try my best to not distract my son sitting just a few feet away from me. He gets distracted so easily. My daughter runs in asking if I can play with her and her dollhouse. I sadly remind her that I am working and try to console her with the idea of pizza. It does not seem to work. *How is she supposed to understand that mommy is working even though mommy is at home?*

No pizza for me today. I eat my lemon pepper tuna; have to watch that figure after all. Too much sitting in front of a computer this past year has not helped.

My daughter joins me. I place my son's lunch in the microwave so it does not get cold. When he is getting ready to eat, I use the rest of my lunchtime to put my daughter down for her nap. She has to nap. It will be a very difficult afternoon if she does not. Luckily, today it only takes a few minutes.

I come back out to see my son enjoying his pizza, and I remind him to log back on when he is supposed to. I take the last 15 minutes of my lunchtime to work on a research piece I am preparing for publication. Within those 15 minutes, I tackle two paragraphs, editing for grammatical and mechanical errors. I also take a minute or two to check my personal email; I am waiting for a response from an author I want to interview for a submission to a scholarly journal. *No response, yet.*

1:15 p.m.

My fifth block begins. This group is starting *Beowulf*. I love a good, epic poem. I set up the Google meets breakout rooms. Those who have used it know that it is a great feature, but it does have its flaws.

Teachers can enter and exit the different groups to monitor and observe; however, when a teacher is in one room, there is no way of monitoring what is being discussed in the other rooms. This is a little, or a lot, worse depending on the group of students then doing group work in the actual classroom. Educators know that the students will start discussing personal topics; for the most part, however, it is easily spotted and students are redirected. Sadly, this is not feasible in virtual group work.

Thank God that my daughter is still napping because my dean decides to join in for an observation. Honestly speaking, I really do not have any problems with my dean coming in to class. She has been very understanding and a great support for the English teachers in our district. She knows that we are all struggling to do the best for our students and our families. I explain that the students are working on their writing assignment and before I know it, she is gone. Just in time, too. It is 2:24, and in walks my daughter with her disheveled hair—half awake, half asleep.

I let my students go for their asynchronous work as my daughter begs me to carry her. In walks my son to let me know that he is struggling with his asynchronous science assignment.

I make room for him on my L-shaped desk and listen to him read the question. I hear the words gravity, friction, and velocity—and my blood pressure rises. I have no idea what he just asked. Those words are foreign to me. With three minutes left before my last block starts, I look at his text and speed read through the page-long information. *No telekinesis, but beyond grateful for these speed-reading abilities.*

I ask him to reread the first and second paragraphs, and to take notes on the side. The answers are right there, but I need him to look for them. I can tell he did not read. Reading aloud works best for him though.

He reads them aloud and stops as he hears the answer come out of his mouth. He just gives me a smirk, knowing that I know he had not read.

I urge my daughter to return to her room and ask her brother to quickly put on a movie for her so I can begin my class.

He is done with school as well and just has two assignments to finish. He needs a break. I can see it in his eyes. I make another mental note to help him finish his homework after dinner.

2:40-3:45 p.m.

Last block! This group though is a lively one. Not rambunctious, just lively. They participate; they ask questions, they keep me on my toes, which is what I need at this time of the day. I go over the same lesson I used for first and second block. This group, however, knows my daughter very well. At this time of day, she is beyond bored and is ready for me to play with her, which means she wanders into the office quite often smiling and waving at my students from behind me hoping to make them laugh. And they do, and thus, the cycle continues.

At 3:40, I excuse them for their asynchronous time. I have worked for 14 years as a teacher, and I do not think I have ever felt as tired as I do now in my 15th year. Sitting at a desk, in front of my laptop and second screen, which my husband helped connect for me, is draining, both physically and emotionally.

4:00 p.m.

I hear the kids and dogs run excitedly to the door. Daddy's home. He urges them to step back. Thanks to COVID, the familiar greetings with hugs and kisses are no longer afforded. Safety first.

By this time the kids know, they stop short of a foot from him and just wait for him to say hi. He waves to me from the

office door and gives me a metaphorical tag: he is in (see Figure 14). *A Godsend.*

Figure 14

Villanueva's Husband Home From Work



4:15 p.m.

