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Hope in a Time of Global Unrest:

An Ethnographic Study

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Abstract

This paper documents the observations, struggles, and insights of a first year teacher. It is a year-long documentation of the search for hope during a global pandemic that affected the way schools functioned and how students learned. This work is in three distinct sections. The first section is a self-reflection of identity and why this teacher chose teaching as a profession. The second section is focused on two of their students, one who is immunocompromised, and one who has significant learning challenges, and how they navigated the quarantine during the pandemic through their expression of learning. The third section reflects on the mostly white and wealthy community and school culture where they were teaching and the tension of being a social justice educator in this environment. The data was collected through participant observation, qualitative research, and ethnographic analysis. By documenting this experience of working in a mostly digital school year, navigating the complexities and tensions of a new school, new principal, new school board, and new superintendent the author provides insight into the various ways they were able to bring hope into their classroom, and remind us how we can thrive even living through our fears and hardships.

Keywords: teaching, students, hope, pandemic, 8th grade, science, remote learning, hybrid teaching, new administration

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Introduction

Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words,
And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;
And sore must be the storm
That could abash the little bird
That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land,
And on the strangest sea;
Yet, never, in extremity,
It asked a crumb of me.

(Dickinson, 1861)

The words of this poem are a comfort during the global unrest that the COVID-19 pandemic brings. The unrest hangs heavy over the time that I am writing this ethnography; in the beginnings of my teacher education program and through my first year of teaching. During the fear and grief that haunts this time, the little bird of hope continues to sing. I am not naive enough to think that fear and grief do not haunt all of our lives reaching back and forward to all generations, but I have not lived in a time where hope was needed more. During this uncertainty that has a grip not only on this journey of becoming a teacher, but the whole of the world, I want to look for the hope for I know that even during this sore storm it sings loudly if we only take the time to listen.

In the first part of my research I will address who I am and the path that led me to teaching. Ozlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo (2017) show us that knowledge shared is never neutral and holds the bias of the one telling the story, it “is framed by the

ideologies, language, beliefs, and customs of human societies” (p.15). Therefore, in respect to my research I must first research myself and my bias and perspectives. Because, “in going into the homes [of our students], we carry with us cultural and emotional baggage that tends to color our understanding of interviews and observations. We have fears and assumptions and perhaps misunderstandings” (Moll et al., 1992 p.135). So first, I study the assumptions in myself. In the second section I study my students and specifically look at two students in my class, one with traumatic life experience and compromised immunity, and one with learning challenges, to get a snapshot of what is happening in my classroom. In the last section, I look at the culture of my school and the surrounding community, and how that impacts the classroom through a critical social justice lens (see Appendix A). In this narrative you will get a sense of what it was like being a first year teacher during a pandemic when all of the schools were shut down and education had to be reimaged.

Who Am I? And Why Must I Teach?

Growing Up

In 1977, I was born into a traditional southern home in Panama City, Florida. Most of my family had lived in the deep south of Florida, Alabama, and Georgia for many generations. Brady and Karen Rice were the proud new parents of a healthy pink baby girl. I am the oldest of three children, and I am also the oldest grandchild of all four of my grandparents, and the oldest great-grandchild of three out of four of the great-grandparents that I knew. I fully owned the mantle of “oldest child” for almost

three years, up until the time my younger brother was born. I was the oldest child, but he was the oldest man child, and in my culture this deserved an honor all its own. I didn't realize it at the time but my birthright was to be an example to my generation of what a good Christian southern woman should be. The pressure was palpable. I would be a 7th generation Christian woman (that they were sure of) and I had a godly heritage to uphold, mostly based on the example given in Proverbs 31 (v.10-31, NIV) of the Bible which reads:

10 [b]A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies.

11 Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value.

12 She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.

13 She selects wool and flax and works with eager hands.

14 She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar.

15 She gets up while it is still night; she provides food for her family and portions for her female servants.

16 She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.

17 She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.

18 She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.

19 In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers.

20 She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.

21 When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.

22 She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple.

23 Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.

24 She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes.

25 She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.

26 She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.

27 She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

28 Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:

29 “Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all.”

30 Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.

31 Honor her for all that her hands have done, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.

This meant that I was expected to first and foremost be a woman of great faith which for me meant that I would always lean into hope. I was expected to be a gracious wife, a loving mother, and an excellent housekeeper and homemaker. I was also expected to

be prudent with my finances and avoid scandal at all costs. As a girl I was taught to cook and sew, I was sent to classes on etiquette, and was always involved in my church. I had read through the entire Bible and the New Testament twice by the time I was in fourth grade. Fourth grade was also the year that I took on my first job as a babysitter. I gave a good effort to make my family proud even in the shadow of my perfect younger brother.

During my childhood, my father was by his own claims a failed tomato farmer turned salesman. He worked at Gayfers Department Store. He worked the long hours that retail life requires, but he was always with us at church on Sundays and Wednesday nights. My mother worked at home caring for my brother, sister and myself. We were not a wealthy family, but we always had what we needed.

I was a “bright” student according to my teachers and was put in the GATE program in third grade. I liked school and got good grades.

During fourth grade my family moved from Florida to Gulfport, Mississippi. The move changed many things in my life. Before, I lived two hours from my family in Tallahassee and only an hour and a half from my family in Dothan, Alabama. We spent so much time with my extended family when we lived in Florida, however in Mississippi the drive took much longer, and we started seeing our extended family less. With less trips to relatives’ houses we relied on our “church family” for our socialization and mentorship. I was in church at least three times a week, more if there were extra events. I became a student leader in the children’s church, and helped younger children through their lessons and by being a good example of how to behave in church service. It was

the summer before 7th grade at summer camp where I felt in my heart that I was meant to work with children. In school I remember being in the A class and I also remember my class being referred to as the smart kids, which made me sad for all the children in the other 4th grade classes. I also noticed that although my school was very racially diverse, my class was mostly white.

In 8th grade my family moved to Daphne, Alabama. I was heartbroken to leave my friends, but happy to be closer to my extended family. I lived in a mostly white neighborhood in the suburbs of Mobile. I lived about a quarter mile from my church which was next door to the high school. While living in Alabama, I began volunteering at my church teaching the two-year-old Sunday School class. I was happy. I was intentionally working toward being the woman that my family expected me to be. I was volunteering at church, babysitting to make money, I had a respectable boyfriend, and was an honor student. Then I turned sixteen. My sixteenth birthday changed everything.

On my sixteenth birthday, my parents moved us from Alabama to West Chester Ohio. I was devastated. I had to leave all of my friends all over again, but this time the stakes were higher. Not only was I an emotionally unstable teenager that had to leave my first love, I was the new kid that talked funny in an unfamiliar culture. I was so angry about our move to Ohio that in defiance of my parents I worked hard at no longer being who they wanted me to be. I became the “rebellious” kid at my new church, when I could not get away with ditching. I started dating the drummer in a popular local band, and did just enough to get by in school, but ditched school every chance I got. When it

was time for college, I made sure my school was far enough away that my parents would not be able to visit often.

During college I started out with my major in Elementary Education but switched to Human Development when I realized that I had a paralyzing fear of public speaking. This detour in my education proved useful as my new major had many elective courses. In a twist of fate, my continued apathy toward schooling that led me to wait until the last minute to register for classes, led to the only classes being open were in the Science Department. I finished out my electives all in Biology classes, and I fell in love.

After college I moved in with my parents in their new home in Upland, California and got a job at my parent's church in the youth department. During this time, I remembered how much I loved working with kids. I enjoyed so many aspects of working with high school students, and even worked through my fear of public speaking. I also realized as much as I enjoyed being an assistant to the youth ministry at church it wasn't a good career path, so I decided to go back to school and get my masters in youth and family ministry. To say that my apathy and indifference to school changed would be an understatement. I loved the challenge and the content of my classes, and I graduated eager to start my first job as a youth pastor. I looked and looked, but I never did land that job, and I went back to working the same job I did when I left for school, except this time, they let me do it full time. While I was in school for my masters, I got married and had two of my children. When my second son was 6 months old, I left the church. I had been passed over for every leadership job, usually to a man with substantially less education. I had also been hurt by other things that were happening

within the church leadership team. I got a new job as an office manager and case manager for a chiropractic and medical clinic. At that job I remembered how much I enjoyed biology. I was able to educate patients about the functioning of their bodies, and realized I was good at teaching. I worked there through the births of my last two children, and then I was approached by a pastor of a church in Pasadena to be their children's director. I was thrilled! It didn't pay much so I kept my weekday job, but on the weekends, I was a Children's Director in a church that held services in a school. As the weeks went on and I wrote our curriculum and taught the classes in an unused classroom of the school, I found myself wishing to be a schoolteacher. My husband encouraged me to investigate what it would take to be a teacher, and I began applying to schools and taking my preliminary tests right away.

I realized that my intuition was right that summer before 7th grade; I was at my best when I was working with kids. I thought that maybe there was a purpose and a plan, and that God had been directing my steps. I had been volunteering with children from babies to college students for most of my life, I loved science, and I knew that I enjoyed teaching in a church setting. The desire to become a teacher, although not novel, as I had originally intended to in college, had found me at a time in my life when I was no longer as easily intimidated. This gave me hope.

Critical Social Justice Teaching

Through my experiences growing up and moving around the United States, I have had the experience of meeting many different people from different backgrounds and cultures. Through my work in churches, I have had the privilege of talking with

people through difficult and life changing times, and I know that we all deserve to be treated with kindness and respect. Humankind is beautiful, we are a mixture of different thoughts and ideas, and given the opportunity, we can come together to be something bigger than ourselves. Although in the United States we are an incredibly individualistic culture (Hammond, 2015), I see the miracles that happen when we work together. I see this hope in choirs, orchestras, flash mobs, massive pranks, and scientists and medical professionals coming together to find cures and care for humanity. When we work together, we find hope. Every person should have the right and the opportunity to find their fit in this world and much of this hinges on education. Learning is such a privilege and should be extended to every person as we cannot take the chance of missing one voice in this chorus we call life. Educators have a paramount responsibility and honor to unlock the potential of the students they teach. Every student has immense potential and given hope and a safe space to be themselves the sacred ritual of learning can occur. This learning will grow into a beautiful and interesting piece in the accomplishments of our species. To make learning accessible to all people it is necessary for teachers to be the servants of critical social justice. In the United States we live in a culture that is deeply divided and unjust, especially to the poor and people of color. Sensoy and DiAngelo's definition of critical social justice is:

A critical approach to social justice refers to specific theoretical perspectives that recognize that society is stratified (i.e. divided and unequal) in significant and far-reaching ways along social group lines that include race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. Critical social justice recognizes inequality as deeply

embedded in the fabric of society (i.e., as structural), and actively seeks to change this. (2017 p.xx)

As teachers we must do everything in our power to even the playing field for all students, regardless of how different their voice or abilities are to that of our own. I have been challenged most by my interactions with young people. During my ten years working in church youth groups, I have learned and shared so much with students who have grown up so differently than I did. I love being a part of, and seeing children develop into adults. Adolescence is such a delicate time filled with possibilities where students begin to discover who they are and what they may have to offer the world. Because of this, and the extensive experience I have with this age group, I have chosen to work with junior high and or high school students. My heart is for young people, that they will have the knowledge, resources, and hope to excel in all aspects of their lives. I see myself as a safe place where a student can have the space and guidance to see who they are and how they fit into this world. Sonia Nieto stated that the teachers whom she interviewed “identified the connections with students as a primary reason they thrived in the classroom”(Nieto, 2013 p.36). Giving students the connections, resources and structure to see the world around them in a critical, thoughtful way, while preparing them to be lifelong learners drives me to be the best teacher I can be.

