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Living, Learning, and Teaching: An Ethnographic Narrative

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For Mom and Dad, two great individuals who have opened many doors in my life so that I may, in turn, do the work of opening doors for other souls.

Abstract

This paper details the journey of a first-year teacher. It is a highly reflective exploration of their inner landscape – one that documents the development of the teaching self in relation to students and society at large. Separated into four distinct sections, this work serves as an account of personal motivation to teach, getting to know students beyond the classroom walls, immersion in the community to situate educational work, and a comprehensive reflection upon teaching effectiveness and the evolution of the educating self. Development as a professional educator as stated in Teacher Performance Expectation (TPE) 6 demands continual introspection and proactive adjustments to our practice. The first year of teaching – a stage of initial and potentially immense growth – is especially critical as it sets the tone for the next and many years after. This ethnography interweaves objective analysis and studies internal and external factors and how they influence one another, and honest perceptions, struggles, and realizations as an individual embarks on the journey to becoming a teacher. By documenting my personal experience and performing higher-level analysis, we unveil the varied intricacies, competing demands, and trying moments that constitute the teaching experience. As the year (and, consequently, the ethnography) unfolds, one thing remains clear – teaching is a work of the heart.

Keywords: ethnography, teaching, education, first year, reflection

Preface

During the very first course in the Claremont Graduate University (CGU) Teacher Education Program, we were introduced to the Ethnographic Narrative Project as an academic, yet deeply personalized, work of writing in which we would explore different aspects of teaching during each term (i.e. summer, fall, spring). Originally assigned as a summative project considered to be our master's thesis, it quickly and surprisingly took on a body and character of its own. Overall, it served not as a capstone project characteristic of many master's programs but instead as a dynamic work that closely tracked the development of my practice and deeply explored my first-year teaching experience.

There are four parts contained within this ethnography: (A) teaching identity and motivation, (B) getting to know students, (C) community, school, and classroom, and (D) analysis of teacher effectiveness. Though distinct in their own right, composing each part proved strikingly similar. To commence, I read over the instructions and rubric for a general idea. This was followed by a great effort to gather enough information by drawing upon any resources I could, which included sifting through personal memories, speaking with colleagues, conducting home visits, searching up data online, and collecting student work samples. (Details regarding the home visit and data collection process for focus students can be found in part B.) Finally, I sat down to synthesize the information by infusing my analysis with personal reflections and academic citations.

In summary, this ethnography required a high level of involvement and assumed a significance far beyond that of typical assignments. The work was time-consuming, requiring serious commitment; however, after several drafts and revisions, a work emerged that I strongly believe represents my experience and development as a beginning teacher. Through writing, I was able to explicate specific ideas and blaze a trail of self-discovery – one that heightened

awareness of my teaching self and weaved a story of closely intertwined teacher actions and student outcomes. From my participation in this year-long project, I forged a deep awareness of my impact on students and affirmed the notion that through teaching, we do make a difference.

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Living, Learning, and Teaching: An Ethnographic Narrative

Part A: Who am I & why do I want to be a teacher?

Personal Experiences and Beliefs

It was a dreary, rather ordinary weekday morning, and my mom pushed the wheelchair containing my unassuming, yet feisty, grandma and energetic four-year-old me on the smooth, dark gray concrete through a sea of firehouse-red seats and white plastic tables before slowing down and facing our chair towards one of these tables. We had just completed our fairly regular Costco visit to pick up some necessary groceries, household items, and reliably unplanned finds, and we decided to eat a convenient meal at the food court to finish up. My mom pulled the brake lever down with a forceful tug and asked my grandma if she wanted her usual hot dog while I jumped out of the wheelchair and started climbing onto a concrete platform to explore.

As any good mom does, mine took a quick glance at my adventurous whereabouts, commanded that I sit down on the bench immediately, and shot a remarkably effective death stare to reinforce her request (though it hardly needed reinforcing). As any good kid does, I then sank down defeatedly into the seat perpendicular to my grandma. But not to fear because my grandma was always one step ahead in trying to keep me entertained. In this instance, she offered that we play a counting game. She put her right-hand flat on the table and said “one.” Then, she instructed that I place my right hand on top of hers and say the next number – “two.” She put her left hand on top of mine, “three,” and I followed suit with “four.” Having run out of hands, she slid her right one out from the bottom, stuck it on top of the pile, and announced, “five.” We continued like this for some time, so when my mom finally returned with three foil-wrapped, steamy hot dogs, we had just about reached one-hundred.

Wherever we went and whatever we did, my family always found a way to teach me something, whether it be identifying fruits and vegetables, analyzing colors, observing manners, or – when I grew older – explaining historical events and the world’s injustices from their own unique and deeply personal perspective. They made living an education, and so to me, education became life.

A second-generation Italian-American, my grandma reached only the 10th grade before dropping out to open up a beauty shop with a couple of her four sisters. My mother made it to a community college where she took a few courses before giving up school to work in a customer service-oriented office position. My father finished high school and forewent a direct transition to community college to instead work a series of menial jobs. Soon after, a mentor from work suggested going back to school, so he attended a city college and completed general education requirements. After working many years as an accountant at the company of his current employment, my dad enrolled in an online university program to simultaneously earn his bachelor’s while maintaining his full-time position. To safeguard job security and prospects in the changing times, he completed his degree 25 years after graduating high school.

Though my family would not be considered highly educated in the formal sense, they certainly have done everything in their power to ensure that I have the tools and support to succeed. Growing up, my house brimmed with interactive history toys, fascinating dinosaur gadgets, singing maps and globes, tactile brain puzzles, and (much to my indignation) strictly educational materials such as vocabulary builders, reading comprehension texts, and math practice books. Not only did my parents provide these resources, but they also took every available moment to share in the joys of learning and expand upon what the materials could offer by telling stories, relevant information, and exactly why things were important. They supported

my academic and extracurricular endeavors unconditionally. Both my mom and dad attended every single Back-to-School night and Open House from 1st to 12th grade, every gymnastics meet, every dance competition, every piano recital, every tennis match, and every awards ceremony. From them, I gleaned that a guardian supplies as many opportunities possible for a child in their care and provides unyielding support throughout the duration of their journey. I learned that teaching is about walking beside inexperienced eyes, pointing out struggle, complexity, and beauty, and showing them how to think deeply about what they see.

Aside from intentionally instilling foundational virtues of respect, honesty, and dedication through discipline and deliberate wording, my parents have indubitably shaped my conceptions of what it means to care for others. Several years ago, my mother gave up her previous occupation to devote the entirety of her time and effort towards caring for my growing self and aging grandmother. If not driving me everywhere I needed to be – from school to the gymnasium, to the dance studio, to piano lessons, – she was constantly filling up my grandma’s water thermos and attending to her medical needs. My father, on the other hand, has worked the past thirty-five years in the finance department at an engineering company and, in doing so, made many sacrifices along the way. Work obligations have created disputes at home, engendered overwhelming stress, and even preceded health considerations at times. Yet, he continually decides to maintain this position in order to sufficiently provide for my family. Witnessing their purposeful struggles has ingrained in me a fierce desire to sacrifice likewise for meaningful goals and people, including all of the students that I will be privileged to work with.

My family comes from humble origins, but they have done everything in their power to equip me with the character qualities needed to thrive in the world – a keen awareness of the importance of education, being one of them. They have granted me the opportunity through

steadfast care and attention, through seeking resources where their own expertise tapered, and – most essentially – through their unwavering belief in my potential. As an individual about to embark on the journey to becoming an effective and inspirational educator, it is these lessons of guiding and caring that I shall strive to infuse into every aspect of my work.

Informed by family background and personal experience, teaching has come to signify giving one's self completely to care for and empower others. As such, I intend to foster a student-centric atmosphere that seamlessly merges content standards and student interests into engaging lessons. Learning, for a child, can be incredibly enjoyable when they interact with the material and their surroundings, so I plan on providing a variety of activities that allow students to absorb information and demonstrate understanding in ways comfortable to them. Just as my parents did for me, I will listen to my students, guide them with clarity and patience, and support their endeavors. Most essentially, I will help them accomplish the things they think they can do as well as those they think they cannot.

Strengths and Limitations

When I was thirteen, my parents, a couple of family friends, and I went bowling for a casual outing. It was intended to be your typical communal activity – a fun, light-hearted opportunity to talk a bit and catch up over a relaxing game. So, it was much to everybody's surprise that halfway through the game, I started crying. It wasn't because I had dropped the bowling ball on my foot or slipped on the oil; it was because I felt like a failure.

Growing up, whatever I was not good at after a few attempts, I decided I did not like. I categorized bowling, swimming, and history into this inadequacy pile, and residuals of this stagnant confinement still linger today. For example, in comparison to my father's 210-league average, my postings of 63, 80, and occasional 100-somethings were meager at best. Though I

knew that my parents' encouragement was sincere, and my dad's expert advice was well-intentioned, throwing a ball into the gutter or managing to knock down only a few pins in front of them made me feel like a massive disappointment. Something about standing in my lonesome where others could see and judge my progress or lack thereof elicited crippling sentiments of ineptitude that dot my remembrance to this day.