I sign out of work for the day, but my day is not over, yet. I head to the living room to see my husband, showered and changed, sitting with my son going over his assignments. *A Godsend.* My daughter sits next to him listening to her audio books.

I breathe.

For the first time since the morning, I take a few minutes to compose myself. It has been a long one. My heart melts as I see my husband work with our children. He was never particularly fond of school, but he always reminds my children how important education is, and that they should never take it for granted because there are so many people out there who do not have the chance to get an education.

5:00 p.m.

Once I am in my comfortable loungewear, it is time to get dinner ready. I had taken tilapia down from the freezer the other night and get to prepping. My daughter walks over asking if she can help. She loves helping me in the kitchen. I find a task that she can handle, dressing the vegetables, and leave her to it.

Only 30 minutes later and the dining room is no longer my son's study place, but

a dinner room, yet again. We sit as a family, eat, and discuss the day's events. I have to admit that this pandemic has given us more time as a family. My husband's hours have changed so we see more of him at home, and I am no longer stuck in traffic trying to get home. Now, the commute is a breeze, with only the dogs causing traffic jams in the hall.

6:15 p.m.

The table is cleared and my husband and son continue to work on his last assignment. Our daughter has decided to play fetch with the dog in the hall. I decide to just let her.

Along with my full-time wife, mother, and teaching jobs, I also work as an assistant to the editor for an international education inquiries series. I take the 15 minutes I have before an editorial meeting at 6:30 to work on a few paragraphs I am drafting for a conference.

I quickly check my email; nothing new besides a reminder that my car insurance needs to be renewed. I make note of it in my planner, which reminds me of one of the mental notes I made earlier. I quickly rush to the dining room to ask my husband if he can go over numbers with our daughter. I get there to see her tracing the number 4 that he had written out for her. *A Godsend.*

7:45-8:30 p.m.

Research meeting ran short. We tend to go past the two-hour mark weekly. I know friends and family do not always understand, but I really love what I do, which is why I do not find it burdensome. I love teaching. I love researching, writing, editing—the full works.

Now, it is time to get the kids ready for bed. I am shocked to notice an anomaly in the house. *Silence.* My husband sits watching his favorite television show, my daughter next to him watching a cartoon on

Netflix, and my son on the recliner playing his video game. The type-A person in me is ready to lose it. I am not a big fan of screen time, especially nowadays when all we do is go from one screen to another. However, I have learned to choose my battles. The hubby has had a long day, too. So have the kids.

“Shower time.” No signs of life.

“Shower time,” I say again, with a little more emphasis. Still, they are too immersed in their shows and games. *Still no telekinetic powers.* I decide to move closer, and with one final, assertive “shower time,” they look up in wonder—how long had I been standing there?

“Don't forget to brush your teeth,” I shout across the house to my son, who has probably forgotten for the second time that night.

My daughter brings out the same worn-out copy of *Llama Llama, Mad at Mama*. It was my son's book. We all read it together. They both love it. Deep down inside, I love it just as much. Mama Llama's advice about working with each other to finish faster and enjoy their time together always tugs at the heart.

8:45–10:00 p.m.

Kids are asleep. Hubby is taking care to empty the trash and help me with the dishes. *A Godsend.*

I use the next hour and half to work on the research piece from earlier. I check my personal email. There it is—the reply from the author I am excited to interview. I read it over and jot the date and time in my planner.

10:30 p.m.

Lying in bed, the quiet and darkness of the room brings a calm ending to a very long day. My husband and I talk about projects we are working on, wondering aloud about what tomorrow will bring. “Don't worry, babe. Everything will work out in the end.

We've got each other," he whispers to me. *A Godsend*.

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Notes

¹ This article was based upon an open invitation to submit a reflection piece about living and educating during COVID-19. The guest editor invited Sara Abi Villanueva to develop this feature. Five educators accepted the challenge to submit their essays to help form the feature. It was a challenging piece to request during a challenging time for all. Villanueva worked with the educators to submit their reflections; she provided context, edits, revisions, and her own personal reflection to fit the feature.