What Are My Strengths and What Needs Work?

Strengths

I am a peacemaker by nature. I have worked hard, overcome obstacles and achieved most everything I have set my mind on up to this point in my life. I went to

college, and although I had a rough start, I finished strong with a degree in human development with a minor in biblical studies. I have a masters degree in youth and family ministry, and I am currently pursuing a masters of education and a single subject credential in life science. Most importantly in my academic success I am a lifelong student. I am always learning, whether it is a new skill, a more in-depth study of a subject, or just a deep dive into something that piques my interest. I consume an embarrassing amount of YouTube with much of my time spent on educational channels. I am a fast learner, I love to read, and I am highly adaptive to new ideas and information. I am curious about so many things, and I'm eager to explore whether in theory or out in the world. I am also adaptable to new circumstances and love to organize.

With other people I tend to be open minded and optimistic. I am not one to jump to conclusions or hastily judge. I am encouraging, supportive and good at connecting with others. I naturally imagine things from multiple perspectives. I am emotionally and relationally observant, enthusiastic, friendly, honest, trustworthy, and generous. I am a good communicator if given ample time to think things through.

Challenges

Academically my challenges have been my aversion to commitment and choosing a path. I always struggle with not feeling good enough, and imposter syndrome (Cox, 2018). I am not cognitively "quick on my feet" and need time to process my thoughts on everything, especially since I am slow to commit to what I think about a subject. Because I so highly value peace in my life I tend to avoid conflict or at

least put off confrontation, just hoping the conflict will go away. I tend to minimize my own problems, especially emotional issues, and will wait too long to ask for help from others. I can be stubborn if I have made up my mind about something, but it usually is in the realm of seeing through a vision I have about something, not usually theories or ideas. I don't do well with criticism unless I have been warned in advance of the interaction, and I hate criticizing or judging others even when it is necessary. I also tend to try and shut the world out when I am under stress. Because I am writing about these opportunities for growth, I recognize them and work to put people and structures in place to support me with these challenges.

How My Bias Can Affect My Teaching

Considering my positionality as a protestant white woman raised in the south, there are several things that must be looked at before entering into the remaining work on this ethnography.

The reality is that no one can avoid prejudice because it is built into our socialization. All humans have prejudices, but they are so normalized and taken for granted that they are often very difficult to identify. This is one of the challenges of critical social justice literacy: developing the critical thinking that would enable us to bring our prejudices to the surface and reflect upon and challenge them. (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p.53)

According to Sensoy and DiAngelo, we all bring our baggage wherever we go, including myself. Our challenge is identifying these biases so that we may make what is hidden that might be calling the shots into something we can recognize and work on. There are

two types of bias: implicit bias and explicit bias. Implicit bias is the assertion that an individual's "ideas, views and opinions are not objective and independent, but rather the result of myriad social messages and conditioning forces" (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017, p.43) and explicit bias are the biases that are easily seen and acknowledged.

I have been working on understanding who I am in relation to where I am from and how I was raised for over a decade and it seems I am always confronting new ways that my bias rears its ugly head. Some things are so ingrained in the culture that the thought of bias doesn't cross my mind, and so I have learned to always be on the lookout. As a southern woman I have been accused by those close to me of using more idioms than the average person. Last week, my oldest son was interrupting my conversation with my husband with silly ideas. Finally I turned and said "what does the peanut gallery have to say about it this time". He asked me what peanut gallery meant, and I said "I could tell you but it's more fun to look it up." We looked up the saying and to my horror I found that I had been diminishing the voices of African Americans by using that phrase. I know that this bias is implicit, and I will be working on changing my perceptions and behaviors the rest of my life. Another bias that I have identified and have been working on is poverty. I didn't even realize that I held prejudice toward those on government assistance until I and my family were the ones receiving government assistance. Walking through applying for Medi-Cal and WIC is a very confusing and honestly pride swallowing journey. I have a relatively newfound respect for those who have had to use these programs. Another bias that I didn't realize existed until recently is toward women. I know that in the culture where I was raised, males were valued

higher. Maybe that is why I learned to drink whisky and smoke cigars, and how to fix cars and drive a stick shift. I became an advocate for myself and other women during and after college and I thought I was over that bias, after all I *am* a woman. It could not be that hard to work through. After observing myself for a few weeks, I found that my default is still to defer to the man in the room. I will continue to work on this as I dig deeper into myself and learn more about who I am.

The biggest bias I am currently wrestling with is toward those from my own culture of origin. I treat people that go to church (especially those in leadership) like they have something they need to prove. This is something that I am still having a hard time with and am working through, but evangelical Christian idioms, or “christianese” as I’ve heard it being referred to my whole life, puts my guard up so quickly. Much of the distrust in the Christian world was from working in leadership in several churches and having the opportunity to peek behind the curtain. While I was in school for ministry, my father was ordained as a pastor. This has given me a different perspective on church leadership, seeing how my father was mistreated in the mega-church where he was employed, due to his age. He was treated as irrelevant even though he was the pastor that would visit the sick, counsel the hurting, and advocate for the homeless; the things I consider the real work of the church. This part of my bias needs years more to unpack I am afraid. Unfortunately, I have felt the effects of this while teaching. One day earlier this year I was walking around the room of a 9th grade business class checking with each table to see if help was needed. One student stopped me and asked if I thought homosexuality was a sin, I was blindsided. I expected it from church kids but in an arts

school, I was taken aback. The question made me mad. I tried not to show it and I said “you know, I’m a pastor’s kid and have a masters in ministry and the one thing I am certain of is that love will always win.” I probably should not have said anything in my anger, but I felt like I needed to say something. I know that my feelings of anger in that situation weren’t about that 14-year-old boy, and not even his parents as much as it was the religious culture of my past. Working through this bias has brought many bouts of shame and unrest thinking back of how I have been a co-conspirator in creating this judgemental, binary mindset in others.

I had never felt more shame for where I was from than during and after the 2016 presidential elections. Throughout the campaign I was astounded at the ignorance on display from church people not caring for the hurting and the less fortunate, church people acting as if it didn’t matter if they used racial slurs, church people laughing at people with disabilities, church people in agreement with those who objectify and diminish women. The wound is still too fresh. I have learned to keep my mouth shut in most situations as I have extended family and in-laws who fall into this category for me. I will continue working on finding and doing the work needed on my own bias while still advocating for what I know is right.

I know that personal bias affects how one relates to the world. In order to continue to grow and keep the effects in my classroom to a minimum, I will continue to do the hard introspection. Because I am averse to conflict, I tend to keep my opinions to myself unless I see a great injustice happening. I need to be aware of injustices happening not only from me but also from others and to confront the person or persons

creating the injustice. In most situations I am open minded and easily see multiple perspectives. I also have a strength of being emotionally observant, so I will use this intuition as a guide to notice if I have stepped out of line, and then either connect with the students one on one or call a circle depending on what I sense the offense may be. I have learned that when an injustice occurs it is imperative to address it as soon as possible or the hurt will fester and cause a huge disruption in the environment. I will use my relationships with the students to guide and to learn as well. I believe that doing the hard work of building relationships will be the foundation of hope for my students. I want my classroom to be a safe place for all.

The Goals for My First Year of Teaching

With the pandemic in full swing and school being cancelled until the end of the year, my plans for my first year of teaching seem to be up in the air. I am not sure when I will have my own class at this point, but when I do, I want it to be a place of hope. A safe space where all people feel comfortable to learn and grow. Given what I have learned in TLP I, I will apply my goals for my first year of teaching to my thus far imaginary classroom.

First, I want an incredibly inviting and organized classroom (Hammond, 2015). In my mind's eye it is a maximalist decorated environment with pops of bright colors and as many plants as I can afford. I want stations for missed assignments (Fisher, Frey, & Smith, 2015), and extra supplies that the students can use and not worry if they can not find their pencil. I want my room to smell and sound comfortable to myself and my students which will require speakers for a music source, an essential oil diffuser (after

checking all student's allergies), and probably some form of coffee lending itself to the aroma of the room. Knowing myself I will most likely rearrange the room several times during the year (Marzano, 2017), but each time I want the environment to be even more inviting and comfortable with space for mistakes and growth (Hattie & Clarke 2018) . I think the challenges to this goal will be in school policy, and honestly, fire code. I will know that I have met my goal by gauging the reactions to my classroom from my students, their parents, and my mentors and administration. In the school that I substituted in, I heard a lot about how the classrooms looked from teachers, students, and administrators. Also, since my sister was the 11th grade science teacher, I heard from parents, through her, about how much they liked her classroom. The impression has been made that the atmosphere of a learning space is extremely important.

Secondly, I want to effectively work together with my teammates and parents in collaboration to help the students achieve their highest potential (Hattie,& Clarke, 2018). This will require a high level of communication on my part working with my fellow teachers in finding the best way to communicate with parents (Nieto, 2013). The challenges to this will include setting structures in place that will allow me to communicate with the parents of 130-170 students at one time for regular communication. As a church children's director I put out a weekly newsletter that shared with parents a letter from myself, what the students were learning that week, and an activity that could be done at home to help the students remember what they learned in class. I would love to do something of this sort like a letter, or a YouTube video, or some other form of communication that I have yet to learn in which the parents of my

students are already engaged. I will also have the goal of personal communication with 15 parents a week, through phone calls, texts, or emails. This communication will include both collaboration and feedback. Working with parents I believe that the potential for their student to succeed will grow exponentially.

Thirdly, I want to learn to utilize a wide variety of technology in my classroom. The challenge would be if my school didn't have the computer capability, but as I believe our computer to student ratio in California should be 1:1, this should not be a problem. In order to achieve this goal, I will need to introduce one new technology piece or app each unit during my first year of teaching.

Fourthly, I would like to establish a classroom where students collaborate without fighting, being off task, walking out of the classroom without the pass, etc. This will hinge on my complete classroom ecology. The physical environment is incredibly important to me, however without the classroom being an emotional safe haven, the physical environment is nothing more than a "place". As the teacher I am a warm demander, with the "*care and push as needed*" (Hammond, 2015). The biggest challenge will depend on the grade that I am teaching. For long term success with teaching self regulation (Fisher, Frey, & Smith 2015), I will set incremental goals for myself such as "the students will work in small groups on task for 5 minutes", then the next week we bump that number up etc.

Finally, but not of least importance, I will have a classroom that is built on critical social justice. I need to use at least one social justice practice in each lesson I plan. This will include items such as do now's and exit tickets, as well as regular circles

(Boyes-Watson & Pranis 2015). I will differentiate each lesson so that students will not be left out because they learn differently than my teaching style (Tomlinson, 2017). This will be measurable in my lesson plans and in the success of my students.

As a teacher, I am looking forward to building relationships with those around me, including my students, their parents, my colleagues and administration. I want my students to know that I know that they are human, with good days and bad days. I want them to be comfortable coming to me when they need support or don't feel well or if something happened in their life that affects their ability to be authentically present in class that day. I want to teach my students to speak up for themselves. I want to be able to assess their needs and to be able to give each student access to the education that they deserve. I believe that learning can unlock the hope that we all so desperately need.