Since then, my fear of not being good enough has evolved into a pursuit of perfection, which has its own benefits and drawbacks. Knowing that improvement emerges from investing time, attention, and conscious effort, I have dedicated significant chunks of my high school and collegiate life to excelling academically. From poring over readings to solidifying tricky details in math problems, I chased capability, strove to comprehend deeply, and reached for success. In these pursuits, I forged a strong work ethic and profound resilience in the face of adversity. However, aside from being an unintentional impetus for developing positive character qualities, perfection is conversely an "enemy of difficult learning" as its insistence on the end product diminishes the integrity of struggle and process of learning (Dweck, 2016, p. 181). Indeed, as desires to achieve the highest reaches possible loomed reliably in the background of my studies, worries of incompetence boiled beneath the surface, and both were inhibiting my capacity to properly receive an education.

A notably difficult physics class in my sophomore year of undergraduate coursework marked a pivotal alteration in my educational paradigm. From the start, grades were to be determined only at the end of the term, so throughout the duration of the course, all I could do was focus on learning. Between this and the sincere efforts of the professor to offer help by opening his office up before, during, and after lectures, I began to realize that tying my worth as

a student and person to assessment results made for an incredibly distorted perception of the learning process – one that I sorely needed to change.

Since then, I have become exponentially more cognizant of the bigger picture as I dive into new material and sift through concepts to discern meaning. I recognize the value of dedication to studies and the importance of maintaining overall balance. I understand now that one should not glean self-worth from scores, nor grant grades control over identity and character. Assessments are not the sole determiners of who a student is or should be but are general reflections of current aptitudes and indicators to guide teachers and students along the roads of development. After all, education is intended to enrich lives and broaden horizons, and it will be my responsibility as a teacher to convey this message through my attitude, words, and actions.

Experiences that I have lived through and continue to learn from will certainly inform my teaching. Having personally grappled with insecurity and doubt, I will be sensitive to students' sentiments and needs, foster a safe and welcoming environment to express themselves and offer constant support and affirmation. Having struggled with a fear of incompetence and obligation to perfection, I have discerned that it is best to utilize them lightly only to guide one's true goals. Through teaching my students these attitudes towards failure and perfection, I hope to liberate them from the control of insignificant outcomes and consequences so that they can immerse themselves fully in the process of learning. Just as in bowling it is more beneficial to focus on the lane rather than on the gutters or the idea of getting a strike, I will likewise encourage my students to remain grounded by their goals, efforts, and achievements.

From childhood to now, I have made significant progress in perceiving and accepting myself as a human being living a full and sometimes unpredictable life in this rich and textured world of ours. Oftentimes, reality does not meet expectation, and this is a significant lesson that I

hope to share with students by cultivating in them the capacity to assess situations realistically, the compassion to be forgiving, and the patience to persevere until important goals are achieved.

Communicating, Learning, and Teaching Styles

Throughout the several years spent in academic settings and non-academic ones, I have forged distinct communicating, learning, and teaching styles. When I was younger, I used to be intimidated by social interactions. Small groups were manageable and even comforting, but crowds brought me mild anxiety and made me feel insecure. This spirit of introversion remains, yet through engaging in a host of athletic, community service, and employment activities, I have acquired and become familiarized with social norms, cues, and strategies that facilitate effective communication. From extensive practice with properly receiving corrections from gymnastics coaches, I learned how to maintain meaningful eye contact and affirm understanding. From attending weekly Key Club service events with fellow members, I learned how to hold meaningful conversations and build rapport with peers. From welcoming and assisting customers at Kirkland's home decoration store, I learned how to observe and attend to their needs and express a genuine caring for their well-being. As a teacher, I will employ communicative competencies such as articulating thoughts clearly, presenting material with enthusiasm, and demonstrating active caring and concern to connect with my students and best position myself to help them develop social aptitudes alongside intellectual ones.

Having experienced a wide range of learning and teaching strategies, I personally prefer a few methods. Though I delight in hands-on activities such as physics experiments and crafty projects, I ultimately crave structure in the material. Well-organized textbooks that outline key ideas, lessons that precisely detail steps to achieve certain ends, and clear instructions for assignments allow me to grasp onto tangible expectations that I can utilize to monitor learning.

In a more holistic sense, I thrive in environments wherein behavioral and academic specifications are established forthright. Conversely, it is exceedingly more difficult to learn while having to expend energy on adapting to unpredictable settings or weeding through obfuscated signals to discern what is expected. As Emmer and Everson (2013) assert that “predictability is reassuring for all students,” I intend on leading a well-managed classroom framed by objectives, informational chunks, monitored practice, and purposeful reflection (p. 209).

Additionally, I have learned that time truly is of the essence. Especially when working with complicated constructs, I prefer to have ample time to let concepts initially sink in, revisit them repeatedly, and allow what Oakley (2014) would call my focused and diffuse modes (i.e. conscious and subconscious networks) to ruminate on topics. Moreover, I favor spending time to slowly and steadily move through initial steps of learning so that I can tie new information into prior knowledge and form strong neural connections. In the educator’s seat, I will make this possible for my students by pacing lessons so that we can cover concepts thoroughly, return to important topics, explore the interconnectedness of ideas, and traverse deep learning journeys.

What all of my personal experiences, strengths, and limitations point to is that each student that enters my classroom will have their own personal history, their own suitcase of skills, prior knowledge, insecurities, pathways of expression, learning preferences, and amassed experiences. As a teacher, I recognize that it will be my foremost job to ensure that I present information, tailor lesson plans, and provide support to empower every student to believe in themselves and in the things they can accomplish. In the constant effort to fulfill these essential responsibilities in incredibly personal ways, I strongly believe that I can make a difference.

Choosing to Educate

My father is not an outwardly emotional man. In my recollection, I have only ever seen him cry twice before. The first was when I was seven years old, and this hardly counts because we had just finished watching *My Dog Skip*, a terribly heart-wrenching movie that would reduce any animal lover to a puddle of tears. But the second instance happened fairly recently, and it will be imprinted on my memory for a very long time. That day, my dad had arrived home in the evening, stressed and unhappy with how things were going at work, so he ate dinner and went straight to bed shortly thereafter. This, in itself, was not out of the ordinary – the unshakable fatigue and early bedtime; however, on this particular day, my mom urged that I speak with him about his consistently negative mood. So, I trudged upstairs, slightly annoyed at what I perceived as my dad’s voluntarily cynical attitude and struck up a conversation.

We talked about his work briefly, how he felt like he should exercise more, and scratched the surfaces of a few other topics. I persisted to dig deeper and identify the source of his negativity when he finally revealed that it was his work that was causing him distress. He spoke quietly and in short spurts as if trying to downplay the rawness of emotion that was spilling out. With some prompting, he told me that working at the same company under the same stressful demands for the past several years was finally wearing on him. After great hesitation, he divulged that though he enjoys working with spreadsheets, Excel, and forecasts, “Nobody cares about what I do” (M. Goodwin, personal communication, October 2017). At that moment, I saw my dad –one of the most stoic, knowledgeable, and calm individuals I know – crumble into despair. I saw in his teary eyes immense sadness at the realization that his day to day efforts might not make any difference, regret for having spent too many hours at work instead of at home with his family, and resignation to endure these last few years before retirement. With the

utmost respect for my father and the sacrifices he had made, I decided at that moment that this was not the life for me.

And so, I began searching. I searched past external commotion for my life's meaning and purpose. I searched past lures of money and extravagance for how I could make a difference in the world. I searched past societal expectations for what brings me personal fulfillment and joy. I ultimately searched for a balance of these elements, and teaching high school mathematics emerged from the flames of this introspective amalgamation.

To be quite honest, it comes down to two things: I enjoy math, and I love helping people. Ever since I was a kid, math has been the most pleasurable subject for me. However, what I had previously mistaken for inherent fondness of the language of numbers and symbols, I recognize now to be a keen eye to discern important patterns, break down intricate methods into simpler steps, and carefully reconstruct complete processes. It was not naturally ingrained talents that enabled me to solve problems but acquired skills and purposefully practiced techniques that could be learned. Soon after I realized this aptitude to digest rigorous math into bite-sized pieces, I began using it to help people.

For eight years now, I have tutored students one-on-one. I have worked with elementary, high school, and college students in subjects including all traditional high school math courses, chemistry, reading comprehension, English, writing, and even basic Spanish. After identifying troublesome concepts, addressing misconceptions, and equipping students with the necessary knowledge, I spend the majority of my time guiding them through what Fisher and Frey (2011) refer to as the "gradual release of responsibility model" in which "cognitive responsibility shifts" to the student (p. 13). In practice, I model a problem-solving technique while emphasizing key steps and self-assessment questions. Then, I have the student try the problem as I supply ample

prompting and guidance, and the eventual last stage entails them completing the process largely on their own as I stand by to support. During the latter phases of guided practice, I witness students' uncertainties and doubts and combat them with encouraging affirmations like, "Yes, it's complicated, but it just takes practice," "Take a deep breath and try to think of what we just learned," and "Small steps at a time. You can do it." I remind them of the tools they have accumulated, of the practice they have endured, and of the skills they have solidified. It is in these moments of confidence-building that I am truly making a difference.

I cannot fathom a more personally fulfilling experience than having the opportunity to inspire individuals with their own potential to understand, think, and create. As a math teacher, I can elucidate mathematical concepts and offer passage to scientific, technological, and engineering worlds, I can dissolve doubts, fears, and insecurities, and I can show young people that someone cares deeply about their struggles, dreams, efforts, and successes. Whenever I ask myself what difference I can make in the world, I always come back to thinking of how I can contribute to the community, to the people I inhabit this earth with, and to the future of society. As former President Obama (2006) explains, a teacher largely determines what their students can and do achieve, even overriding factors such as gender, ethnicity, and background (p. 161). I aspire to assume the role as a helping hand, a guiding presence, and a person who makes the difference between feeling alone and feeling understood.