Appendix A

Figure 1

Nickerson's Son at His Computer Work Station



Appendix B

Figure 2

Nickerson's "Emergency Data"

	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z
1	Hip_CM (in)	SF_Chest	SF_Ax	SF_Abd	SF_Supra	SF_Thigh	SF_Subscap	SF_Tricep	Sum_SF7	BP_BF%	BP_FFM (kg)	BP_FM (kg)	BP_BV (L)	DXA_BF%	DXA_BMC	DXA_Mo	DXA_Lean Mass	DXA_Fat Mass
59	50.13	30.00	52.16	52.50	40.25	52.83	57.25	29.50	314.49	47.70	56.81	51.80	109.199	49.30	2.76	2.88	53.25	51.70
60	40.25	13.60	22.25	22.25	22.50	29.75	24.75	14.00	149.10	21.20	58.53	15.71	70.659	27.80	2.85	2.98	51.72	19.93
61	43.25	26.25	46.75	52.50	36.00	35.75	49.00	23.75	270.00	37.40	51.95	31.09	81.773	40.20	2.50	2.51	48.04	32.26
62	38.75	22.00	30.00	38.75	28.75	34.00	29.30	15.50	198.30	24.10	45.19	14.37	57.055	30.00	2.39	2.49	40.16	17.21
63	36.77	18.00	16.50	28.50	17.75	28.00	21.25	24.25	154.25	24.70	40.18	13.19	51.19	31.90	2.23	2.33	34.78	16.31
64	39.88	18.50	38.80	45.00	29.00	40.25	40.25	23.00	234.80	35.90	40.54	22.67	62.025	40.80	2.28	2.37	36.13	24.92
65	37.75	18.00	31.25	336.00	27.80	21.25	24.00	23.75	482.05	27.20	48.35	18.11	64.068	29.50	2.63	2.74	45.10	18.91
66	49.45	24.00	59.25	44.50	42.00	46.00	52.50	38.50	306.75	47.90	50.74	46.58	97.878	50.90	2.29	2.39	46.95	48.67
67	38.75	16.25	21.00	41.00	30.75	22.00	26.75	28.75	186.50	27.80	49.22	18.91	65.762	31.60	2.59	2.70	44.93	20.80
68	41.90	25.25	48.00	46.00	39.00	39.75	40.00	26.66	264.66	39.90	44.90	27.75	73.869	43.80	2.35	2.45	40.41	31.47
69	41.75	11.00	33.75	32.00	21.70	39.25	29.00	32.25	198.95	40.80	44.59	30.76	74.713	41.70	2.14	2.23	42.67	30.47
70	43.75	14.50	42.00	47.00	33.25	40.00	48.50	29.50	254.75	33.70	51.77	26.36	76.352	41.50	2.60	2.71	44.13	31.34
71	42.13	18.25	22.25	34.50	21.00	20.00	25.75	19.00	160.75	24.60	53.32	17.37	67.771	31.20	2.69	2.81	46.79	21.80
72	38.50	15.75	38.50	35.50	27.25	33.75	31.00	18.50	200.25	31.60	43.34	20.05	61.676	37.20	2.24	2.34	38.55	22.79