My Students; a Vast Resource of Hope

“Hope is a thing with feathers,” (Dickinson, 1861) and during this time of hardship I lean into this hope. As I teach, I see this hope daily on the faces of my students. This is the reality that must be leaned into as we walk through this difficult time. I look across my screen of boxes and in my heart yell “wingardium leviosa”(JK Rowling, 1997) knowing that each of my students have dreams that I can help take flight. “Wingardium leviosa” we chant as a class. We are determined that our circumstances will not be the end, but a beginning. Each standard, each lesson will push us forward toward our dreams. It is hardest to see the thing that isn’t there, but we dig deep because we know that hope resides in each of us. We make that hope explicit and know that “happiness can be found, even in the darkest of times, if one only remembers to turn on the light.”(JK Rowling, 1997). I strive to help the students find this light switch, or the kindling to help their light burn. We are doused with turmoil, a pandemic, strained race relations, the mistreatment of the minorities of this great nation, a presidential race and election aftermath including an insurrection that wishes to snuff out that light, but that makes us burn. Let us not forget this burning inside of ourselves. Let it be the hope that together we not just dream our dreams but make those dreams a reality. I see this hope in my focus students, not because I wish it to be there, but because in their wide eyed innocence they look to me and know that they are more than just an 8th grader, more than just a student, they are a force that will carry us through, they are the light, they are my feathers.

I began the summer session of my first year at CGU with my fingers crossed that maybe there would be summer school and maybe I could get my pre teaching done. When it was apparent that the plans would be changing, it brought with it a great sense of loss. I knew that I would not be able to have my own classroom this year. I knew that I would be working with a mentor teacher, and by the end of Summer, I knew that this school year was not what we were hoping for either. This year has tested the limits of faith and hope.

Being in distance learning, I knew that my relationships with my focus students and their households would be different than I imagined as well. I would not be able to do home visits, but I would be able to still meet with the students and their families in an online setting. I did all of my interviews through Zoom. I worked hard to create relationships even with all of the given obstacles. What I did have was time, and according to the Elder Lakota tribe member “It takes time to visit, to really sit down and be present” (González & Holmes, 2017, p.211), so sitting down in front of a computer to be present with my students is what I did.

This part of my ethnographic project will focus on two of my students to get a sense of who my students are as a whole. My first student Abby, is a leukemia survivor. My second student Maria, has an IEP with processing delays. Both of these girls and so many more of their classmates have been the light that has carried me through this incredibly challenging year.

Abigail Lynae

Abby caught my eye on the third day of school. Her face was full of bright eyed innocence and she seemed very eager for school to start. Her bubblegum pink bedroom decorated with Disney stickers made me smile as the nerves of my first real teaching assignment was eating away at my stomach. Thinking back to my bubblegum pink room from when I was 14 reminded me of what it felt like as a 13 and 14 year old student. We had never formally met, but I instantly felt a connection. Over the next few weeks I recognized that she often seemed tired in class and sometimes seemed confused and distracted. I would send the occasional chat message through Zoom to check in on her, but she always said she was fine. The next week came and I got to join my very first 504 meeting. To my surprise it was for Abby. I got to meet her parents and listen as the teachers, counselors and administrators set her goals for this next year. I found that Abby was a leukemia survivor, and because of this had to be completely quarantined since March of this year due to her compromised immune system. She was so sweet and bubbly at the meeting and I could tell that all of her teachers loved her. She is in my last class of the day on Tuesdays and Fridays which could easily account for the fatigue and distraction, but then they were talking about her having trouble with processing information. Knowing that Hammond (2015) said, “the quality of relationships between teacher and students are just as important as the technical strategies used to get students to perform at higher levels” (pg. 8). I decided right then I wanted to see if she and her family would allow me to work more closely with Abby this year and have her be one of my focus students. After conferring with my

mentor teacher, I sent her parents a letter. They responded with a yes, and our journey began. I was excited to begin working with Abby more closely over the course of the school year.

Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity

At first I wondered how her experience of school might be affected by her identification as a Chinese American student remembering “how families experience racial inequities through individual moment-to-moment interactions with educators and other system-based actors. (Ishimaru, 2020, p.66)” After I interviewed her family, I was assured that Abby was well liked by all of her teachers and administrators. Digging a little deeper, I found that her mother is a teacher at our school. Abby is well versed in what we call the deep structures of school as defined by Tye (2013) as “our society's widely shared assumptions about what schools are for and how they should function. (p.332)” She often turns to her mother when she needs help. Her mother expressed her appreciation that Abby has a teacher that is looking out for her, and helping her with her school work. I am aware, however, that not all of the students in my classes have this advantage. Being in a college town, we do have a large portion of our parents employed by schools on some level as there are many school employment opportunities in our community. I started looking and realized in Abby's class alone there are 3 students who have at least one parent employed by our school. Other students have let me know that their parents are employed by one of the local colleges. This creates a very different dynamic than some of the other schools I have worked for

or volunteered with, as many of our students' parents are very "vocal" in their students' schooling, advocating for their students sometimes on a weekly basis.

Being a cancer survivor does affect her school work and interaction with others. She doesn't talk about it unless you ask, or in my case, when her mom whispered in her ear during one of our "home visits." She says that she doesn't remember much about her time battling leukemia, but it has left her with the frustration of chronic fatigue, and her family believes that the chemotherapy may have affected the development of her ability to process information. She was declared cancer free when she was six years old. With her compromised immune system she has to be even more careful than other kids her age during the current pandemic. She has been quarantined with her family since March and has benefited from the close relationship she has with her parents and her nine year old brother. She said that when she isn't feeling well, her brother will make a pallet next to her bed and sleep in her room with her. The close relationship she has with her family has helped her get through this time of isolation with an upbeat attitude.

She is both a Girl Scout, and a BSA (Formally Boy Scouts of America) scout. She wants to be the first girl in our community to receive her gold award and her eagle scout rank, and one of the first in the country. Every time I have met with her outside of school time she always was just finishing, or getting ready to start working on a merit badge. Her father has been a great support for her to achieve her goals in scouting, and she is not afraid of hard work.

Another observation I made was her initial excitement, and her subsequent sadness when talking about friends. I know that most children are having to isolate themselves from their friends this year, but many are able to have a small few that they are allowed to play with in person. Abby doesn't have that privilege. When I ask her about her friends, she is quick to say that she has so many friends she can not possibly count them. She has friendships through her cancer support groups, her scouting, and her church youth group, although she is nervous that the church youth group might start meeting again in person and she would feel left out. She does have a few friends at school, but really relies on her teachers for support. Angela Valenzuela (1999) says that "relations with school personnel, especially with teachers, play a decisive role in determining the extent to which youth find the school to be a welcoming or an alienating place. (p.7)" I have found this to be key with Abby. Although Valenzuela was discussing the effects of schooling on Mexican American youth, Abby is a first generation American on her father's side. After a relationship was established, Abby seems much more comfortable in class, and is even eager to have other students join us in going over our assignments and concepts together. School seems to be a safe place for her, especially at our school where her mother teaches English. Keeping that in mind I have worked to make more time available in class to have the students interact with each other. It tends to start with groans, but many times it ends in smiles. Specifically with Abby I have been adding other students to our breakout rooms when we work together, and I have noticed that she and Maria, another of my focus students, have been enjoying the time they spend together in class and during my office hours.

Abby identifies as three quarters Chinese, as her mother is half Chinese and half white, and her father immigrated to the United States from Hong Kong in 1983. Her grandparents wanted her dad and uncle to have a better life and future and that coming to the US would allow that opportunity. Abby has been in this same community her whole life, and her parents were able to buy a house down the street from her grandmother when she was very little. She only remembers ever living in her current home. She celebrates all major Christian and American holidays in a traditional American way, but Thanksgiving is her favorite. Her birthday is in late November, and sometimes even falls on Thanksgiving day. She is also excited for Christmas this year, and let me know that sometimes her “Elf on a Shelf” comes as early as mid November. In addition to Christian holidays her family celebrates Chinese New Year every year, and her father added that they also make sure that on their birthdays they eat noodles, signifying a long and happy life. She admits that she knows very little Chinese, although she did have a Chinese tutor for a while. She is proud of being a Chinese American.

When the news started reporting a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans I asked Abby about how she felt. She said that she “didn’t know, but it made her very sad.” I realized the extent that Abby has been sheltered from the rest of the world. She has dealt with so much in her short life that I appreciate her parents' care to make her life centered on hope.

Academic Standing

Abby is diligent, persistent, and not afraid of hard work. I see her scouting come into play in this arena. She is a straight A student, but the grades don't come easy for her. She resubmits all of her work, sometimes several times, to get the grade she wants (See Appendix B). I am excited to push her a little to become more of a leader this next semester, as she is a fantastic example of a hard worker. I know that we plan to move a little faster in the next few units, and I will continue to provide support to Abby to make sure that she stays caught up and continues to get the grades that she expects of herself.

After she found I had a vested interest in her, it was apparent that Abby was excited to work with me to learn the content of each lesson. Instead of getting frustrated in class she began stopping in after school to go over the concepts and even the coursework again. She cited that it was much easier for her to learn when she hears it the second time. We developed a solid relationship and she became eager to work with me, even requesting breakout rooms during our asynchronous class time.

Action Plan

Creating a plan for Abby's continued success in our science class, I will continue utilizing breakout rooms so she can have more interaction with peers. I have also spoken with other students in our class that could benefit from small group interaction with a teacher present to work together to learn the concepts taught in class. We will be meeting weekly or bi-weekly in a help group as needed during asynchronous class time to make sure that each of these students have the same access to the material as other students who catch on quickly. Dr. Bermudez said in her book that the exceptional

“teachers [that she] observed endeavored consistently to provide their students with high quality instruction that recognized their cultural and linguistic assets and funds of knowledge. They did this because of their collective deep rooted belief in the worth and potential of every one of their students.” (Poplin and Bermudez, 2019, pg. 35-36) I deeply believe in the worth and potential of each of my students and will continue to work to provide Abby and her classmates the best education and preparation for their future not only in the classroom but in their lives. Noticing that Abby tends to work ahead and work alone on her assignments I will begin using more structure in breakout rooms and start having students turn in some work as a group to insure that Abby is interacting with her peers during the breakout rooms. Two of the strategies I plan to use this next semester are from TeachingHow2’s, a website dedicated to teaching strategies. The first one is peer tutoring where the student thinks about a concept or question on their own, then works in pairs to refine the idea and then as a group or quad before comparing their ideas or answers to the teacher’s model. (Train, *PeerTutoring*, n.d.) The second strategy I would like to work on for Abby’s benefit (as well as others) is cooperative answers. In this strategy the students are numbered and work together to come up with a response to a question or prompt and I will call on one person from each group to share what their group decided on by calling on their preassigned number (Train, *Cooperative Answers*, n.d.). With this strategy all students must engage in the group and understand what their group would say to answer in case they are called on. I will continue to work on having all of my students engage with each other and also have their voices heard in class and in breakout rooms.

I have and will continue working in aspects of Abby's, and other Chinese American student's culture and funds of knowledge into our lessons. I have quoted Chinese philosophers, and even pointed out that the Chinese people were the first that we know of to discover the properties needed to make compasses. I am also excited to find that Abby loved learning about the Galapagos Islands and wrote a paper about them for herself. We will be learning about natural selection later next semester, and my mentor teacher lived in the Galapagos Islands for 15 years. I also plan on having her help me in our help group. Abby currently has a 98% in our class, but instead of submitting her work several times she has started asking for a breakout room with me to clarify the instructions and what is expected.

Seeing Abby's determination even through struggle and distractions stirs hope within me. I know that our future is in good hands when students like Abby are not afraid of doing the hard things to get work done.