Hopes, Dreams, and Fears

As with anything in life, my hopes, dreams, and fears for the journey ahead are very much intertwined. I acknowledge that teaching is not going to be all rainbows and unicorns by any means. Especially at the start, I expect to bear massive responsibility, struggle, and stress. Despite this, one of my primary hopes for this first year is to see my students' eyes light up with

wonder, excitement, and realization. I merely want to catch a glimpse or receive a subtle sign to let me know that my efforts in lesson planning, observing, reading, training, explaining, and trying are making the impact that I envision.

In the coming year and long thereafter, I hope to connect with my students and form a relationship of mutual respect and trust. I want to build a true home within the classroom, such that my students can explore, express ideas freely, and come to believe in themselves and their potential. I will strive to create a safe, open space in which I “participate with young people as they build their selves,” and we can continually shape and rework our identities to accommodate new, informative, and enlightening experiences each day (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 26).

One of the most profound observations that I arrived at was realizing how little I actually remembered from my past education. Though I have taken a multitude of courses in a wide variety of subject areas, if someone were to ask me to recite all ten amendments in the Bill of Rights, balance a chemical equation, or state the main events in Hamlet, I would be quick to disappoint. And disappointed I was when I came to this realization that much of the information once learned in school, I had forgotten – or at least needed a thorough review session to remember. But at that moment, I began to understand what education was.

Education, as Westover (2018) puts it rather deftly, is “to see and experience more truths than those given to me...and to use those truths to construct my own mind” (p. 304). Indeed, my journey through high school and college has provided me with more diversity, rigor, and texture of insight than my parents alone could offer. History has transported me to worlds past to grasp the origins of people and cultures that thrive today, science has given me an objective appreciation for the microscopic and more broad-reaching, and math has allowed me to study the inner workings of powerful phenomena that affect several aspects of our lives. Aside from

becoming significantly more open-minded and empathetic, I have grown leaps and bounds intellectually. I have developed the capacity to learn deeply, analyze new information and reconcile it with previous understanding, and reason through exceedingly complex processes. I have not only gained knowledge (which can be learned, forgotten, and relearned) but also received valuable guidance in discovering my capabilities and forging my own mind.

I would like to play an integral role in the cultivation of confident and independent thinkers, a role that many teachers have filled in my life. I aspire to enlighten young people about the power of their minds and education. I aspire to infuse humanity into mathematics by phrasing it in relatable and relevant contexts. Ultimately, I aspire to make the world accessible to each and every one of my students.

Some thoughts give me pause when I consider this new and exciting realm that is my teaching career. Firstly, I am afraid of finding that students cannot or do not relate to me, as this would preclude any meaningful connection on which cooperation and progress are based. Over the past several years, my tutoring experiences have been overwhelmingly encouraging as I have received much positive feedback from students and parents, alike. Thus, to discover that I actually cannot relate to students in a larger group (i.e. in a classroom) would displace me into an abyss of sorts – a fearsome place of doubting my abilities to connect and teach.

Secondly, I am afraid of finding that, for some reason, I do not like teaching as much as I anticipate. As mentioned previously, teaching math has been my primary professional aspiration ever since I began seriously contemplating future careers. I've revisited this consideration several times and concluded over and over again that there is no other thing that I want to do with my life than teach. All of my tutoring experiences point to becoming a teacher; after each session, though I may be tired from explaining and reexplaining or exhausted from a long and

demanding week, I feel marvelous. I feel I have helped my student build their confidence, brought them clarity, and brought them a piece of the world.

I have come to terms with the fact that teaching is a demanding profession and that the efforts I invest may go largely unrecognized. I have come to terms with the fact that teaching is not a lucrative occupation, but I am more than willing to sacrifice monetary wealth for personal fulfillment. However, I have not given thought to what would happen in the case that I, for reasons unfathomable to me, do not like teaching as much as I anticipate. While justifying my plans to parents, mentors, and friends, I largely convinced myself that this is to be my profession. So, there is no real backup plan in place, no alternative in the case that I don't derive as much fulfillment from being an educator as I foresee, which is a scary thought yet not one I plan on entertaining unless it comes to pass.

If by chance, my visions do not come to light within this first year of teaching, then I will take it upon myself to reflect deeply upon my actions, lesson plans, tone, and attitude to see how I can improve my effectiveness as an educator. Moving forward, I will approach my work with patience and the understanding that such affirmation may not come about until years into the profession, if ever. Yet, I will presently do everything in my power to positively impact my students' lives and achieve contentment from doing so. No one is entirely free of fears, myself especially, but I intend to make full use of these natural phenomena to inform my actions and guide my efforts. I will be not fearless, but self-aware. And I will certainly be steadfast in chasing my dreams of making profound contributions to this world.

My Educational Philosophy

To bring these lofty visions of equitable access to fruition in a world rife with unevenly distributed opportunity, I will draw upon the power of the growth mindset to inform my teaching

and empower my students. Dweck (2016), a psychologist whose team conducted extensive research regarding students' attitudes towards learning, coined the terms "fixed mindset" and "growth mindset" to describe people's general underlying beliefs about intelligence. A fixed mindset is characterized by the belief that inherent abilities cannot be changed no matter what one does, whereas people with a growth mindset believe that abilities (intellectual, social, physical, etc.) are malleable and can be improved through conscious effort.

Though this progressive mentality benefits all students, it can revolutionize the paradigms of those who hesitate to speak up and lack a little confidence. Oakley (2014) reveals the potential of the flexible approach in stating that, "It is the *practice* – particularly the deliberate practice on the toughest aspects of the material – that can help life average brains into the realm of those with more 'natural' gifts" (p. 188). She asserts the power of the growth mindset to effectively even out the playing field. At its core, this mentality flies in the face of privilege, natural talent, and inherent ability as it speaks of careful effort, focused attention, and purposeful practice as the keys to improving skills. Thus, I will foster a growth mindset in the classroom by encouraging participation, praising initiative, and promoting careful practice as the means for improvement and success. In doing so, we can work to transcend labels, personal history, and long-standing educational barriers. We can erase the misconception that people either get math or they don't, we can dissolve the stereotype that STEM is only for boys, we can disprove societal perceptions that some kids are beyond reach or are just too far behind, and we can erode widespread doubts of simply not feeling good enough.

As someone who has grown up with a tremendously supportive family, I desire to provide that same unconditional guidance and care to my students. For every opportunity that my parents made possible, I want to give back tenfold to my students by equipping them with the

tools to succeed and staying alongside them to cultivate their confidence, whether that means crawling, walking, or running forth. By utilizing my strengths and continually challenging my limitations, I will apply my experiences to empathize with and empower my students.

Ultimately, my primary goal in becoming an educator is to make a difference in each and every one of my students' lives – to make them feel heard, understood, capable, and inspired.

Students' lives and futures will be my precious charge, and I shall carry this responsibility with utmost consideration, integrity, and mindfulness. There is no switch to turn off teacher mode, nor any invisibility cloak to hide from a firm commitment to each student once they step foot inside my classroom. From the start, I will invest myself in students' well-being and do all that I can to help them succeed. I recognize that the teaching profession will be strenuous and trying, so when at a loss for how to proceed or when the going gets tough, I will certainly turn outward for guidance and support from friends, colleagues, and mentors. Ultimately though, I greatly look forward to embarking on this journey. Amidst the stress and pandemonium that may ensue along the way, I will stay true to my beliefs. In the actions that I take and the words that I speak, I will embody the belief that each and every one of my students has the capacity to learn, to grow, and to flourish.

To me, teaching means synthesizing my abilities to help students develop into responsible, compassionate, and confident individuals. By working with adolescents in their formative high school years, I plan to build confidence, open pathways to STEM careers, encourage students to pursue higher education and professional careers, and convince them of their enormous potential to learn, grow, and make a positive difference. Teaching will allow me to make a mark on the world through my students, the people they go on to influence, and the

changes they effect. Dedicating my life to teaching will allow me to share the insight, respect, support, wisdom, and pure humanity that my family has so graciously given to me.

Part B: Who are my students?

Introduction

In her paper “Beyond Culture: The Hybridity of Funds of Knowledge,” Professor Norma Gonzalez of the University of Utah (2006) explains that “the validation of the experiences of students and the lived practices of households is an important aspect of critical pedagogy” (p. 41). In an effort to create positive, productive, and student-driven learning environments, it is essential to affirm the experiences and knowledge that students bring to the table, but in order to acknowledge these, we – as educators – first have to gain awareness about them.

At the commencement of this research, I selected three students strategically, those who – (1) fulfill background requirements (i.e. one English Learner/emergent bilingual, one IEP, 504, or GATE student, and one with a significant life experience) and (2) exhibited an enthusiasm to participate in something beyond the scope of our Integrated Math 1 class. Pseudonyms are utilized when referring to my focus students and related persons to safeguard confidentiality. Over the past several weeks, we have negotiated our schedules to meet up for casual lunchtime conversations, after-class check-ins, and home visits. During these face-to-face meetings, we chatted about classes, favorite foods, extracurriculars, families, upbringings, etc. In doing so, I received the precious opportunity to nudge the rigid traditional teacher-student relationship and get to know my students more on a personal level – to transcend my perception of them as mere students sitting in my math class and come to know who they are as people in the world.

What follows below is a series of three case studies, each holistically detailing a particular student, their backgrounds, assets, experiences, needs, and action plans to support their development and increase their mathematical proficiency throughout the course of the year.