73	42.38	18.00	50.75	49.00	33.00	34.00	41.75	24.25	250.75	45.00	42.39	34.71	77.101	46.10	2.29	2.39	40.33	34.43
74	38.50	12.50	26.50	40.50	24.50	39.75	20.50	26.00	190.25	34.80	40.18	21.47	60.385	38.30	2.03	2.12	36.63	22.71
75	39.50	15.50	39.75	43.00	28.00	19.00	27.30	15.00	187.55	34.40	45.35	23.81	67.679	41.40	2.58	2.69	38.86	27.50
76	35.63	12.50	19.50	21.75	14.83	21.00	18.75	21.25	129.58	19.20	46.14	10.98	54.199	24.80	2.21	2.30	41.27	13.62
77	35.00	13.50	14.50	22.25	13.25	19.75	18.25	12.00	113.50	26.50	40.20	14.53	52.685	31.40	2.22	2.32	36.01	16.47
78	35.00	18.50	17.00	29.50	14.75	19.75	20.50	19.00	139.00	22.90	40.88	12.16	50.667	30.90	2.45	2.56	34.95	15.60
79	36.50	12.00	19.00	16.75	13.25	18.25	11.75	10.75	101.75	18.40	46.56	10.49	53.979	21.30	2.05	2.14	43.55	11.77
80	40.50	16.50	22.16	28.50	15.16	33.30	15.00	23.00	153.62	28.90	46.38	18.86	63.121	33.40	2.45	2.55	41.94	21.03
81	39.00	19.75	32.50	35.75	19.50	23.00	36.50	16.50	183.50	31.10	44.16	19.93	62.288	34.90	2.14	2.23	40.37	21.54
82	38.13	29.50	22.25	39.50	25.75	41.75	29.16	27.25	215.16	30.20	41.14	17.83	57.212	33.30	2.16	2.25	37.82	18.87
83	34.38	15.75	16.75	19.50	15.25	24.50	19.50	17.25	128.50	19.50	41.08	9.93	48.371	24.90	2.08	2.17	36.74	12.20
84	34.63	18.25	11.75	16.25	8.00	19.75	14.00	14.83	102.83	19.60	41.59	10.16	49.095	20.40	2.05	2.14	39.71	10.21
85	33.75	19.75	15.00	20.75	12.00	18.75	21.00	16.25	123.50	21.30	37.12	10.05	44.92	27.60	2.07	2.16	32.64	12.43
86	31.88	17.50	7.75	21.50	10.50	22.75	9.00	11.00	100.00	16.50	35.26	6.98	39.809	24.60	1.83	1.91	30.49	9.97
87	48.50	32.00	54.83	51.00	33.75	54.75	50.75	32.25	309.33	44.80	47.73	38.67	86.36	47.60	2.41	2.51	44.38	40.26
88	30.50	13.00	8.25	21.00	9.75	18.00	17.75	12.75	100.50	18.60	29.55	6.75	34.366	28.20	1.50	1.57	25.04	9.82
89	46.10	18.75	21.33	34.00	21.00	30.00	19.40	26.50	170.58	24.90	37.37	12.38	47.674	35.30	1.87	1.90	30.89	16.83