Maria Johnson

Maria first came to my attention the first week of school. Her mother was one of only two parents that showed up for our back to school night. Maria wasn't on the zoom meeting with her mother, but her mom was so passionate about advocating for her daughter and we had such a pleasant conversation. I wanted to keep an extra eye out for Maria. When I approached the idea of her being a focus student for me this year, her mother was thrilled. I looked for her in class the next day, and realized that I had noticed her on the first day of school. She has dark blonde hair and green eyes like I

did in middle school. I do realize that I am naturally drawn to students who I feel like I can see myself in, but I believe that is human nature and since I realize this about myself, I tend to see a piece of myself in each and every one of my students.

Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity

Maria is a fantastic artist and loves to dance. She is well liked, and is passionate about justice and equality, especially for the LGBTQ+ community. She has many friends who are part of this community and has talked with me about the injustices that this demographic faces many times this semester. Before the pandemic, she loved to walk to the village and get boba with her friends. She now just talks with them on the phone. I asked her to label herself socially and she told me her friend group is “gothic, artsy, weird, gamer, skater group.” That classification made me smile. She said that her friend group all go to the same school and did in elementary school as well. She is open to being friends with anyone, and feels like everyone should belong. “Much of what adolescents choose to do, whom they relate to, and how they spend their time is contingent upon the self they are seeing to create, test, and revise.” (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, pg. 18) She is still in dance classes every day, but now most of them are on zoom. She has a drumming class she still attends in person, her class is outside and socially distanced. She really enjoys being able to continue this class in person. She seems to be navigating the social aspects of being a young teenager with confidence.

Maria’s father immigrated from Brazil with his mother when he was a toddler. His father passed away in Brazil and doesn’t have or want connections to his father’s side

of the family. Her mother is of Italian descent and has one sister. Her family is loud and expressive. She is an only child and is very close to her one cousin on her mother's side who lives in the Pacific Northwest. They spend holidays together and like playing video games together to stay in touch between holidays.

Maria is very close to her dog Holly. She told me that she has struggled with anxiety and depression, but that everything changed when she got her dog. Holly is treated like one of the family and she really likes taking care of her.

Maria has lived in the same town her whole life, just like her mom. They moved to a townhome downtown to be close to the village (what they call the downtown area), where they enjoy spending their down time.

Academic Standing

Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey write that "one of the most common ways to determine whether students have met the purpose of a lesson is through the use of verbal or other non written assessments. We pose questions, engage students in discussion, ask them to explain their thinking, and have them justify their expressed opinions. (2011, pg. 129)" I use this type of assessment regularly with Maria. She tells me that she has a difficult time getting what is in her brain onto paper, so after her assignments are turned in we often discuss the assignments and I ask her what her thinking is on the questions or claim evidence reasoningaAssignments which is "making claims and justifying those claims with appropriate evidence and reasoning (Krajcik & McNeill, 2014, p.3)". From these conversations I can see if she is struggling with the material or if she understands. This leads me to question how many of my students

would be better to verbally explain to me the concepts that we are learning in class, while continuing to tackle the written ones as well. I am aware of the students that need this support through their IEPs, but what about the students that don't have an IEP that need this support? I believe that recorded videos might be a great addition to the curriculum we are currently using. One big gap with our communication was pointed out to me in our IEP meeting the week before Thanksgiving break. She did not know how to access the comments on her graded assignments in Canvas. This revelation was both a frustration and a relief to me as her teacher. I was frustrated that I didn't realize this sooner, but was relieved that she hadn't accessed my comments to come in after class to discuss and resubmit her work on all of the assignments I had asked her. At the end of the second triad, Maria had a few assignments that needed some more work and she had not responded to my comments. We quickly resolved the issue and we worked the last week of the triad to resubmit two of her assignments and she was able to raise her grade to a B, which was her goal.

As stated earlier, Maria has an IEP. She is mostly enrolled in special education classes for her required subjects. Science is her only general education class. Unfortunately, due to scheduling constraints we were unable to hold her IEP meeting until deep into the first semester. She has told me many times that she really struggles in science, but wants to continue in our class if at all possible. I am working with her to not just keep her in my class, but to also help her achieve her goal of a B or higher. Everyone in her IEP meeting praised Maria for such a great goal she has made for herself. According to her IEP "[she] has significant difficulty processing and retaining

auditory information which impacts her ability to access the general education curriculum without specialized academic support. [She] also has an articulation delay that may impact her speaking skills within the classroom environment or draw adverse social attention. In addition [her] difficulties with expressive syntax and morphology may affect her listening and speaking skills in class. (IEP, 2019).” Because of these challenges she has many accommodations that she accesses during class, but also many such as “preferential seating, or distraction free environment” that are more difficult to accommodate or require help from home. We have been successful with Maria’s learning by having small group “recaps” of the lesson before working on the assignments due in the small group with Abby and a few other students in our class. After the IEP meeting, I spoke with Maria to establish that we would continue our small group time and also that we would go over her grades weekly so that she would not need to stress about them.

Maria sparks in me the hope that there are even white girls (as she identifies) from the suburbs who are passionate about a more just world. Her passion for the fair treatment of her friends is outstanding, and her self advocacy with her teachers has been growing to be noteworthy among her peers and teachers.

Action Plan

My action plan with Maria is to make sure that the information we are covering in class is repeated several times in different ways to help all students, not just Maria, access the content in the way that is best for them. I will continue to provide examples in pictures and models to explain the concepts and I will review the lessons in a

breakout room before she works on more challenging assignments. In assignments with several steps I will offer to work with her step by step so she isn't overwhelmed. I plan to continue checking in with Maria weekly or bi-weekly as needed to make sure she is achieving her goal of a B in science, and I will continue asking about her art as we have had some great conversations around art challenges she has taken on during the pandemic.

My Students as a Whole

Although they are all behind a screen, my students have found their way into my heart. The challenge of working remotely and doing my residency through distance learning has only shown me that connecting with students is not only possible, but necessary in these circumstances. I know through the experience of substitute teaching that connecting with students in a face to face setting isn't difficult if you take the time to go where they are. I miss chatting between classes, or learning tik-tok dances during lunch, but through a zoom call I see a more personal side of students. I literally see into some of their bedrooms, and I get to meet their pets. We still use the zoom chat to talk about new haircuts, and how annoying crying babies can be. I feel robbed of so much by this year, but on the other side of the coin, this year has given a new perspective, a renewed desire for exploration of technology, and an appreciation of the relationships that we need as a species to survive.

A Turning Point

In March of 2021 we were given the opportunity to take a vaccine to guard against COVID-19 and subsequently after the 2nd vaccine and our two-week waiting period we were invited back into our classrooms. It was a surreal experience stepping into a school I had been teaching in for almost six months, for the very first time. I taught from the classroom for a week before the students joined us. We were on a staggered schedule with only about a third of the class in the physical classroom at any given time. The students were required to sit 6 feet apart and they each had a placemat that they carried with them to each class. Cohort A was there Monday and Tuesday and Cohort B was there Thursday and Friday. Wednesday remained asynchronous. There were some students, Abby being one, who were completely attending class on Zoom as well. That first day with students was exciting. It was like the first day of school in a school where you had been pen pals with all of the class for months before meeting in person. It was the little things that meant so much, seeing the smiles in the eyes of the students (we were also required to wear face masks), hearing the comments from the kids instead of reading them, and realizing how tall so many of them were. Teaching hybrid (as we called it) was a challenge having $\frac{1}{3}$ in person and $\frac{2}{3}$ on zoom of each class period, but seeing at least some of the students in person was worth it. It was at this point that I was able to get a better sense of the culture of our school, and also witness the dynamics of our own classroom culture in person.

School Culture

Learning about and integrating myself into the culture at my school was an

interesting process while teaching remotely. The only access I had to other teachers or the administration was during the staff meetings that occurred in some form weekly. The only access I had to the community surrounding the school was while driving through on the way to my sister's house or stopping by Trader Joe's. The community where our school is located is a college town with the local colleges being the biggest employer in the community. Many of the students are children of educators and academics are very much emphasized in our school district. I was surprised looking at the state-of-the-art athletic facilities that academics was the main focus of the school. The campus could rival any country club, with it's soccer field, full track, olympic size pool and envy worthy gym, but in a community where the median household income is six figures there are some advantages that translate to school facilities as well. Unfortunately, for most of the school year the students didn't get to enjoy the facilities.

It wasn't as easy to see the privilege from a Zoom screen, but after we went back to school the reality of wealth was apparent. When I say the community is wealthy, it's not to say there weren't students who were in really tough places in my class. I had one student who rarely showed up to class because even the school's hotspot would not work from his home and he could not keep a connection, so after a while he stopped trying. I had another student who was homeless and would come to school if he was staying at a hotel with wifi, which was heartbreaking as he would be so engaged and eager to learn when he was there. However, most of my students had a much different reality. This became apparent to me while driving to school one morning. I was following a sparkling white Suburban with a rhinestone license plate frame. We both

slowed to take our turn to go right at the four way stop in front of the school, but instead of turning, the Suburban's door flung open and a student jumped out. The Suburban quickly turned right and left me to wait for the crossing guard to walk the student across the street, while the student drop off area was only a few feet away. I recognize the privilege I have to even be in that situation, sitting in my air conditioned car belting out lyrics to the song on the radio, but in that moment I noticed that most of the parents I saw in the car line were not thinking of anyone besides themselves, not the other students, not the car behind them. This may be true in many places, but it hits differently in a line of BMW's and shiny new SUVs. With this experience fresh in my mind, I asked my students that day, what about quarantine was good? One student spoke up "I found out that you can DoorDash Starbucks, so I drink a lot more Starbucks now." I said, "I don't think I have ever heard of a more expensive coffee", and laughed with the student, silently grateful that the two previously mentioned students were absent that day. These events helped me identify the structural classism and racism that affects the area. I used this information to inform my teaching and my sensitivity to what the students' everyday lives were like, not taking for granted all of the students had the same experiences within this largely wealthy community. This shows critical social justice competency 5.2: identifying and meeting students where they are.

School Board, Administration, and Faculty

Our school is a place where teachers want to be. The pay and benefits are good, and the teacher's union is strong. This is witnessed in how many of the teachers have been working there for 30 plus years. The retention power of the school is a

blessing and a curse. To quote the new principal, “it takes time to turn a tanker”; he is right. Our school has committees to come up with the names of other committees. I have noticed a constant undercurrent to what I hear from the administration is a strong need to keep up an image of excellence, not said explicitly, but seemingly implied. The school has its own athletic apparel store and many of the students and teachers wore school logoed apparel every day. I am fully aware of the need for maintaining a public image. In our current culture, one can overhear students and adults alike looking at pictures on their phones asking is it “insta-worthy?”, referring to a popular social media app, as an individual’s self-concept is based on the perceptions and feedback from others (Solomon 1983, Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). I found it interesting for a whole group of adults to be more interested in what we look like and our branding than in the hard realities of the year we have right in front of us. I first noticed this in a staff meeting at the beginning of 2021. We were just back from Christmas break and I was still suffering the effects of fatigue and other neurological effects from having COVID-19. I was glad to finally get to the all staff meeting because there were so many questions I knew had to be answered. There was a buzz that we might be going back to school this year after all, even though the numbers of positive COVID-19 cases were on the rise. The students were asking questions. We needed answers. It felt like the logistics of our bell schedule was in the air and we had just found that the votes were counted to decide what Phase II of the pandemic plan was to look like. I came into this meeting with high expectations. Then we proceeded to get a step by step tour of our new branding and the new online store that was to roll out that Friday. Not one mention of COVID-19, the

vote on the Phase II schedule, if we would indeed go back to school this year, or any of the other seemingly hundreds of items that I thought might be on the agenda.