Focus Student 1: Mina

Her bag is nestled comfortably in her lap, her otherwise unruly hair is secured neatly in a bun, and scattered across the table are her highlighters, at the ready to color code as we oftentimes do in our Math 1 class. She takes notes diligently, shifting her gaze from the whiteboard to her notebook and back again to document our learning. Her bright, wide eyes look up at me, eager for instruction. *What comes next?* they beg, yet no words escape her lips. This is my first impression of 9th grade, 14-year-old Mina, the first of my three focus students.

In class, she is exceedingly well-prepared and equally as quiet, speaking only when spoken to and, even then, only with ample and gentle prompting. This, alongside her studious nature and tranquil demeanor, are perhaps the character traits most immediately identified when observing Mina in the classroom. Noticing these motivated me to figure out how this combination of puzzle pieces fell into place. Why doesn't she talk much? To what can her admirable work ethic be attributed? What are her educational goals?

She identifies paying attention and working hard as academic strengths, and she is furthermore respectful, honest, and funny. Mina is outgoing, lighthearted, and a self-proclaimed comedian when unconstrained by the academic setting. She laughs often, and even when no sound is audible, her eyes smile knowingly. Especially after my interactions with this student and her support system, I discovered her to be a person of many interests, one who exhibits a whole-hearted kind of enthusiasm for life, people, and learning itself.

Though her tongue may not be sufficiently experienced to express it, her eagerness to do and to learn speaks volumes. It is only a matter of time and focused practice before Mina develops the linguistic fluency to convey her thoughts, feelings, intellectual capacities, and undeniable vivacity out loud, just as she does on paper. The primary growth area for Focus Student 1 (FS1) is to improve her vocabulary and speaking skills, ideally enough so that she feels comfortable participating during group and whole-class activities.

Academic Standing.

Language Proficiency. Mina was raised in a solely Spanish-speaking home in Tijuana, Mexico, where she resided with her family and attended school until the age of 11. In the summer of 2015, she and her mom migrated to the United States because, in Mina's words, her "mom want me to learn English over here. Here is better opportunities" (personal communication, September 14, 2018). And so, she began learning English upon arrival. She is categorized as an English Learner (EL), yet throughout this paper, we shall utilize the term "emergent bilingual," in an effort to analyze this focus student with a more comprehensive, holistic lens of their attributes (Garcia and Kleifgen, 2018).

In October of 2016, Mina scored Early Intermediate overall on the California English Language Development Test (CELDT), achieving Early Intermediate in the domains of reading and writing, but only Beginning in listening and speaking. About a year and a half later and given the shift in the statewide language proficiency assessment to the ELPAC (English Language Proficiency Assessment of California), her reading score dropped to Beginning, whereas she attained Somewhat/Moderately in listening, speaking, and writing. Overall, she sits at a Level 3 of 4 as deemed by the 2018 ELPAC, currently working towards "FEP" ing out (i.e. to achieve the irreversible designation as "RFEP" or Reclassified Fluent English Proficient).

Categorized as an “EL,” she is taking a designated ELD class along with a traditional integrated ELD English course, both of which she expresses are her least favorite: “Too boring. We have to learn more about how to make good sentences and how to use the verbs and all the stuff” (personal communication, October 7, 2018). The extent of her fluency in English, thus far, is most apparent in her writing; she demonstrates thoroughness and clarity of thought through her clear printing and accurate word choice. Particularly in our math class, she is quick to discern the meaning of different numerical and algebraic symbols, showing a strong command of these as well as key vocabulary words specific to math content such as *function* and *intercept*.

In speaking, however, she exhibits much greater uncertainty. She pauses to think before responding and in the middle of responses, filling gaps with *Ah* and *Mmm* as she sifts through her “unitary repertoire” to accurately convey her thoughts in “the given communicative situation” (Garcia and Kleifgen, 2018, p. 62). In each moment as an emergent bilingual, Mina must not choose to reside in either of two mutually exclusive linguistic realms, but rather capture from a vast pool various communicative pieces to construct desired messages. I can practically see the wheels turning as she looks either down at the ground or up towards the ceiling, trying to grapple for the most pertinent words in a given context. It is this struggle that any individual must endure as they simultaneously develop fluency in more than one language, and Mina expresses heightened awareness of these concentrated efforts. She identifies English vocabulary and speaking skills as two primary areas for improvement, which evidences cognizance of her own capabilities.

Academic abilities. With regards to assessments, including formative, summative, and standardized, Mina exhibits competency in terms of acquired knowledge, application, and demonstration of understanding. On the most recent Spring 2018 California Assessment of

Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), for instance, she achieved a designation of “Standard Met” on both the English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics branches as an eighth grader. She showed Above Standard performance on the Listening and Research/Inquiry portions of ELA/Literacy and Near Standard on all remaining sections. This data communicates her readiness upon entering 9th grade, with particular relevance given to her mathematics aptitudes; she arrived at our class on par with math standards up to and including eighth grade, which is further evidenced by her score of 10 out of 11 on a diagnostic quiz administered within the first week of this school year. Moreover, on formative checkpoints, she has largely performed well above average on most quizzes and tests that we have had so far, indicating an ability to comprehend, retain, and apply content and concepts introduced to her in class.

Mina exemplifies strong work habits and organizational skills. When granted time in class to work through problems, she starts immediately after instructed, perhaps pausing occasionally to chat or laugh with a nearby classmate. She works quietly and diligently by herself, highlighting or color-coding as demonstrated during modeling; she puts forth great effort and yields productivity, which manifests itself in a record of no missing assignments, each having been completed with the specified structure, neat handwriting, and thorough justifications (symbolic and written). She raises her hand to participate in class, though usually only to use the restroom or (more recently) to ask me a clarifying question when I am circulating the classroom. Mina shies away from participating in whole-class discussions and even exhibits slightly withdrawn behavior when working in groups of three to four, opting instead to work independently and forego any verbal communication with her teammates. This being said, she excels in critical thinking tasks, though communicatively, she tends to smile and nod, rather than

responding verbally. The second observation indicates that utilizing the English language to orally express ideas still poses a challenge to her.

Prior academic knowledge. Though we touched upon this slightly in the previous section, we shall restate it here: Mina arrived at my math class with strong number sense, algebraic skills, and conceptual foundations. On the diagnostic assessment from the first week of this school year, she scored nearly 100%, showing mastery of operations with integers (positive and negative) and fractions, order of operations, graphing, and even exponents. As deemed by the midterm (our most recent summative exam), Mina currently struggles in the areas of domain and range (CCSS.Math.Content.HSF-IF.B.5), interpreting graphs (CCSS.Math.Content.HSF-IF.B.4), and using function notation properly (CCSS.Math.Content.HSF-IF.A.2). In her ELD course, she is struggling the most in the Presentational category (78%), which is composed of writing and speaking activities, including small presentations. These data point to a struggle with speaking, making sense of words and pictures with multiple messages, and breaking down syntax, or notation. On the other hand, Mina excels in graphing proportional relationships (CCSS.Math.Content.HSF-IF.C.7.a), determining an equation from a graph (CCSS.Math.Content.HSF-BF.A.1.a), and graphing a line (CCSS.Math.Content.8.EE.B.5), all of which can be attributed to the concreteness of the steps required to accomplish the goal.

Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity.

Social Identity. Mina identifies as the daughter of Mexican parents. Having moved with her mother to the United State a little over three years ago, she sees herself as an outsider working constantly to find her own in this relatively new location. To maintain connectedness to her geographic roots, she travels to Mexico for two to three months at a time to visit her biological father and other filial relatives over the summers. During the rest of the year, she lives

with her mom and stepfather in a two-story Pico Rivera apartment complex, which they describe as “muy tranquila y limpia” (very quiet and clean). They live comfortably and recognize themselves to be part of the American middle class, and Mina expresses contentedness when speaking about her home: “We have plants, it is nice outside. The house is a little bit big.” (personal communication, September 14, 2018). Furthermore, she identifies as a Catholic, heterosexual female whose home language is Spanish, but is gaining fluency in English as an emergent bilingual. A player on the school’s basketball and volleyball teams, she sees herself as a student-athlete, but primarily a student.

It is apparent from the way she speaks with soft confidence about her self-concept and, on the other hand, laughs nervously and apologizes for mispronunciations that FS1 experiences the “delightful self-awareness and sometimes-painful self-consciousness” that Horn (2017) uses to characterize adolescence (p. 30). It then is my responsibility as a guiding figure in Mina’s life to reaffirm and embrace her identity by carefully designing an environment inclusive of as many facets as possible. Our classroom space is organized with attention to detail and for ease of use throughout each school day. The predictable structure includes a Do Now warm-up, main lesson activity, and daily closure that allows all students to develop a sense of competency with regards to classroom operations. Visual cues line the whiteboards that students can draw support from on their own for guidance and self-direction. We utilize Spanish on occasion, as a significant majority of my students possess it as a second language in their repertoire; however, talk in Spanish is always permitted given the same expectation for English usage – namely, that discussion is respectful and on topic. Lastly, I encourage all of my students to participate in mathematical sense-making, via written methods (e.g. journaling, notetaking) and verbal strategies (e.g. Think-Pair-Share, alternatively calling on males and females); this conveys to

FS1, in particular, that she (as a female Mexican-American emergent bilingual) has the capability, voice, and right to think and express just like anybody else.