Appendix C

Figure 3

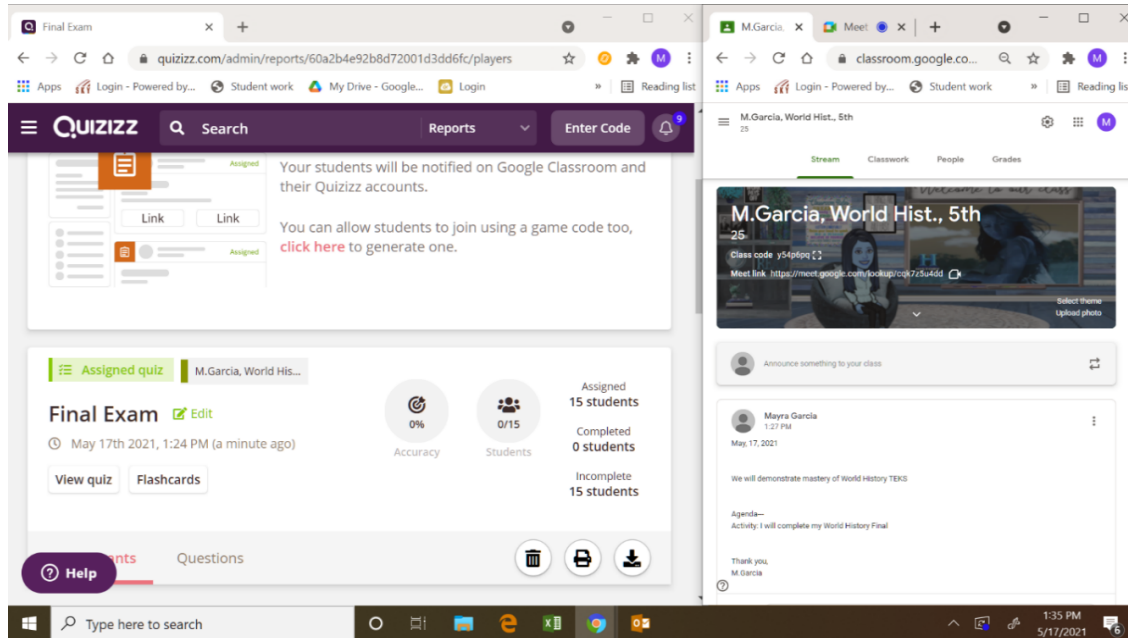
Nickerson's Home Gym With Floor Jack



Appendix D

Figure 4

Garcia's Computer Screen With Multiple Programs Opened



Appendix E

Figure 5

Garcia's Son Working at His Virtual Learning Setup at Home



Appendix F

Figure 6

Garcia's Planner That Details Family Schedule



Appendix G

Figure 7

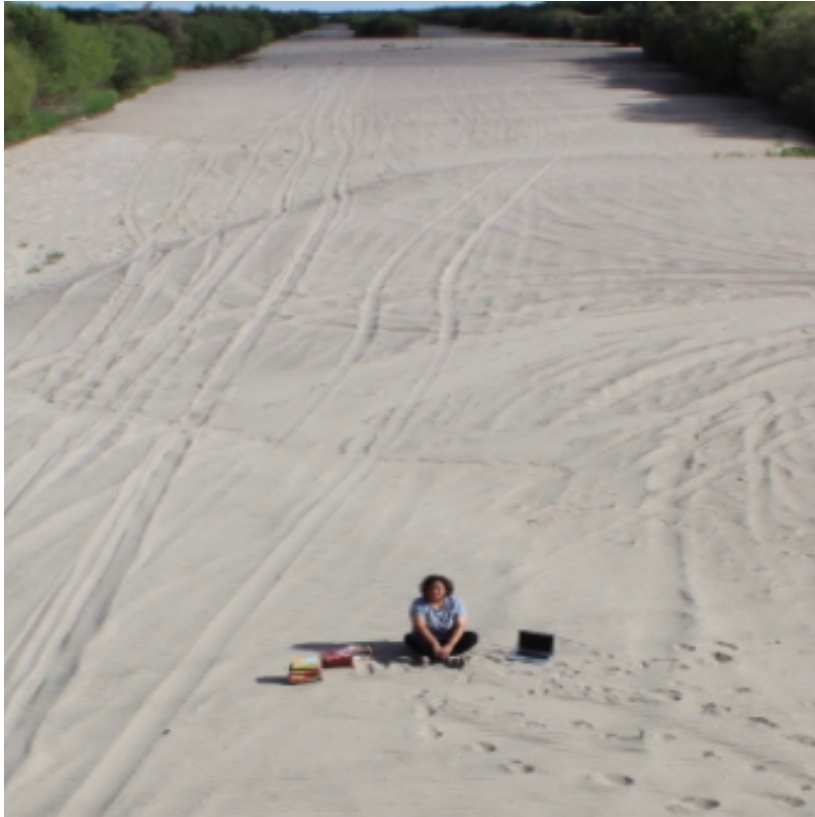
Murillo's Pumping Machine, A Morning Ritual



Appendix H

Figure 8

Finding Inspiration: Bustillos Sits in the Rio Grande Riverbed, in New Mexico, With her Chromebook and Literature Books



Appendix I

Figure 9

O'Leary's Winter Intervention Packet

Winter Break Intervention
Due: January 28, 2021 @ 6pm

(ALL activities must be complete to receive credit. Partial credit will not be given)

Instructions: Complete all activities listed below on one document. Use MLA format and be sure to add a title for each activity.

Activity 1 - Memoir About An Elder (100pts)

Step 1: Interview an elder (60 years or older) in your family or community. Ask questions about a significant event that occurred in their life.

Step 2: Write a **memoir** about the event. Be sure *not to write a biography* about their entire life but only focus on one specific event.