Upon questioning teachers at the school site on this apparent need to look like we have it all together I got a better picture of why the admin and teachers are situated the way they are. The district lost their superintendent in the last year and a new school board was elected. I was told by another teacher that school board changes were always a tense time as they were the group that held the most power in the district. The teachers are on the defense as they don't know how this will fare for them. They had a really good relationship with the last superintendent and don't know the new one or the new school board as we have been teaching in distance learning throughout most of this school year. The current principal of the school started at the beginning of the 20-21 school year, and really there hasn't been much to go on. Everyone feels like they are fighting blind, not sure who are their true allies in the classroom. The teachers want to know that the new players will keep all of the stakeholders, as they are referred to, in mind, including the teachers. The union is pushing for clarity and reasoning behind any changes. It is unclear if the new administration is pushing for more work from the teachers without compensation and most of the conversation is surrounding this idea.

The new principal has a challenge ahead as about half the teachers at my school site have been there for a very long time and change seems very scary for them. The principal is working on rebranding and creating/maintaining his ideas of a healthy school culture and the teachers are pushing back, resistant to change, waiting to see who they can trust. The struggle I see is only in lack of clarity in communication, which translates

to fear. This recognition helped me to reconcile my initial frustration with how staff meetings were seemingly lacking the information that I felt was needed as I stepped back and learned all of the different social dynamics at play. This reflects critical social justice competency 6.2: showing that I could reconcile school and personal values, beliefs, and practices.

In a staff meeting later in the year, the principal proposed a new bell schedule for the 21/22 school year. Many teachers had been discussing the advantages of the block schedule that was started during distance learning, but after they voted, it was unclear if there was a majority. The proposed bell schedule was a temporary, one year schedule to give a committee time to research. The next thing a teacher said started like this: “well in 1992, I was told...” with many disembodied zoom heads nodding in agreement. I see the uphill climb that the new principal is embarking on. To be fair the principal was quoting a text from 1986 earlier in the meeting that is still the current text for some aspect of deciding bell schedules. When looking into the ideas of the push/pull between admin and teachers I read that, “better planning for the pull toward change and better noticing of the opposing pull of resistance is the leader's job. When we change our own thinking and behaviors so we create an “us” that accelerates change together, we can end the tug of war” (Murphy, M. June 2016). This dynamic strongly influences the culture of the school, this year especially. The principal is pushing for an “us” mentality and seems to be aware of the dynamics of the push/ pull relationship. The progress may be slow, but there will be progress. As the administration pushes forward, clear communication will be key in creating that “us” mentality where the teachers feel less

defensive of being bulldozed by the administration requiring more work without compensation as I don't believe that is the intention of this new administration.

According to the school leadership meeting notes (a meeting of department chairs) (see appendix C) from February 4th, 2021 our school's motto is "making connections". Asking for a copy of these meeting notes was the first time I had heard this. It was so hard to make connections during our distance learning, but it was good to find out that there was at least some discussion of how to connect to the students. As far as I know none of the ideas were implemented as the social aspects of our school year were tabled due to the imminent return of the students to the physical classroom. However, on those same meeting notes, the app Rithm was introduced to the Leadership team, and subsequently to the teachers and students. This program was the school's answer to "how do we connect with our students on a socio-emotional level to make sure they are ok?". We did implement the new app and most of the students participate by "getting into Rithm" at least once a week. In this app the students rank how they are feeling on a scale using emojis with room to write anything they want the teachers and admin to know about what is going on in their lives. The program will then suggest socio-emotional learning exercises depending on the student's score. For example, if the student is feeling sluggish it will recommend getting up and stretching or jogging in place, and if the student is feeling anxious the app may recommend breathing exercises. Since implementing this program we have learned of grandparents and pets passing, students stressed out about tests or missing assignments, and are able to get a general picture of how our students are feeling that

day. This app is not the answer our students need for their mental health, but it is a good starting place as long as it isn't also the stopping place. Some of these students have gone through unbearable loss this year, and some generic breathing exercises and learned mantras may help some, but the support many of the students need goes way beyond jogging in place if you feel sluggish. After going back to school in person however, some of the students have voiced that it is too embarrassing to do the socio-emotional learning exercises and I have yet to see one student participating beyond filling out the questionnaire. To make this accessible, the teachers will need to create an accepted norm out of deep breathing exercises or standing up to stretch in the classroom without the students feeling like they are in a spotlight. This app is a great start to the socio-emotional learning that the students need, but can only catch red flags. It will be up to the teachers to create safe spaces and community in their classrooms.

One practice that has worked in many schools is the practice of circle. "The Circle is a process that intentionally seeks to attend to the whole person and to provide space for emotional, social, and moral development alongside the mental and physical." (Boyes-Watson, C., and Pranis, K., 2015, p.6) It is a practice where every student has a voice, and can be used in a variety of scenarios from simple responses to a fun question, to restorative justice practices giving voice to all parties involved in an altercation and lending space for healing to occur. The circle is a tool that insures equity. This idea has been revolutionary in my own life, having been born into a culture where the voices and concerns of males were consistently valued over females. This

would be a great tool to help create the community that the students, teachers, and administration all need. This is also relevant for social justice as it engages critical social justice competency 5.1: funds of knowledge. It supports productive learning with culturally sustaining practices.

Students

With the students, getting a sense of the school culture was more difficult. Before going partially in person in April, the students were mostly black boxes with their favorite meme or anime character displayed for those who had their cameras off, and their bedroom ceiling fans for the majority of the ones who did have their cameras on. I knew which students needed more time on an assignment, and which students were uncomfortable speaking up in class. I knew their IEP's and their 504's, and some of the students I had even been able to have fantastic zoom meetings with them and their families. However, I got a much better understanding of the students when we went into Phase II "the hybrid classroom".

One of the first ways I was able to connect with a student about more than just science class or how they were feeling that day was with a student who is very active in the fight against racial injustice. In the past year, many injustices and cultural bias came to light in our country in a more explicit way. The Black Lives Matter movement stepped up in response to the many police inflicted murders of black and brown people. Some of the harrowing stories were highlighted in the names of Walter Scott, George Floyd, Tamir Rice, Aiyana Jones, Stephon Clark, Breonna Taylor, Sandra Bland, Atatiana

Jefferson, Ezell Ford, Ahmaud Arbery, Alton Sterling, Botham Jean, and Eric Garner to name a few. With the strong push for justice in our country, many of the students stepped up to support and celebrate diversity, equity, and each other as a whole. The school board asked for a climate survey on racial equality in our district in response to this movement. One of my students volunteered for the committee as a student representative and presented his findings to the school board and then to the teachers (see Appendix D). In his research, he found through surveying the student body, the students were in favour of removing the SRO, School Resource Officers, who are the law enforcement responsible for safety and crime prevention in schools, citing that the presence of the SRO made them feel like criminals. In a time where the police are under scrutiny for killing innocent people, and being judge and jury for those who may not be innocent, it makes sense that the students would feel uncomfortable with the presence of a police officer on their school campus. (Student, A. 2021)

In looking at the idea of removing the SRO from our campus there were mixed feelings from the student presenter, but there is much literature in favor of removing police presence from school campuses. Increased police presence in schools makes it easier for the teachers and administration to hand over responsibility for disciplinary action to the criminal justice system, which can escalate to the student being arrested and solidify the “school to prison pipeline”.(Fronius et al., 2019 p.2, Ijeoma Oluo, 2019 p.128,129) This police presence can ultimately undermine any culturally sustaining or social justice oriented teaching practice. Monique Morris juxtaposes the idea of a school district becoming a “restorative practice district” with the increasing police

presence in schools noting that becoming a district that uses restorative practices such as “restorative circles” is difficult with police presence on campus. (2019) I used the practice of “circle” a couple of times in my classroom this year, but quickly realized that the school culture did not seem to be receptive to restorative circles in a way that I had hoped. Amen Rahh talks about restorative practices, such as circle, as an “approach to discipline which moves away from punishment, and toward restoring a sense of love, connection, and well-being for all those affected by a harmful act.” (2021, p.99) In order to implement a culture where restorative practices is a norm and there is no need for an SRO, practices such as circle need to be engaged in on every level. Each year the students would need to engage in a circle with light, fun topics before trying to engage in topics that require vulnerability and trust. I would love to see the district be more embrative of restorative justice and shy away from police presence on campus, as would the majority of students surveyed for this presentation. Restorative justice practice would move the whole community away from feelings of fear and perpetuate a sense of hope in this school. This shows critical social justice competency 8.1, as it raises consciousness of the socio-political context in which my school resides.

Another aspect of my student’s research into the district stated that the students and teachers surveyed were under the impression that the school district only hired teachers from their community which is almost 75% white, according to Google. In my research, I found the diversity of teachers in the district seems to match the diversity that the student found with the population of the city. The students also expressed that the curriculum they were taught was only through the perspective of rich white males,

and they desired a richer diversity in the narrative. (Student, A. 2021)

The understanding that the students possess related to the voice of the curriculum is to be commended. Their desire to diversify the voices in their texts is also an idea that seems beyond their years. I applaud their recognition and their desire. This displays social justice in the critical social justice competency 9.1, as it recognizes and acknowledges bias in curriculum. Having a diversity of voices in their education is a benefit for all students to have a better understanding of our world from the many different lenses that coexist. Cultural diversity and diversity of voices in curriculum can be summed up in a quote from Ijeoma Oluo. Her book *So You Want to Talk About Race?* says:

The truth is, as long as our children are being taught by white teachers, being taught by schools focused on the needs of white children, learning from textbooks teaching white culture, and taking tests designed for white students, our children of color are going to have a hard time engaging with and succeeding in schools. We must challenge the assumption that having our children succeed in a white supremacist school system is the best we can hope for, for kids of any race. We need to ask for a truly diverse and inclusive education for all of our kids. (2019)

I was offended by this line in her book when I first read it, as a white woman wanting to

teach in a diverse environment. I felt that she was saying because of who I am, I could not have a positive impact on brown, black, and indigenous students. Sitting with my own discomfort and thinking about my place in this world, I found that William Ayres said ““Racism”also means the structures of white supremacy and the institutional practices based on race”(2019). This got me thinking about the aspects of white culture that make up white supremacy and how this can negatively impact my classroom and students of all backgrounds and races. One aspect that stood out was the emphasis of individuality. My culture prizes individual achievement above community resources. This detrimental emphasis on individuality creates a need to stand out and be “better” than others. In an individualistic society that prizes individual achievement you run the risk of having relationships turn into a “what can you offer me?” transaction. A transactional relationship no longer sees people as people but as pawns or as resources. The breakdown in this aspect of white supremacy culture is that there is no true community. You find people searching for authenticity and coming up short because even the “good” that people who are inundated in this culture do is documented and displayed for all to see on social media. I know people who want to reach out, who want to find community. They want to be a source of good, but the underlying need for approval and need for status undermines their intent. Status can lead to wealth, which can lead to power, and power is the ultimate achievement in an individualistic culture, which reinforces white supremacist ideology. This individualism creates loneliness, and this loneliness causes despair. We need each other and a healthy community to truly have hope. “One landmark study showed that lack of social

connection is a greater detriment to health than obesity, smoking and high blood pressure.”(Seppala, E., 2014) In order for all of our students to succeed, we will need representation from many different cultures and races and value all of the ways each student can contribute to create a healthy learning environment and to not reinforce a “lone ranger” mentality. This work does not exclude me, but welcomes me for my voice and understanding as well as those from cultures and races different from my own. As I make sure that my classroom is a place where every student voice matters, and we spotlight the different cultures and races that worked together to advance the field of science, I become part of the solution. My recognition of this tension and subsequent reconciliation shows the value critical social justice competency 8.2: sharing power and tools as I can use my position of power as a teacher and a white woman and share that power by celebrating the diversity of voice in my classroom.