Socio-Emotional Development. As previously stated, Mina is reserved in demeanor and quiet in the classroom. When approaching the entrance, she extends her hand carefully for a handshake and greets me with a smile, a nod, and an occasional “Hi, Miss.” Once class begins, she is attentive and diligent throughout, rarely pausing to chat minimally with those around her and sometimes foregoing group work when given the chance to work on her own instead. She is affable in nature and oftentimes smiles when interacting with classmates, so it seemed natural to find that she considers herself funny, crazy, and friendly. FS1 conveys that she has many acquaintances yet describes a few key people whom she is close with on campus. She explains that in class, she is intentionally serious but “at home and with friends, I am too crazy, talking, talking,” which is primarily due to her and her family’s perspective that in an academic setting, students show their respect by being quiet, following directions, and doing their work (personal communication, September 14, 2018). An area of need for Mina is fostering friendly, working relationships with classmates since this would allow her to see different perspectives and strengthen interpersonal communication skills.

There are various strategies to foster students’ healthy social-emotional competencies that Jones and Kahn (2018) indicate are prevalent in individuals who “enter and graduate from college; succeed in their careers...and become engaged citizens” (p.18). Just as we work to prepare students to acquire important knowledge and solve problems, we must also cultivate a growth mindset, capacity to empathize, relationship skills, and self-awareness in the hopes that they flourish into socially aware, competent individuals capable of handling challenges and navigating social situations. To do so, I already greet students at the door with a handshake and

“Hello, how are you today?” so that upon entry, each feels welcomed and supported from the start. Our Do Now warm-up has two key purposes: (1) to encourage students to review previous material and (2) to create quiet time for students to get settled and ground themselves before delving into the daily lesson. According to Nakkula and Toshalis (2016), development of interpersonal skills is “promoted interactively within all of the relational and opportunity contexts within which we exist;” thus, to build these proficiencies, we have recently started carving out time for daily check-ins, wherein students are encouraged to turn and discuss with a neighbor how they are doing for a couple of minutes, and afterward, the floor is opened up for anyone to share (p. 39). To ensure that Mina benefits maximally from this activity, I can model exactly how to hold a check-in discussion, by providing example questions like *Hi, how has your day been so far?* and even pairing up with her for the first few times. We also utilize Think-Pair-Share to consistently practice student-to-student interactions, and I will pair Mina up with a particular classmate that she has known since middle school so that she can focus on cultivating her interactional skills. During class time, I frequently circulate the room, providing students with feedback about the learning process. To be clear, for Mina, in particular, this means not only giving specific praise for “what they accomplished through practice, study, persistence,” in terms of solving math problems, but also in relation to how well she is taking conversational turns and interacting with others (Dweck, 2006, p 180). Lastly, I have tried to build in weekly reflections in the form of an exit ticket, and I will focus on ensuring that we reach that part of our daily agenda so that FS1 can practice metacognition about her learning.

Funds of Knowledge.

Mina’s family is small yet sizeable; maybe allopatric is the most accurate term. Most of her family (i.e. biological father, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents) lives in Tijuana,

Mexico, which is roughly a two-hour drive from her current Pico Rivera residence, where she lives with her mom and her mom's boyfriend, who we shall refer to as Soto. Despite the dispersed nature of their geographic locations, FS1's family maintains communication and shares common values like dedication, the importance of education, sacrifice, and care for one another.

Through our home visit, I gained valuable insights into the dynamics of Mina's immediate family. Both her mother and Soto work, so she takes the bus home most days. However, she expresses an appreciation for their persistent efforts to provide the lifestyle they currently enjoy and to prepare for her future endeavors (i.e. attending college). They mostly make meals at home, going out to eat only for special occasions like birthdays and notable celebrations. Family activities include sharing dinner together each day, going to the park to play sports like soccer and volleyball, and going to the beach. Mina shared that she and her mom are Catholic; though their church is located nearby, she is not able to attend as much as she wants since her mom usually works on Sundays. Her family's home language is Spanish, so Mina is fluent in all domains (reading, writing, speaking, and listening); her mother speaks only Spanish, whereas Soto speaks a little bit of English, so Mina graciously provided translations for a large majority of our conversations.

Speaking about Mina on behalf of himself and FS1's mother, Soto said, "I am very blessed. She is a nice girl. She is a good student," after which, he expressed that he would prefer speaking in Spanish. He proceeded to say that FS1 is very happy, calm, and hardworking and that it is an honor to have a friendship and good relationship with Mina. Both guardians expressed that they believe education is an essential component that will make a bright future and good employment for Mina possible, and this education certainly includes attending a four-year college (personal communication, October 7, 2018). They expressed an intense desire to

support their daughter in any way they can: “Ayudarla con todo lo que necesita,” and FS1’s family believes that teachers should make sure that students complete their assignments and participate in class adequately. At the same time, they feel that a teacher should also provide encouragement (especially reacting to mistakes in the math classroom) to bolster student confidence and create a positive environment where students feel empowered and comfortable sharing their thoughts (personal communication, October 7, 2018).

Towards the end of the home visit, Soto uttered an apology that I had heard many times before but never given a second thought. Prior to entering the Teacher Education program, I would have responded to his “I am sorry about my English” with a simple “That’s okay” and moved on (personal communication, October 7, 2018). However, I thought about what Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) call “the construction of inferiority that accompanies being categorized as an emergent bilingual” and replied instead with “No need to apologize. This was a good conversation” (p. 13). As I reflected upon the interaction, I realized that his sentiments voice a hierarchical societal structure based on language and culture that permeates the general American populace and, quite frankly, the world. I have discovered indignation within myself, protesting the injustice of disproportionate pressures and requirements placed on non-English Only students and their families. I understand that it would require much diligent work to change any policies, but for the time being, this opens my eyes to the importance of providing supports (linguistic and otherwise) to my emergent bilingual students such as Mina.

Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations.

Prior Experiences and Interests. Mina grew up in Tijuana with her mother, father, younger brother, and younger sister, but since moving to America in the summer of 2015 with her mom, she has lived for the past three years in Pico Rivera in a small, rented apartment with

her mother and Soto (her mother's boyfriend). Migrating has been the singular most impactful event so far in the life of FS1. She says it was difficult primarily because she did not have any previous exposure to English, so being in classes taught only in English posed an immense challenge. Mina explains that some friends helped with translations, but "some of them stop helping," or "some words they don't really know in Spanish, and that's why it was so hard to do like my assignments and homework" (personal communication, September 26, 2018). She feels better now because she understands English more and there are only a few words that she does not recognize here and there. FS1 is much more comfortable reading, writing, and even listening in English, and she is currently self-conscious when it comes to speaking aloud due to uncertainty about pronunciation.

Mina is a girl who appreciates the moderate, sunny California weather and loves visiting the beach. She likes to dance ("any kind" so she says), listen to music, and spend time with family. She is athletically inclined, participating in school sports such as basketball and volleyball in addition to occasionally playing soccer with friends in the park near her house. She enjoys taking pictures of nature, flowers, and the ocean, and she would like to travel more in the future. FS1 wants to go to college, but lacking a definite answer when asked, *what's your favorite subject?* she does not yet know what career she would like to pursue.

FS1 claims that her mother has been the most influential figure in her life and gives the following explanation: "I think my mom because she is always there for me. She help me, she try to do the best and she like do what she can so I can be good" (personal communication, September 14, 2018). She admires her mother's work ethic and is coming to realize the enormity of the sacrifice in moving countries three years ago. Mina mentions that she loves her dad, but that she spends all of her time with her mom and consequently shares a very close bond.

Aside from her mother, Mina's support system includes one best friend who attends the same school, a few close friends, and many acquaintances that she has befriended through basketball, volleyball, and middle school. She recounts her 8th grade promotion as the most successful time in her scholastic career since she earned all A's as well as three awards for academic excellence, and her memory of feeling least successful comes from when she first started middle school after arriving in the United States and was entirely unfamiliar with the school system, the people, the available resources, and the language itself. She prefers structured classrooms where the physical environment and activities are well-organized.

Developmental Considerations. Mina displays signs of typical development across the board in accordance with the Center for Disease Control specifications ("Child Development: Young Teens," 2017). She exhibits the proper bodily development for a fourteen-year-old female, attends to her physical appearance, and shows care for her peers via lending them materials. FS1 demonstrates competency on problems involving more complex cognitive processing such as higher depth of knowledge questions, and any shortcomings have been either commonplace or attributable to a need for linguistic clarification.

Action Plan.

Through relaxed conversations and intentional meetings with FS1 and her family, I have been able to discover Mina's "identities, assets, and aspirations" so that I may be equipped (as Varlas (2018) sufficiently articulates) with the information necessary to develop an action plan to "respond to students' real needs and challenge injustices" (p. 52). All discussed data and information presented above considered I have forged such an action plan to improve Mina's mathematical proficiency. The three main components are as follows: (1) maintain skills practice, (2) exercise higher order thinking, and (3) strengthen verbal communication.

Firstly, the most recent SBAC and Integrated Math 1 assessments indicate FS1's strength in understanding and performing skills-based computations, so with regards to her procedural fluency, we will aim to maintain. We will do this by continuing to color-code important processes and formulas, utilizing graphic organizers, and providing ample examples to work through, ideally through Khan Academy.