Activity 2 - Analyze the Conflict (100pts)

Step 1: Read the article linked [here](#)

Step 2: Identify which of the six types of conflict the protagonist is experiencing

Step 3: Identify the theme of the text.

Step 4: Write a one page analysis of how the conflict in the story connects with the theme of story (remember there can more than one them and more than one conflict so be original)

Activity 3 - Persuasive Paper (100pts)

Step 1: Read the article linked [here](#)

Step 2: Choose an argument or claim from the text

Step 3: Summarize the argument or claim, and then explain why you agree or disagree with it

Step 4: Support your position with evidence from the text.

Note. Highlighted sections are emphasized for O'Leary's students

Appendix J

Figure 10

O'Leary's End-of-Year Student Survey

CLASS OF 2021

End of Year Survey

Please complete this anonymous survey for Dr. O'Leary's research data collection.

My current age is

- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19

My gender is

- female
- male
- other

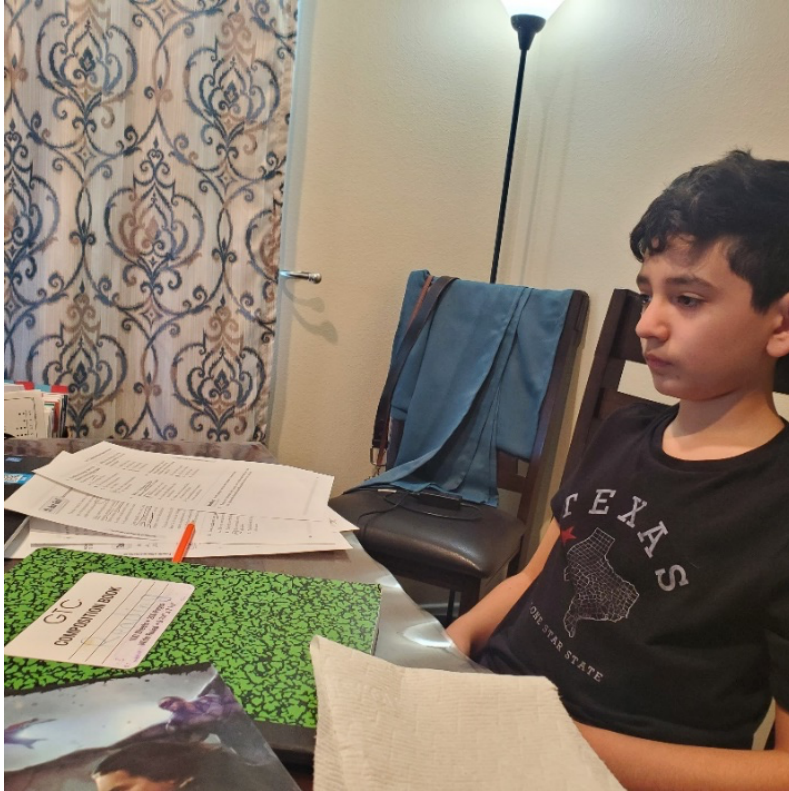
I identify myself as

- Hispanic
- Black/African-American
- White
- Pacific Islander
- Asian
- Bi-racial
- Other