What I Have Learned in My Study of School Culture

My year long student teaching placement was an interesting learning experience. I had never worked or volunteered in a school where “the way it has always been done” was so highly valued by the teachers, or at least I had never been in a position to hear that sentiment in a school. The attitude I encountered was that “if we do it that way it is for a reason decided on by people that know better”. This didn’t sit well with me as I participated in classes aimed at social justice, participated in marches, and worked to make my classroom a safe space for all people keeping in mind the voices that were already amplified, and others that should be. I learned that keeping my head down and taking home that paycheck is not enough for me to keep teaching. There were so many

times this year that I failed to do what I knew in my gut was the right thing because I was told that I could not or that it wasn't my place. I had a student this year involved in an accident that killed a person, and I wasn't allowed to reach out. The turmoil that I felt going into the next class with him was heart wrenching. This frustrated me to no end. This showed me the school culture of ignoring the needs of students with the intent of protecting them from any embarrassment. I wanted us to embrace him and show him that we support him during this traumatic life experience. I spoke extensively to my mentor teacher about the situation and cried to him several times after school but was reminded each time that I could not let him know that I knew, even though it was in black and white in the city's newspaper. I don't know what my student really went through or is going through. I do know that he didn't return to school when we came back in person. He was still in my class until the end of the school year, but through Zoom only. He is a good student and has kept his grades up for the most part. Is he thriving? I doubt it. I didn't know him well before this happened as it was toward the beginning of school. I was heartbroken. I ended up being able to talk with him for a few minutes without bringing up anything specific the next week when he stopped into office-hours. I let him know that I knew this was a really hard year emotionally for everyone and if he ever needed to talk that I was there for him and I care. I hated having to be so generic. He said he appreciated it, and he seemed ok on the surface. The other students didn't know or at least didn't let on that they knew. He did have better grades second semester than he did first when it happened. I regret not reaching out, and I will not let that happen again. I have learned so many things in respect to the

teaching craft this year, but learning about school culture and how it affects the students, especially in a diverse school environment, was the most important thing I learned. This important lesson is embodied in critical social justice competency 6.2 where I didn't reconcile school and personal values, beliefs, and practices. I did embody competency 4.3 by using the information I had about a student to look out for him and give him extra time on assignments, as I knew his home life was upended.

Learning about the school culture and the frustrations with the apparent disconnect of the school wanting to connect with the students (Rithm), but not wanting to venture outside of their comfort zones to do it (circle) was a great source of tension. The tension that existed in wanting to be there for my students but not being permitted was an extremely uncomfortable tension, and working on being a critical justice educator in a white supremacy culture may have been the biggest tension of all. Living in the midst of that tension this year was stressful and seemed hopeless at times. I had to take the time and look for my blindspots as a white teacher in a city where 75% of the population is white. I had to take the time and reflect on what did work, what didn't work, and what I want to carry with me to my own classroom. Toward the end of the school year, in the spring, I was having a particularly stressful week so I took a moment to sit on the back porch and listen, for my own mental health. I began to hear baby birds chirping. Looking around I found a nest of house finches in the rafters of the patio. I watched for a bit while the daddy finch would bring food to the mama finch who would then regurgitate the food for the babies. The process was mesmerizing and the sounds were beautiful. It was exactly the reminder of hope I needed to re-energize and step

back into the classroom the next day. I find that hope is always there when you look for it.

Conclusion

Looking back on this past year and a half, I have learned so much and grown in ways I could scarcely imagine at the beginning of 2020. In reflecting on who I am and why I need to teach, I was able to reconnect with what sometimes feels like a different life so many years ago. I was able to remember who I am and where I come from. I was able to reflect on my known strengths and weaknesses and to work toward uncovering implicit bias in my own life. This will serve me well as a template to keep doing the self reflection that informs my growth.

When talking with and observing my students, I found joy in watching their development over the school year. I learned that I am really good at creating relationships with students, and still need to work on making sure I am differentiating the learning for all students to learn. Getting to know students and their families is time consuming, but returns on that investment are innumerable.

Looking into the school culture and the fears and tensions that were held throughout this school year, I could see the predominant white culture at work with the “what’s in it for me” attitude in teachers, parents and students, as we lean into individuality and push for recognition. I will take that tension with me and, through

self-reflection, not forget what it was like to be a first year teacher with a critical social justice lens to see the world. I will continue to look for my blind spots and find friendships that are comfortable enough to help me search for those blindspots. I will continue to work to get to know my students, their families, their cultures, and the culture of the community where I find myself working. My soul delights in this hope.

We hold onto hope even in the darkest of times sometimes because we have to, sometimes because we want to, and sometimes we lose that grip. I chose to focus on hope this past school year as I knew it would get me through some very tough times. I also noticed this hope and fear/despair tension in my students, my co-workers, and my classmates.

For myself, This past year and a half has been devastating. As it has for much of the whole world, no one alive has lived through a global crisis quite like this one. The toll that has been taken on our mental health is not one that will be easily forgotten. In my family alone, there have been 8 deaths in the last year and a half, and although not all of them were due to COVID-19 my family was not able to come together and grieve as we would have in a different year. Those we lost, we have not seen in over a year and that feels incredibly unfair as well. Leaning into hope has been the best path this year.

So to end this school year I leave my students, co-workers, classmates and you, with a prayer that you may always find hope, and with this Celtic blessing, in the tradition of my ancestors:

A Friendship Blessing

May you be blessed with good friends.

May you learn to be a good friend to yourself.

May you be able to journey to that place in your soul where
there is great love, warmth, feeling, and forgiveness.

May this change you.

May it transfigure that which is negative, distant, or cold
in you.

May you be brought in to the real passion, kinship, and
affinity of belonging.

May you treasure your friends.

May you be good to them and may you be there for them;
may they bring you all the blessings, challenges, truth,
and light that you need for your journey.

May you never be isolated.

May you always be in the gentle nest of belonging with your
anam cara (soul friend).

(O'Donohue, J. 1997, p.35-36)

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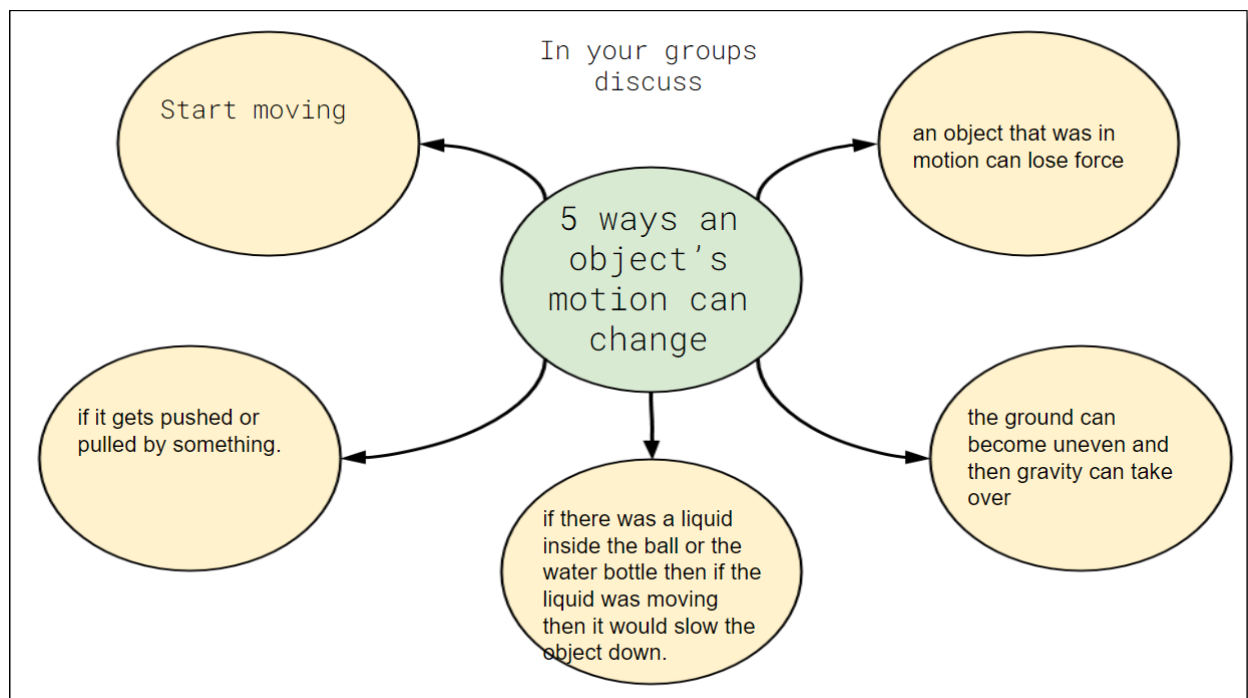
Appendix A

CGU TEP Critical Social Justice Teaching Domains, Relationships, Competency Strands	
Domain 1: <i>Philosophy of Education</i>	Relationships: <i>Purpose, Self, Content</i>
1.1 Grow Self-Awareness	
1.2 Establish Baseline of Respect for Students & Their Learning	
1.3 Develop Familiarity & Facility with The Curriculum	
1.4 Take Responsibility for Students Learning & Engagement	
Domain 2: <i>Pedagogy</i>	Relationships: <i>Teacher, Students, Content</i>
2.1 Introduce New Content & Skills in Engaging and Meaningful Ways	
2.2 Make Productive Learning Accessible	
2.3 Use Instructional Practices to Grow Students' Knowledge, Skills, & Understanding	
2.4 Help Students Level Up with Steadily Increasing Rigor	
Domain 3: <i>Science of Learning</i>	Relationships: <i>Students, Content, Self</i>
3.1 Use Data to Inform Instruction	
3.2 Harness Instructional Cohesion	
3.3 Use Assessments to Promote Learning & Understanding	
Domain 4: <i>Socio-Emotional Learning</i>	Relationships: <i>Students, Self, Others</i>
4.1 Set & Demonstrate Expectations	
4.2 Promote and Maintain A Pro-Social, Asset-Based Classroom Ecology	
4.3 Use Knowledge of Students to Anticipate & Limit Unproductive Behavior	
Domain 5: <i>Funds of Knowledge</i>	Relationships: <i>Teacher, Students, Households</i>
5.1 Support Productive Learning with Culturally Sustaining Practices	
5.2 Identify & Meet Students Where They Are	
5.3 Develop Productive & Inclusive Relationships with Households	
Domain 6: <i>School Climate & Culture</i>	Relationships: <i>Teacher, School, Households</i>
6.1 Maintain Professional Responsibilities	
6.2 Reconcile School & Personal Values, Beliefs, and Practices	
Domain 7: <i>Community & Cultural Wealth</i>	Relationships: <i>Students, Households, Communities</i>
7.1 Raise Consciousness of Local Community & Cultural Wealth	
Domain 8: <i>Socio-Political Identity</i>	Relationships: <i>Students, Others, Communities</i>
8.1 Raise Consciousness of Socio-Political Context	
8.2 Share Power & Tools	
Domain 9: <i>Global Perspective</i>	Relationships: <i>Others, Communities, The World</i>
9.1 Recognize and Acknowledge Bias in Curriculum & Media	
9.2 Promote Comparative, Critical, And Global Perspectives	

Appendix B

These are work samples from Abigail Lynae, first submission vs. last submission.