The second item on the action plan is exercising Mina's cognitive capacities for higher order thinking. Since FS1 has demonstrated proficiency in straightforward paper calculations, this and the next focus areas fall in what Nakkula and Toshalis (2016) explain as Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is an area "where the most possibility for growth occurs," located "between what a child can do without guidance and what he or she can do with assistance" (p.10). Mina would benefit from being appropriately challenged by the higher depth of knowledge questions that require more critical thinking, analysis, and even creativity. Moving forward, I will follow the CPM curriculum more closely, which is context and concept-heavy, encourages students to develop mathematical reasoning, and emphasizes collaborative work to make sense of information. This way, FS1 will have more opportunities to practice "describing patterns, developing clear representations, being systematic, and extending ideas," which Horn (2017) introduces as competencies essential to math reasoning (p.64). Strategies conducive to developing these aptitudes include team roles during group work (such as facilitator, timekeeper, recorder), modeling of text annotation, and think-pair-share.

Lastly, we will work on verbal communication. Mina has indicated a hesitance with speaking due to fear of and uncertainty with mispronouncing words (personal communication, October 7, 2018). Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) assert that "linguistic features are acquired in authentic use, not by focusing on them in isolation," so I will frontload vocabulary words with

visuals only when absolutely necessary and otherwise allow students (including Mina) to develop the vocabulary or at least uses for it on their own through the activities at hand (p.43). I will begin a more permanent word wall up on the front board as a visual reinforcement and refer to it often, encouraging students to do the same during their discussions. We will do Think-Write-Pair-Share more frequently to give students practice generating and communicating ideas to the world outside of their head. Another strategy proposed by Tina Reckamp in Lent's *This is Disciplinary Literacy* is having students swap notebooks or papers to respond in written format to peers' ideas (p. 70). For students like Mina, this scaffold allows them to think of a verbal response without the pressure of being heard.

In the collaborative group settings mentioned, students are encouraged to work together fulfilling team roles and building working relationships. Team roles and responsibilities will be specifically outlined and modeled so that students (including FS1) can know what is expected. Aside from peer interaction in the group setting, supports for social-emotional development also include checking-in (at the door via a greeting and during class time amongst students), and weekly reflection journaling.

To track Mina's progress as we try implementing these steps, I will collect formative data from the classroom, including free response exit slips, formative quizzes, summative results, and notes from observing the group and pair work. By providing opportunities and supports for FS1 to practice pronunciation, explanation, and higher order thinking, we hope to see her develop enough confidence to engage comfortably in mathematical discourse at least in pairs and maybe even small group. Overall, by applying these research-based strategies and tracking her progress along the way, we can work to solidify Mina's procedural fluency, deepen her understanding, and cultivate confidence in her abilities to express thoughts and justifications verbally.

Focus Student 2: Izzy

Row three, seat two. This is where Izzy has sat since the first day of school. With light, mid-length brown hair – straight and silky enough to be in a shampoo commercial – and nails decorated with shiny acrylic polish or occasional French tips, she sits tapping the screen on her phone, up until class starts. Consistently the first to walk through the door after dismissing my previous period, Izzy is undeniably prompt. Upon stepping foot inside, she usually utters a lilting “Hi, Miss” as she relies on peripheral vision to navigate between seats while her gaze stays fixated on her phone. Sometimes, it takes a few gentle reminders to shake her attention away from the device and to join the present, but then again, this is not altogether uncommon across the swarms of students that I interact with on a daily basis.

Izzy exhibits an attention to detail and an acute awareness that contradict her somewhat distractible façade. As a sixteen-year-old sophomore who has taken the class before, she can appear aloof at times and demonstrate ever so slight annoyance at being doled the same reminders of class expectations as the surrounding sea of freshmen. However, she takes care to pay close attention when she deems necessary (i.e. by taking diligent notes during direct instruction), and her willingness to ask questions (including “Miss, may I go to my RSP teacher?”) is a mark of her maturity. These subtle behaviors allude to deeper care and concern that I, as Izzy’s math educator, was compelled to tap into by getting to know her better.

From our interactions in class, lunchtime conversations, and a home visit, I have developed a better sense of Izzy’s strengths and areas of growth. Her strong points include preparedness, respectfulness, and self-advocacy. She is consistently prepared with her notebook, writing utensils, and worksheets, and her impeccable handwriting is the product of vested time and energy that symbolize her grander academic efforts. Izzy follows instructions, and she is

quick to give her attention after a callback, oftentimes even reminding those around her of expectations. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, she advocates for herself and her learning needs. Areas of growth include developing mindfulness and stronger working relationships with peers.

Academic Standing.

Learning challenge. Izzy has been diagnosed with a specific learning disability (SLD), one that involves a psychological process disorder in attention and memory processing that negatively impacts her progress in the general education curriculum. Her Individualized Education Plan (IEP) goals include determining the central idea of a text, writing routinely over specified time frames, and evaluating vocabulary to distinguish between claims supported by evidence and those that are not. In mathematics, her IEP goal states that in the coming year, she should be able to solve one-variable equations and inequalities involving absolute value, graph the solutions, and interpret them in context with at least 80% accuracy in 2 out of 3 trials. Izzy's IEP specifies that one-hundred percent of her time is to be spent in the general education setting, with her RSP teacher pushing into various classes a couple of times a week.

Academic abilities. Focus Student 2 (FS2) has a language classification as RFEP. The most current accessible data states that she scored Intermediate in reading, writing, and listening, and Early Advanced in speaking as of the 2016 CELDT. Since then, academic records show that she achieved the designation of "Reclassified Fluent English Proficient" at the end of the 2017-2018 school year. In her writing, she demonstrates mild aphasia by saying, "Figure 10 will have 20 titles" instead of "tiles" and "each of them will make sences" instead of "sense." While speaking, she maintains eye contact and responds with interlaced simple and run-on sentences, colored by frequent grins, light laughter, and occasional shoulder shrugs.

On the 2017 CAASPP, Izzy placed in the Level 1 Standard Not Met category on both the English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics sections. Her performance in the listening domain was Near Standard but was deemed Below Standard in reading, writing, and research/inquiry, thus giving her an overall score that placed her within 44 points of reaching Level 2 Standard Nearly Met. In math, her overall performance suffered from the classification of Below Standard in all three categories of “Concepts and Procedures,” “Problem Solving and Modeling/Data Analysis,” and “Communicating Reasoning.” In our Math 1 class, however, her performance on assessments runs counter to her standardized test scores. So far, she has averaged a 70% on in-class formative quizzes, and on summative chapter tests that include a variety of multiple choice and free response questions, she has produced work worthy of high eighty to ninety percent scores. As the environments for these three types of tests differ significantly (i.e. common standardized testing room for CAASPP, general education classroom for quizzes, and RSP resource room for chapter tests), the data suggests that her surroundings influence Izzy’s capacity to demonstrate her understanding.

FS2 works well independently, once she gets started on a given task. Whether it be checking her phone for messages first, finishing up a bag of Hot Cheetos, or chatting with a nearby friend, Izzy needs reminders at the beginning of an activity in order to commence. On individual work, she follows instructions carefully and requires little guidance, diligently whiling away unless she gets stuck and has a question, at which point, she does not hesitate to raise her hand to ask. Her work is moderately thorough, providing minimal explanations of her reasoning when requested and sometimes turning in assignments that are partially incomplete. In groups, she is slightly withdrawn, oftentimes choosing instead to sit back and let others do the work or opting to have a conversation unrelated to the topic at hand. Izzy has proficient speaking and

listening skills, though she displays reluctance to try problems that she perceives as more demanding of original and critical thought.

Prior academic knowledge. In general reference to students, Fisher and Frey (2014) claim that “They may not be aware of what they do or do not understand,” and so the only way to even begin to figure out what improvements can be made and how we, as their educators, can provide appropriate supports, we first have to identify current levels of understanding and skill sets (p. 1). This, oftentimes, is done through a diagnostic assessment at the start of the school year and is carried out every time an assessment (formal or informal) is performed like observing during group work or analyzing midterm results. On the prior knowledge diagnostic test administered during week one, Izzy scored a 68%, which aligned with the class average; this revealed her fluency with integer operations and graphing as well as significant gaps in fraction familiarity and number sense.

As we have progressed through the semester so far, she has struggled with evaluating functions given specified inputs (CCSS.Math.Content.HSF.IF.A.2), exponent manipulations (CCSS.Math.Content.8.EE.A.4), and interpreting mathematical objects in real-world contexts (CCSS.Math.Content.HSF.LE.B.5) as deemed by missed problems on the chapter 1 test and midterm as well as self-assessments. We can attribute these current shortcomings to the room for improvement in Izzy’s number sense (especially in the realm of fractions, which appear in functions and exponential expressions) and to her continual journey to acquire fluency in English reading comprehension. On the other hand, areas of strength include graphing lines (CCSS.Math.Content.HSF.IF.C.7.A) and utilizing linear models to analyze situations, as evidenced by her score of 33 out of 36 on a written response assessment that required students to make sense of a “Big Race” between competitors given different head starts and moving at different constant

speeds. Present academic levels considered, we should hone in on shoring up procedural fundamentals and think about situating more problems in terms of a convincing context to engage her interest and motivate problem-solving.

Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity.

Social Identity. Born in the city of Whittier, Izzy is a second-generation Mexican American as her grandparents originated from Mexico, and her parents were both born in the United States. She grew up an only child, the daughter of a single mom, who recently got married and so, she learned English and Spanish simultaneously from a young age. FS2 identifies as a heterosexual female and religiously as Catholic though her mom is Christian. She considers her family middle class and has expressed, “I don’t want any more than my family and I need to be content,” which exemplifies a perspective mature beyond her mere sixteen years (personal communication, October 27, 2018). Izzy mostly preoccupies herself with schoolwork and sports; she participates in cheer and softball, through local organizations not affiliated with the school. In a sea of freshmen, FS2 stands out because of her self-assuredness; she projects confidence in the way that she keeps to herself to work (bordering on withdrawn at times) while refraining from the attention-seeking antics that some of her classmates display.