Appendix K

Figure 11

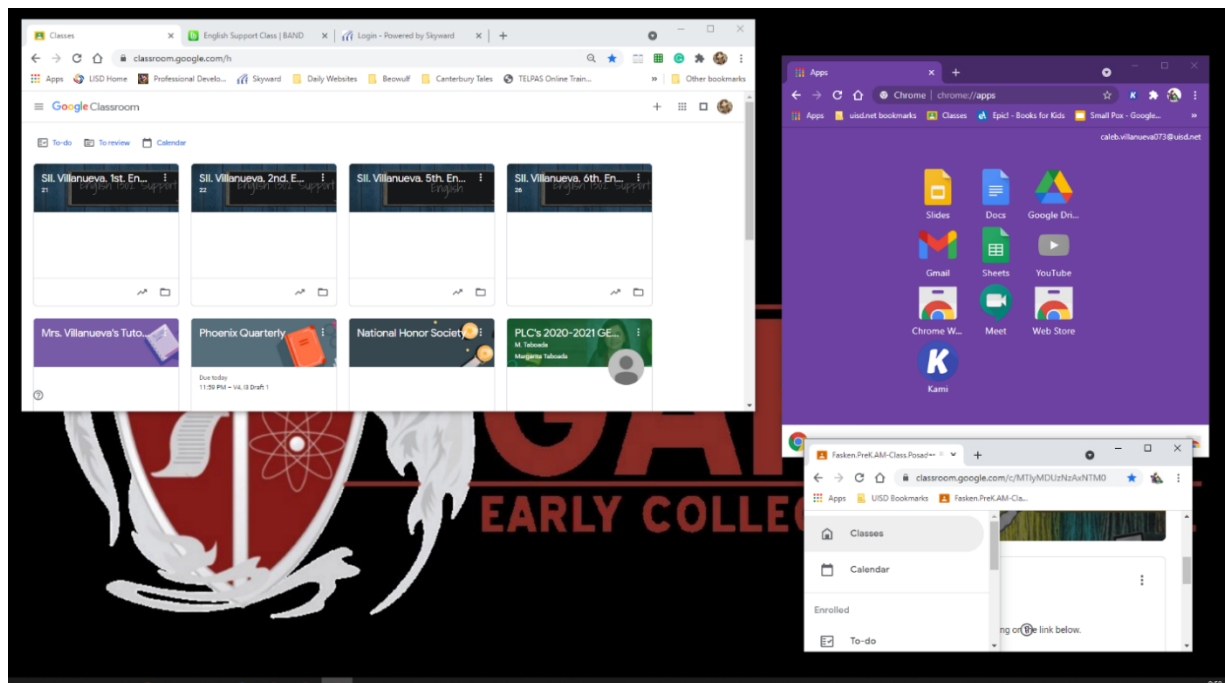
Villanueva's Son Sitting at the Dining Room Table, Listening to an Audio Book



Appendix L

Figure 12

Villanueva's Screen With Multiple Google Classroom Windows Open

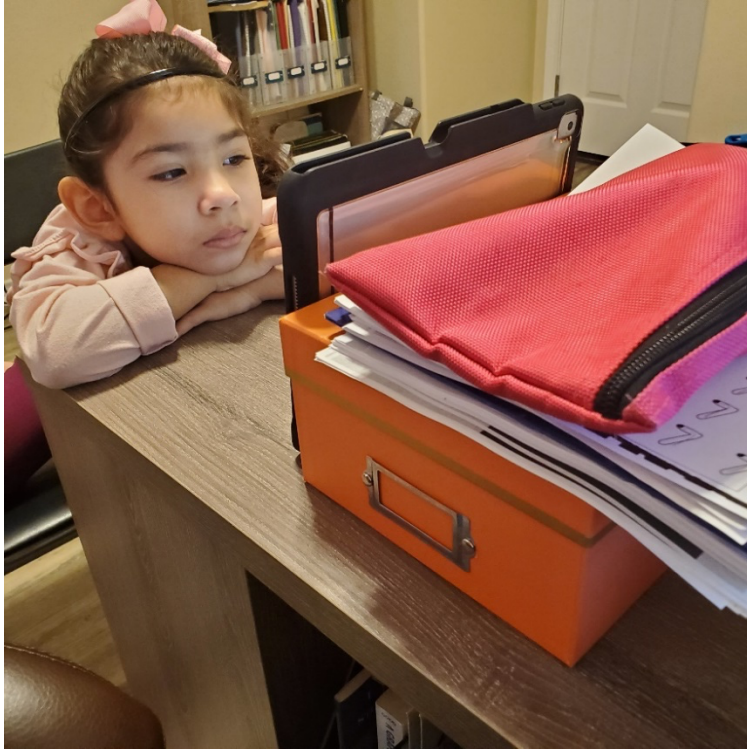


Note. In the upper left corner is my Google classroom set up. In the upper right corner is my son's Google window. The bottom right corner is my daughter's Google window.

Appendix M

Figure 13

Villanueva's Daughter "Done" With Online Schooling



Appendix N

Figure 14

Villanueva's Husband Home From Work