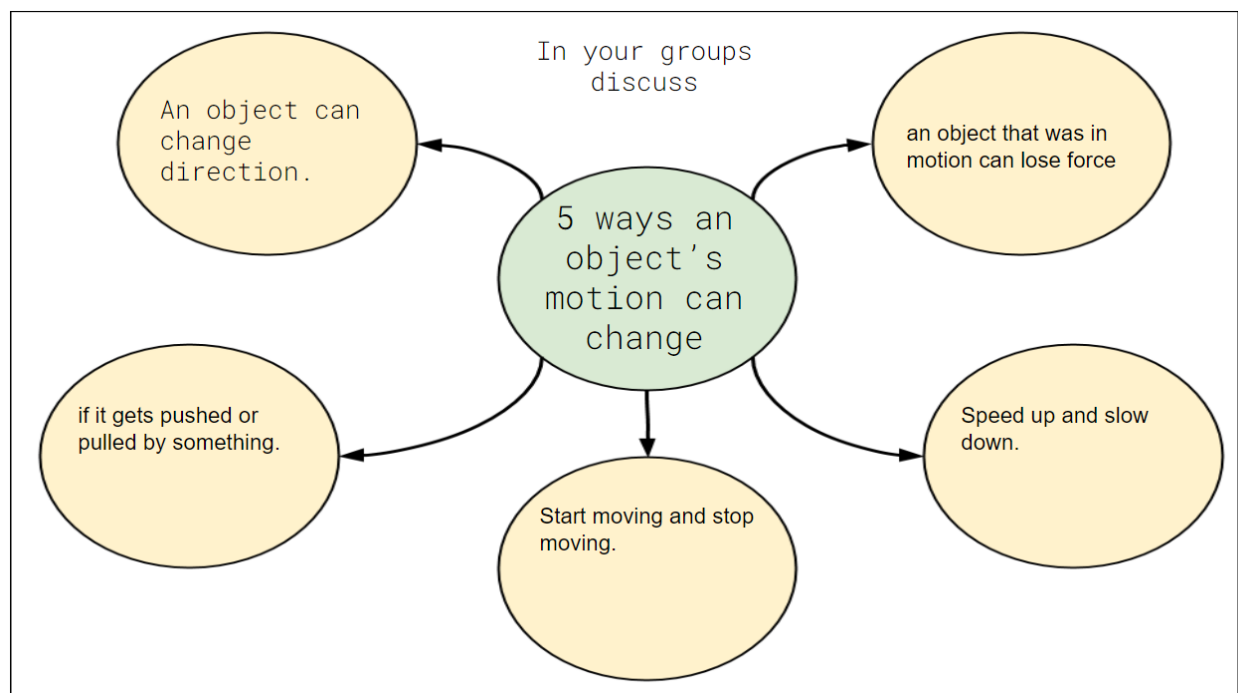
In this example we were looking for the 5 ways an object can move: start, stop, speed up, slow down, and change directions. Abby turned in this graphic organizer:



The answer "Start moving" was provided. I noticed that she was starting to think about many of the concepts that we were going to teach such as the effect of force on an object, or the effect of mass, however, most if not all of the answers we were looking for had been brought up in class. We weren't explicit about the answers as this was the very beginning of the unit and we wanted them to explore and find the concepts on their own. As is shown on the top of the graphic organizer this was done in a group. I noticed that others in her group had the answers we were looking for and this sample

gave us the data that Abby would work by herself instead of interacting with her peers in small groups.

After reviewing her work, the comment: “So getting pushed and pulled is force, an uneven ground and gravity will have an affect, but how will it affect the object? If there is liquid inside it might change the direction... Stop by after class if you need more help with this! - Mrs. Hanson”, and the 2 out of 10 she received on this submission, Abby came to office hours and asked for help. I let her know that the answers she gave, while not all incorrect, were not answering the question of how the object moves. We worked through several examples and she turned this in:



She then received a 9 out of 10 as she had all the answers in her graphic organizer but seemed still unclear what we were asking. We worked more on this concept in future lessons.

Appendix C

Leadership Meeting | MINUTES

Meeting date | time February 4, 2021 | 2:30 | Meeting location Virtual Zoom

Facilitator

[REDACTED]

Attendees:

Note taker

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

AGENDA TOPICS

Agenda topic Making Connections with students | Presenter Leadership Team

[REDACTED] motto is "making connections." What can we do as a school to bring students together outside of the classroom to decrease feelings of isolation in this virtual environment? Here are the ideas that people brought to their departments.

Science:

- Clubs are going well; we should advertise those more
- Teachers could do a mental check in at the beginning of class (Ex: Scale of 1-5 where is your mental health today? Or, ask them to tell a story in the chat about something happening in their life)
- Breakout rooms just for subject-specific interaction (similar to our PLCs) where students can come and choose a breakout room to chat about subjects like "gaming," "sports," etc.
- Virtual dance with music
- Virtual Zoom party with breakout rooms that each have different games or activities

English:

- Virtual lunch room where games or activities could be played
- Virtual "Opportunity Time" that could provide optional activities for students to do at lunch or on Wednesdays
- ASB hosted Wednesdays (maybe one or two ASB students could be in different breakout rooms to host activities)
- Designated club times so that more people can attend
- Beanstalk app- a school wide reading tracking system where all members log their reading hours (teachers included)

History:

- Yard signs for students with 4.0 or renaissance, but renaissance would include students who are making grade improvements or showing positive work ethic
- Certificates for students sent from office
- Virtual game nights (Trivia, BINGO, minute-to-win-it, etc.)
- Drive-in movie night with big screen and speakers (families and everyone welcome)
- Wednesday WOW day to celebrate students who embody Panther PRIDE
- Virtual talent show where students submit videos of their talents and we compile it together
- Virtual field trips or museum tours
- Ask kids what they want to see and participate in
- School-wide assembly or rally to boost school spirit

- ASB recognizing students on their social media pages

Math:

- 7th graders have never been on campus- take a video field trip of the school and the teachers
- Bring back student of the month and announce during PRIDE and/or on social media pages
- Handwritten post cards for students written by staff

Electives:

- Kindness challenge
- Department virtual activity night: each department could host an activity night for students or families

Special Ed:

- Activity night- a virtual night where they can participate and learn something new but not have to produce something for a grade

P.E.:

- Opportunity Time schedule where students can self-select where they would like to go. Ideas for breakout rooms could be things like: gaming, share your pets, art, robotics, music, sports talk, sports contest (free throw shooting for example), physical challenge, legos, etc.

Counselors:

- Virtual college tours during office hours
- Virtual awards posted on social media
- Wednesday support meetings where teachers can host social office hours to just chat
- Staff members mentor D/F students through messages, Zoom, office hours, etc.

Admin:

- Bringing back renaissance with tiered rewards systems and recognition (see attached DRAFT flyer for ideas)
- A drive-through recognition is currently being organized to recognize Semester 1 grades. There will be a backdrop and cardboard cut-outs for students to get out of the car and take pictures
- Building more of a renaissance culture based around PRIDE

Next Steps:

- Create a team of people to help make some of these ideas happen. They will be referred to as the R.A.T. Team (Renaissance Action Team)

Action items	Person/People Responsible	Deadline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send an email to try and recruit R.A.T Team 	██████████	February 9 th

Agenda topic *Rhithm app* | Presenter ██████████

Background:

There is an app currently on the market called “Rhithm” that is designed to capture the emotional state of our kids and staff and collects data on their overall wellbeing. ██████ asked a few teachers to look at it ahead of Leadership to see if it was worth discussing at the meeting, and they felt that it was. The team watched two introductory videos about Rhithm, and had a discussion about whether or not to use the tool at ██████.

- Big idea: There are many students hurting and struggling right now and we need a way to engage with them and their overall wellbeing

- The data on students would allow us to possibly identify students who need help that would otherwise slip through the cracks
- Concern: what kind of responsibility does this put on teachers?
- The assessment takes less than 3 minutes and gives students an immediate individual activity based on their self-assessment
- Implementation at [REDACTED] would need to be discussed. Ideally it would happen at least once or twice per day- not just once per week during PRIDE.

Vote:

- [REDACTED] made a motion to present the idea of this tool at the staff meeting where it would then be discussed in random breakout rooms and the entire staff will vote on implementation.
- [REDACTED] seconded
- All approved

Action items	Person/People Responsible	Deadline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • [REDACTED] will present more information about Rhithm at our next Staff meeting so that there can be an all staff vote 	[REDACTED]	February 10 th , 2021

Agenda topic Interventions | Presenter [REDACTED]

- Currently, the center that is being used for special ed students is being run by our staff. If additional support was added, can the center also be used for all students? This could help remove the stigma for students not wanting to go to the center since now it would be an inclusive environment.
- What are the pathways and supports available for students if they need help?

Action items	Person/People Responsible	Deadline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a discussion with the Special Ed department to see if this is something that could be feasible 	[REDACTED]	February 19 th
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Send out list of resources and pathways for students that need help 	[REDACTED]	February 19 th

Agenda topic MYP | Presenter [REDACTED]