Angela Duckworth (2016) asserts that our passion, perseverance, and “the source of our strength is the person we know ourselves to be (p. 248). Then it becomes imperative that we, as educators, acknowledge and embrace the individuals that walk through the classroom door with their varied funds of knowledge and rich identities. Our classroom welcomes diverse languages and highlights cognates during class and group discussions; this affirms Izzy’s predominantly English and Spanish linguistic repertoire. As sports are a major component of the school culture, we draw heavily upon athletic contexts for word problems involving math modeling. We also

engage in a group work activity called “Batter Up” wherein students come up to the whiteboard successively to solve problems and build upon teammates’ work; in this way, we incorporate softball structure, which is a familiar and integral part of Izzy’s extracurricular life.

Socio-Emotional Development. Izzy is reserved in demeanor, often hesitant to reach out and meet a handshake when offered. She walks slowly and deliberately, as though measuring each step to ensure it points towards her desired destination. After finding her seat, she takes out her green spiral notebook, mechanical pencil, and yellow highlighter, all the meanwhile, carefully monitoring her phone for messages before class begins. FS2 exemplifies the same partial attentiveness as the day progresses; even if her phone is stored away in her moss green knapsack, I observe her glance down towards it every now and again out of habit. When instructed to discuss concepts and solve problems with peers, she is often unwilling, choosing instead to retreat into the security of fidgeting with her cell phone. Despite her visible discomfort when explicitly asked to collaborate, she exhibits utmost respect when she does interact with myself and her peers, taking care to acknowledge with eye contact and say *please* and *thank you* when appropriate.

A few weeks back, another student was added to my roster, who happens to be a good friend of Izzy’s; we will refer to them as Astrid. The presence of her friend has dramatically changed the behavior of FS2 in that she has become notably more talkative, particularly with Astrid; they communicate often, isolating themselves from the rest of the class, especially during group work when they can talk more freely. Though Astrid’s arrival seems to be a source of distraction, their interactions provide valuable insight into FS2’s social capacities. It now becomes a matter of deciphering how to best leverage Izzy’s comfort with her friend to forge connections to the rest of the classroom community. Additionally, as evidenced by her lowered

shoulders, relaxed posture, and natural eye contact during lunchtime conversations and with her friend, FS2 is versed in interpersonal communication with one other individual.

During one of our lunchtime conversations, Izzy explained that the on-campus space she feels most comfortable in is her 6th period “because everyone’s respectful to each other, but nobody really pays attention to like who’s like better and who’s not” (personal communication, October 15th, 2018). She went on to elaborate that she tends to shut down in spaces that are overwhelming or that she feels impending judgment. In order to provide a secure environment for all students, we have established classroom expectations centered around respect for the diversity of ideas and experiences that each individual brings. We engage in Think-Pair-Share wherein everyone can generate original thoughts and then exchange in safe spaces (i.e. to their partner) before receiving the opportunity to share out to the class. Applied to mathematical content and social-emotional topics, this allows Izzy to initially process individually and then draw upon prior knowledge to share her unique perspective with others in a secure environment. We also have daily check-ins as a staple social-emotional construction; immediately after the Do Now, which provides students predictable time to ground themselves, we set aside three to five minutes during which students “check-in” in pairs, conversing about their days and anything that is currently on their minds. Especially for FS2 (for whom areas for improvement include mindfulness and communication with classmates), the daily check-in is a crucial opportunity to regularly practice being attuned to their thoughts and feelings and listening to others as well.

Funds of Knowledge.

Local to the area, Izzy grew up in Montebello as the daughter of a single mother. Her mother, who we will call Reyna, got married recently, so she lives with her and her stepdad, whom we shall refer to as Juan, in a modest one-story, two-bedroom home in Pico Rivera.

Walking up to knock on the door, one can see a large, sprawling tree in the front lawn and a matching dark, forest-green door sandwiched halfway in between a one-car garage door and large window concealed by blinds. From the outside, it looks ordinarily pristine, and her affinity for light-colored clothing and tidiness palpably manifested itself in the street edifice. During our home visit, Reyna deferred to her husband, Juan, for the majority of the conversation because she feels uncomfortable speaking English (personal communication, October 19, 2018). We chatted for roughly thirty minutes, during which time I learned a great deal about Izzy's background and extent of her support system outside of school.

Izzy's immediate family, though composed of only three members, is closely-knit and does practically everything together. Whether it be going to the movies on occasional Friday nights, visiting theme parks, watching sports on television (especially the Dodgers during baseball season), or just walking around, they enjoy spending common quality time. Their neighborhood is peaceful, and Juan said that they "don't have a lot of disturbances at night," and the one thing he would change is the expensive price of housing, but he acknowledged that "it comes with the territory" (personal communication, October 19, 2018). He also confirmed that Izzy is an only child, but added "right now," explaining that he and his wife are planning on having kids of their own as well. Their family values hard work, equality of treatment, fairness, and education. After exchanging some words in Spanish with his wife, Juan spoke on behalf of both of them in saying that Izzy is the closest with her mom; "they spend a lot of time together shopping, doing sports, all kinds of things" (personal communication, October 19, 2018). They describe FS2 as a very active child, one who enjoys sports including softball, cheer, and soccer.

With regards to Izzy's academic progress, Juan appreciates that she is "putting in the effort, doing assignments and homework" and working hard to achieve the success that they

believe is important to moving forward in education (personal communication, October 19, 2018). When asked to compare his personal experience in school with his daughter's, Izzy's stepdad paused for a long five seconds before answering, "in simple math, I guess there are now different ways to figure out the answer whereas, in my day, there was only one way to find it" (personal communication, October 19, 2018). Referring to the curriculum shift to Common Core, he said that he understands there are "more activities that are very helpful because they can see what they are learning," which is beneficial for Izzy since "she likes group work and hands-on activities," according to Juan (personal communication, October 19, 2018).

As for their hopes for what the school can provide for Izzy, they hope her teachers embody motivation, act with the best interest in the kids, and treat students fairly across the board. Juan expresses that he wishes the class sizes were smaller; he acknowledges that classes (and especially core ones like Integrated Math 1) are overpopulated but would like to see fewer students in each so that they can receive more individualized assistance and get the personalized attention they need to succeed. Izzy's parents value education as a means to a better end, expressing clearly that their goal is for her "to continue the school and graduate from college" so that she can have options in the future and the opportunity to do something that she enjoys (personal communication, October 19, 2018). Though they would prefer if she went to a college nearby, they are open to any post-secondary institution and are happy to give her the freedom to choose when the time comes. Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) compel teachers to align themselves with parents in being "particularly focused on high expectations for emergent bilingual students" in order to uphold our end of children's support network and maintain a consistent message of empowerment (p. 177). It was fantastic learning about Izzy's support network, and I intend on fully supporting these admirable goals for FS2 as we move forward in the school year.

Reflecting upon the insight, I realized how profoundly in touch with their child both the mother and stepfather were with their child's needs and how aware they are with the pulse of the school and community. Perhaps many families are just as attuned to their children's emotional and academic needs, but nevertheless, it was astounding to witness the immense care that Izzy's parents conveyed through their willingness to be so honest and vulnerable in sharing their experiences with me (a near stranger, connected only by virtue of being FS2's math educator this year) so openly. Garcia and Kleifgen (2018) assert that "parents of emergent bilinguals have a great deal to teach teachers about knowledge and skills that originate in their households that can, and should, be translated into academic success in schools" (p. 139). I believe that the understanding I have gained simply from showing up and spending time speaking with parents is an essential starting point to jointly constructing a roadmap to supporting our students together.

Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations.

Prior experiences and interests. Izzy stands five feet and one inch tall with a slight frame and the same gently scuffed, off-white Vans every day. She is reserved in demeanor and speaks at a low volume, unless describing something of particular interest, such as sports. When talking about cheer, for instance, her face lights up, and the pace of her speech picks up as she recounts past and present joys of the activity. She says that between softball (which she had to stop recently because of the club's age limit) and cheer, her "favorite of all time would be cheer," which she began at the age of five. FS2 is currently waiting until December when the season for her all-star team begins, but in the meantime, she attends weekly tumbling classes to maintain her skills (personal communication, September 30, 2018). As I used to practice gymnastics competitively, we forged a connection by excitedly exchanging experiences about developing new moves and overcoming physical and mental challenges.

When asked what major events have occurred in her life, FS2 shared with me stories about the absenteeism of her biological father during her childhood. She said that Reyna (her mother) would work hard to provide and care for her – then a child with asthmatic symptoms, – but her father “would always go out to drink and go with [her] uncle and do stuff”; when she was eight years old, Izzy’s biological father left her and her mom unexpectedly (personal communication, September 30, 2018). In speaking about her mother, FS2’s voice became soft, eyes shifted down, indicating how personal their relationship is. Izzy says that Reyna used to work at a seafood restaurant, always trying to make ends meet and maintain stability even when her husband removed himself from their family years ago. She now works part-time at a local bakery to supplement Juan’s income and has Monday to Tuesday weekends. FS2 expresses immense gratitude for her mother’s constant presence and support, and her professional goals embody a deep understanding of her and her mom’s shared life experiences.

