I teach and run the dance program at a public high school in Los Angeles. I have dance classes and a dance team.

In a typical year, the dance team performs in the fall at football games, assemblies, and pep rallies. We also hold a winter concert in December that includes all dance classes and cheer (which I also teach). All of these events and performances are canceled. Our school, like much of California and the nation, is starting remotely. I have little hope of us opening for in-person instruction before there is a vaccine.

I have been holding summer practices for my dance team via Zoom. I thought it was important for the kids to have exercise and also a connection to their team in order to give them some sense of normality. However, Zoom practices bring a plethora of challenges that I expect to continue in the fall.

First of all, in a typical dance studio, the instructor can stand in the front and demonstrate and watch in the mirror as the students follow along behind them. We can give feedback quickly and correct mistakes. In Zoom, I have to back up about 8 feet from the camera in order for the students to see my entire body. This puts me too far from the computer to be able to see the students to give corrections. If I face back so the students don’t have to reverse the movement, I cannot see them at all. I have to approach the camera to watch them, but then they no longer have me to follow. My device also limits me to seeing only nine at a time; I cannot really give great feedback, as I have to scroll to see other students. Finally, the speed of Internet relay means that the students hear the music at different times, so when I go to watch them perform choreography, they are so unsynchronized that it is difficult to my trained eye to watch multiple students at once. My brain is so distracted by the differences in timing that it is hard to override that to see corrections. Maybe I will get better at this as time goes on.

I also cannot accurately assess students in this format unless I watch them individually, which is unrealistic in a class of more than 30. In the spring I had them each record themselves doing the choreography and post videos so I could score them. It took four hours a week to grade per class. This usually takes me 20 minutes when we are in class as I can watch students and easily fill out rubrics to give feedback. This amount of grading is unsustainable. I was on the computer so much that I was getting headaches and not enjoying the job that I usually love.

As any good teacher does, I have been brainstorming ways to fix some of the technology issues. I am purchasing a large mirror to use at home, along with a tripod for my iPad so students can follow me from behind while also seeing the front in the mirror (similar to in-person learning). I am trying to see if I can set up additional devices so that I have one filming and one that I can keep closer to watch students. I still have to figure out how to create sustainable grading practices though.

In addition to my challenges, the students also are challenged. Most have very little space at home. Some are dancing in bathrooms. Some have to move their bed or coffee table to get a few feet to dance in. They often cannot set the camera back far enough for me to see their entire body, which means I can’t tell if they are doing it correctly. This is especially a burden for students new to dance who have not yet developed the body awareness of more advanced dancers.

Students are also lacking motiva-
I have been in education for 30 years, and I continue to marvel at the opportunities that I get to learn and grow, provided I am in a mental and emotional space to do so. Such was the case on Saturday, May 15, as I awoke to do my daily Devotions, overlooking Fresh Pond in Cambridge.

My daily devotional time is an opportunity for me to show gratitude as well as center myself in who God is in my life, and what I am being called to do that day, as well as days to come. Over the years I have disciplined myself to use this time as a filter through which the rest of the day must pass through. My thinking? If I start the day with a faith filter, I am more inclined to experience the day in the way that I am called to, as opposed to simply how “I” want to experience it.

In retrospect, I marvel at the power of that centering because, that Saturday in May, I read something on social media that — in the delicate world of academia — “triggered” me.

After doing my devotion, my attention was drawn to a Facebook post by one of my former Ed School doctoral students, Cheryl Camacho, Ed.L.D.’19. (She welcomes the attention here.) Cheryl is a system-level leader in South Bend, Indiana, where she oversees five schools, 2,100 students, and hundreds of faculty and staff. In her Facebook post, Cheryl was expressing her personal and professional concern.