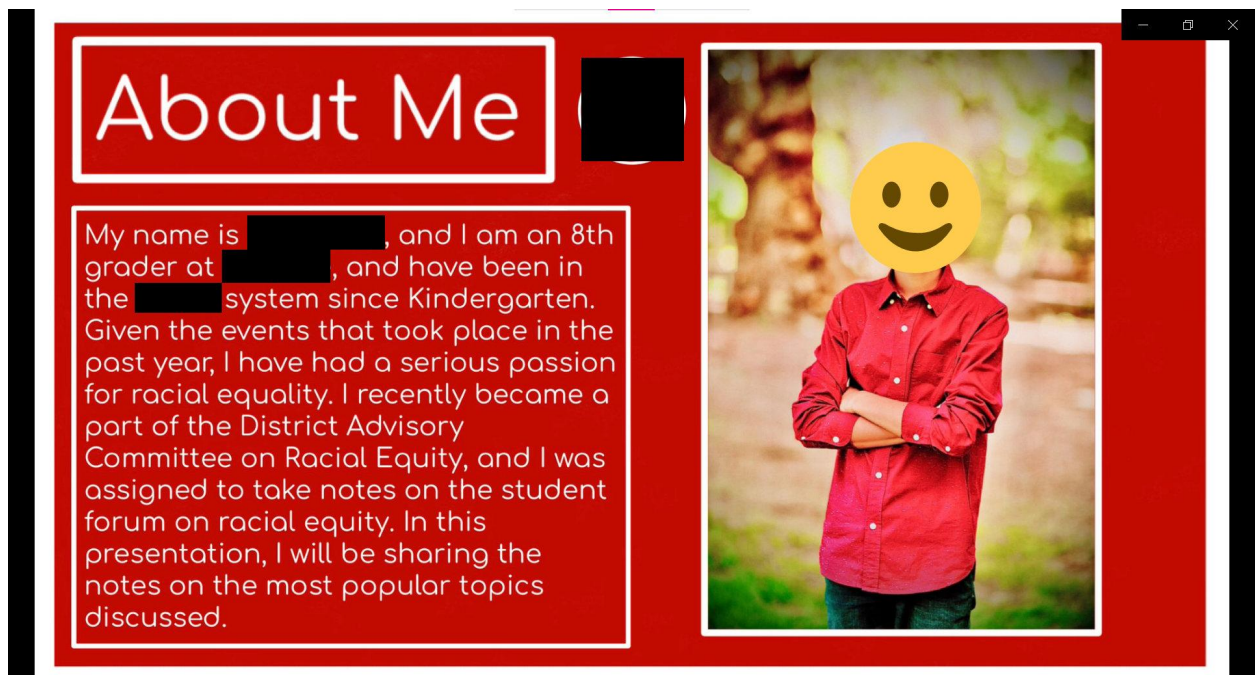
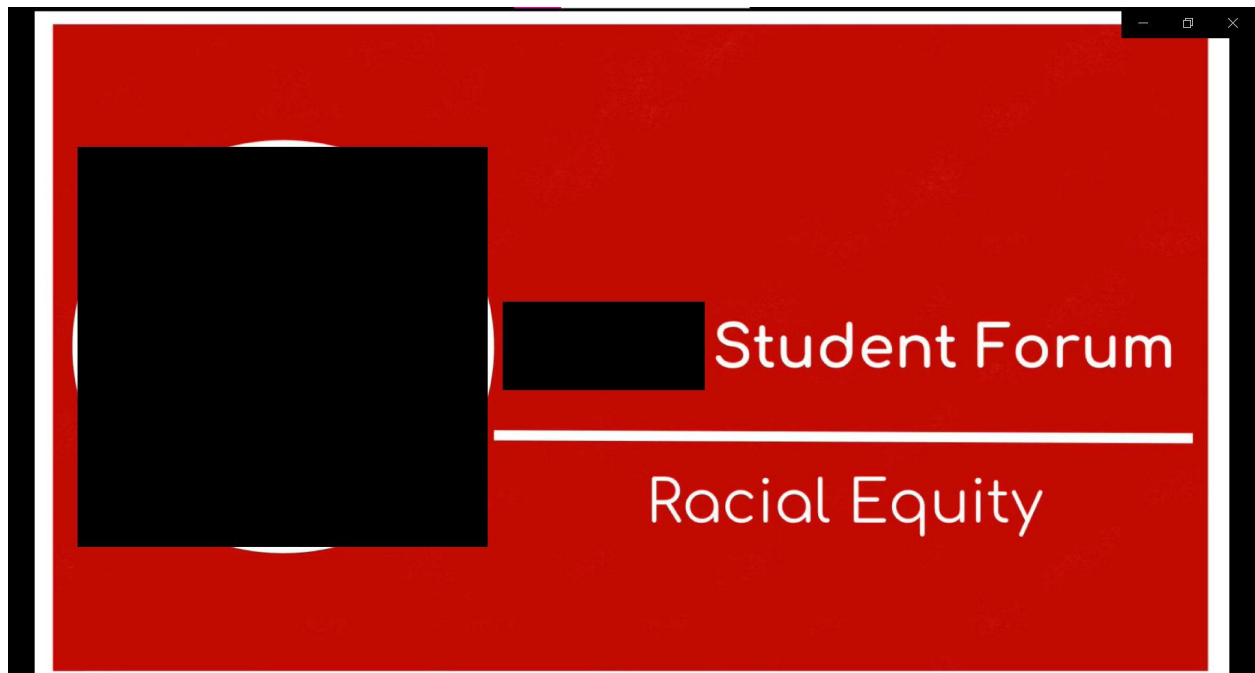
- In November, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] participated in an MYP training, and would like to discuss the next steps with the entire staff at the next staff meeting.
- If there are any questions, comments, or concerns about this topic before the staff meeting, please reach out to [REDACTED] directly.

Action items	Person/People Responsible	Deadline
[REDACTED] will discuss MYP at the next Staff meeting	[REDACTED]	February 10 th , 2021

Agenda topic Open House | Presenter [REDACTED]

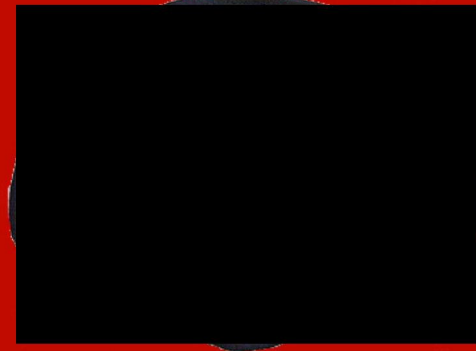
- What should Open House look like this year? Think outside of the box and bring ideas to your leadership rep

Appendix D



The SRO

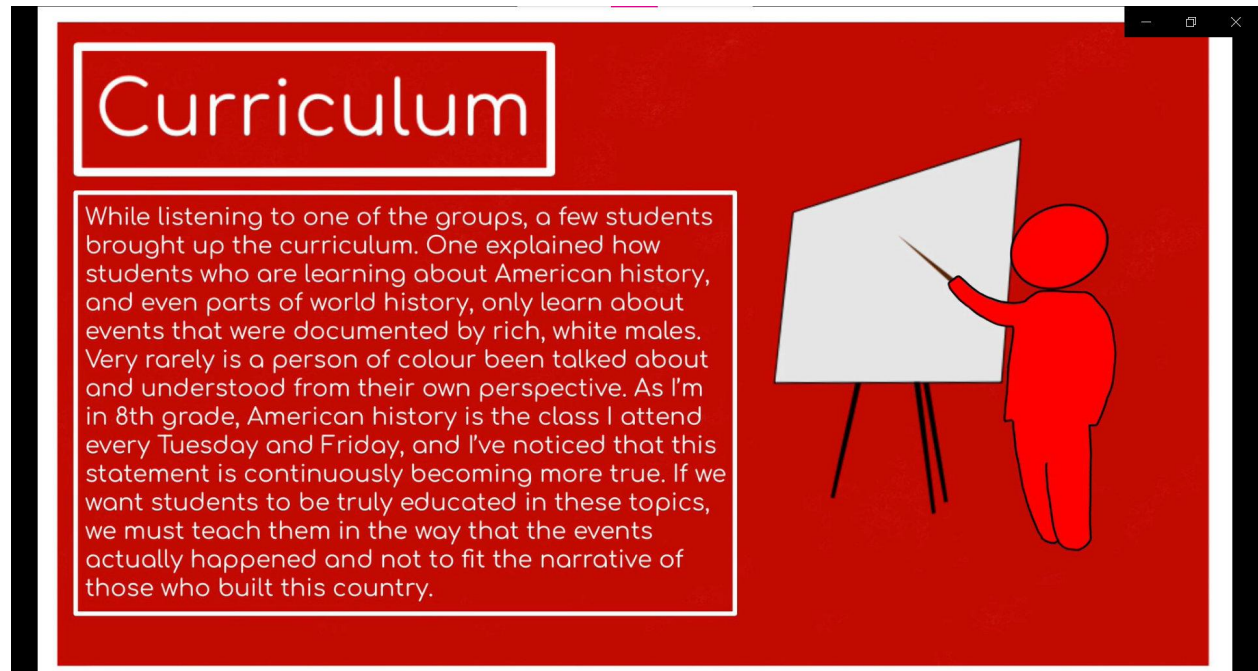
By far the most talked about topic is the presence of the SRO (Student Resource Officer) on campus. Many students believe that them being there, in a sense, criminalizes the students and they don't see why a person in possession of a firearm on campus necessary. During the forum, students were divided into 3 different groups and all of them discussed this matter, and all of them seemed to be in favour of removing the SRO.

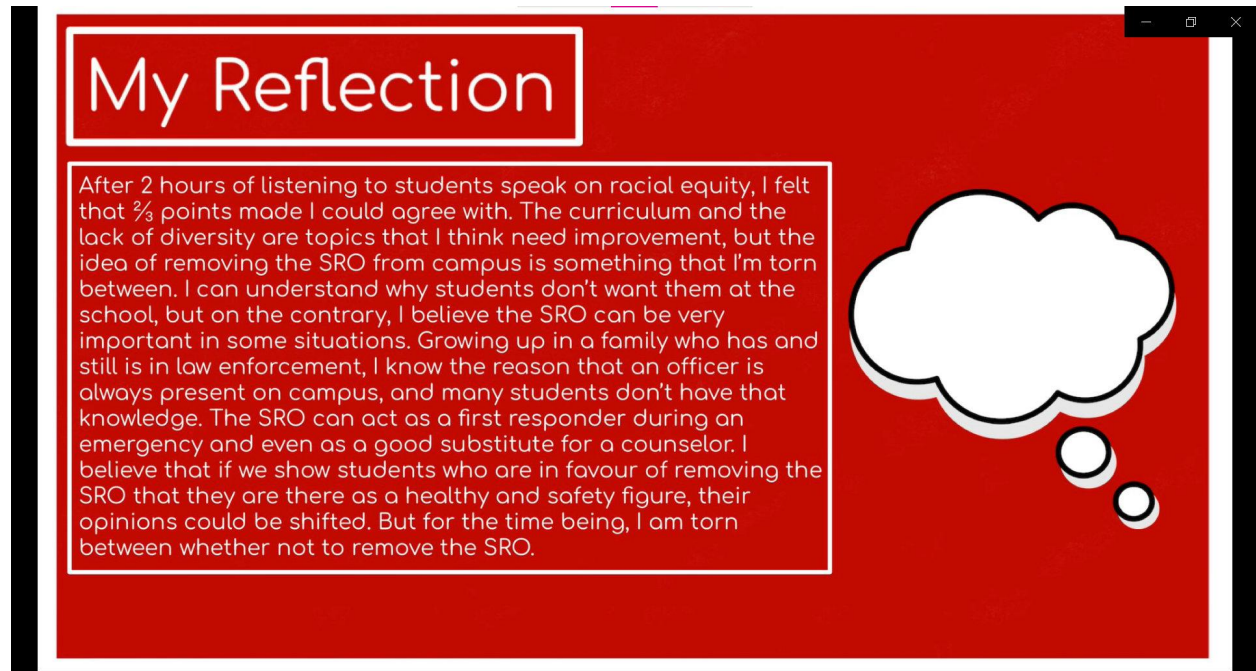


Diversity

Throughout the district, there is a serious lack of diversity. In the 8 years I've been in the [REDACTED] system, I've had a total of 19 teachers, and only 3 of them have been people of colour. Only 16%! Race is not the only diversity issue in the district. A teacher at [REDACTED] shared with me that she grew up in [REDACTED] and when the time for looking for a job came around, her parents told her that becoming a teacher in [REDACTED] was going to be very difficult. She went on to tell me that their belief was that [REDACTED] only hired staff that lived locally, meaning that at some point, the city gave the impression that only local teachers could be hired. While this misconception is quite popular, according to those I've spoken to, there has been great work on changing that belief within the district.







My Reflection

After 2 hours of listening to students speak on racial equity, I felt that $\frac{2}{3}$ points made I could agree with. The curriculum and the lack of diversity are topics that I think need improvement, but the idea of removing the SRO from campus is something that I'm torn between. I can understand why students don't want them at the school, but on the contrary, I believe the SRO can be very important in some situations. Growing up in a family who has and still is in law enforcement, I know the reason that an officer is always present on campus, and many students don't have that knowledge. The SRO can act as a first responder during an emergency and even as a good substitute for a counselor. I believe that if we show students who are in favour of removing the SRO that they are there as a healthy and safety figure, their opinions could be shifted. But for the time being, I am torn between whether not to remove the SRO.



Thank You!