In our first lunchtime conversation, Izzy said that she wants to be a domestic violence lawyer, though she could not come up with the exact title at the time. She provided a situation to help elucidate her career aspirations – something to the effect of, if a father hits his wife, and there is a child or children involved, then she would want to be the person who steps in to help negotiate and support the family during the aftermath. To emphasize her point, Izzy closed with, “That’s the type of lawyer I want to be. It really inspired me because that basically happened to me” (personal communication, September 30, 2018). In a follow-up conversation, she mentioned that a back-up plan would be to serve as a translator because she likes to help people in need. In order to achieve these goals, however, she recognizes that she must improve her fluency in both English and Spanish, which motivates her selection of vocabulary (in both languages) as a self-identified area for improvement.

During one of our lunchtime conversations, Izzy mentioned that she feels the most comfortable in her 6th period Green Technology class because “if you make a mistake, they don’t laugh at anyone else; they just go along with it and help each other” (personal communication, September 30, 2018). She described sentiments of discouraging participation in previous school settings resulting from fear of judgment and alienation by classmates and even teachers. A critical piece of working with FS2, especially in my content area in which children arrive with the emotional baggage of entwined self-worth and historied relationships with math, is then captured by the essence of Teacher Performance Expectation (TPE) 2, which states, *creating and maintaining effective environments for student learning*. To put it concisely, this tenet impels educators to ensure that students feel welcome, safe, secure, and empowered within the classroom and, thus, are best positioned socially and emotionally to learn. Izzy’s personal school experiences serve as a testimony to the importance of building positive relationships between teacher and students and amongst students themselves.

All of the effective teachers featured in Horn’s (2017) *Motivated: Designing Math Classrooms Where Students Want to Join In* “worked with mistakes as learning opportunities,” which is a cornerstone of the growth mindset (p. 64). It is pertinent to note here that everyone in Izzy’s support system (from her mother and stepfather to her counselor and from her few close friends to myself) possesses the influence to help Izzy push through struggles, utilize resources, and develop grit. Thus, I have the responsibility of encouraging the perspective that her learning journey is mutable and wholly responsive to conscious effort.

Developmental Considerations & Assistive Technologies. According to CDC developmental markers for fifteen to seventeen-year-old children, Izzy (who is sixteen years of age), exemplifies typical development overall (“Child Development: Teenagers,” 2017). FS2

routinely shows up to class well-groomed, with clean hair, polished nails, and trendy clothing. She speaks often with Astrid, her closest friend, in class but does not engage in attention-seeking behaviors like younger adolescent students in the same setting. As the CDC details rather accurately, her work habits are more defined; she demonstrates organized notetaking (using highlighters and colored pens to markup ideas), routine behavior in her phone usage, and a grounded perspective of how her current studies fit into the grander scheme of future career plans. Since her IEP specifies only the use of a calculator or multiplication chart, preferential seating, and separate setting for testing as appropriate accommodations for her processing needs, Izzy is not currently in need of assistive technologies.

Action Plan.

Though gathering multifaceted information from various sources, I have gained a more holistic sense of who my second focus student is as a daughter, a young adolescent, and a student in my math class. Izzy's strengths include her mature, seasoned persona, organizational skills, enthusiasm for sports, and a close relationship with her parents. To raise her mathematical proficiency, I have developed an action plan that leverages these strengths and support systems. It is composed of four main points: (1) building quantitative literacy, (2) practicing mindfulness, (3) increasing connectivity to classmates, and (4) developing a growth mindset.

Firstly, as Izzy's current performance in our math class is slightly above average (as measured in comparison to the rest of the class), and she demonstrated proficiency in the most recent chapter test with a score of 92% on linear equations and graphs, it would be beneficial to focus on her quantitative literacy. By this, we mean shoring up procedural fundamentals and situating problems to motivate problem-solving and provide opportunities to practice interpretation of numbers in meaningful contexts. To do so, we can use Khan Academy as a

resource for skills practice, and through the online platform, I can assign specific tasks tailored directly for Izzy's areas for improvement, including fraction and exponent manipulations. To increase her numerical literacy, I can also incorporate think-aloud during class to model metacognitive strategies commonly used by mathematicians. Kate Nonesuch aptly describes that oftentimes when tackling math problems, she pays attention to "what kinds of questions I ask myself and what I already know that I bring to the problem and which parts of it come from the paper" (Scotia, 2016). Developing self-awareness while doing math will allow Izzy to monitor her progress within certain math problems and topics so that she can effectively make sense of information, ask questions when necessary, and advocate towards success.

Aside from being mindful of mathematical processes as she solves problems, FS2 also struggles with what Dan Harris considers mindfulness in a general sense – "the ability to know what's happening in your head in any given moment without getting carried away by it" (Happify, 2015). Izzy has admitted a tendency to become distracted, especially by her cell phone; when working, notifications frequently lead her to stray off from tasks and waste chunks of time. I will introduce her to breathing exercises as simple practices of being present that she can use in any place and any time. We can prioritize tasks, construct to-do lists, and specify time allotments. Lastly, I can show her the Pomodoro technique, which Barbara Oakley (2014) explains allows one to focus "on *process* rather than *product*" and "relax into the flow of the work" (p. 106). This simple strategy will provide a reliable structure within which Izzy can immerse herself in one task at a time and practice mindfulness as she achieves productivity.

In my classroom observations of FS2 so far, I have identified interpersonal communication as a significant area for improvement. As Izzy currently avoids associating with any of her classmates aside from Astrid and has expressed slight annoyance at her freshmen

peers, it would be in our best interest to cultivate positive relationships between her and her classmates. We can work on this social-emotional aspect by continuing our daily check-ins and engaging in more Think-Pair-Shares in which Izzy can formulate original thoughts, share them first with a single classmate (perhaps her trusted friend, Astrid), and then practice exchanging ideas with another peer. A similar strategy would be “2 by 4” in which students work in pairs first for a specified amount of time and then join up with another pair to grapple with problems and discuss together. Each of these follows with Emmer and Evertson’s (2013) recommendation to offer strategies that include “de-emphasizing comparisons among students and using activities that promote student collaboration” (p. 7). Ideally, these approaches will help Izzy come to realize that having mutually supportive relationships with her classmates leads to feeling more connected in the classroom community, free to participate and ask questions without fear of judgment, and more supported all around.

Lastly, as conversations, quiz scores, and homework completion suggest, Izzy would benefit from learning about the growth mindset. In submitted assignments, I have noticed that she tends to either fully complete calculation-based problems or avoid writing any work for problems that involve higher-level thinking or lengthy text. This implies that FS2 shies away from perceived challenges, valuable indicators of Vygotsky’s ZPD, an area containing the most potential growth. As Boaler (2016) highlights, we need to acknowledge the value in giving students “challenging work that will be difficult for them, that will prompt disequilibrium” alongside “positive messages about mistakes” so that they “feel comfortable working on harder problems, making mistakes, and continuing on” (p. 19). As a math educator, much of my work revolves around not only providing the mathematical knowledge necessary to solve problems but also instilling a fortitudinous mindset, one that enables students to acknowledge that they do not

know something, yet still work to seek out a solution (Math Practice Standard 1: Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them). So, at the suggestion of King-Sears (2008), we can engage in “guided inquiry, group work, monitoring and facilitating student thinking, and recursive opportunities for students to develop and refine investigative processes,” advanced practices that promote collaboration, encouraging students to depend on each other and forge resilience together (p. 56).

To monitor Izzy’s progress in response to these action items, I will collect formative data including homework assignments, free response exit tickets, weekly quizzes, work on chapter tests, notes from my observations of her behavior during individual, pair, and group work, and recordings of future conversations. I will look specifically for her accuracy in interpreting mathematical statements, her frequency of attempting higher DOK (depth of knowledge) questions, and her quality of contributions during pair and small group work. Through embedding lessons with opportunities to engage in collaborative sense-making, encouraging a growth mindset and positive student relationships, and providing research-based strategies for time-management and mindfulness, we hope to attain increased engagement during pair and small group work as well as progress with being more present as reported by FS2 herself.

Focus Student 3: Oscar

Curly, chestnut brown hair disproportionately lengthy on the top drapes over the frame of his thick, black, rectangular glasses. He sweeps it aside quickly out of habit for it to fall back down and rest upon his glasses again, without missing a beat of his animated conversation with a classmate as he enters the room. He speaks hurriedly and in varied bursts, letting a stream of consciousness flow through his tongue to explore the outside world. An outspoken, vivacious

fourteen-year-old, ninth grade, Mexican-American male in my Integrated Mathematics 1 class, Oscar is my third and final focus student.

From the start, Oscar stood apart from his classmates in terms of his outgoing behavior. Always one of the first to volunteer an answer, even if lacking certainty, focus student 3 (FS3) displays a willingness to partake in activities that is second to none. He gladly shakes my hand before walking into the classroom, oftentimes asking me how my day is going before I get a chance to pose the same question to him. He speaks with pure enthusiasm, if not fervor, and completes tasks with equal engagement. When offered the opportunity to participate in a few additional meetings after briefly explaining the ethnographic narrative project to my general class, Oscar jumped at the chance and approached me after class, saying that he would love to volunteer. For these reasons (along with the fact that he fulfills the significant life experience requirement), he presented a clear and pleasurable choice of a student to work with closely.

Focus student 3 excels in learning academic content in all subjects ranging from English to mathematics to health. Through formative and summative assessments, he sufficiently demonstrates his understanding and claims to be proficient at multitasking. During interactions with classmates, he has proven to be genial, intensely respectful, and willing to help. Areas for growth include organization, clarity of oral and written communication, and higher cognitive functions, for which we shall discuss an action plan at the close of this section.

Academic Standing.

Life experience. When Oscar first approached me that day after I had announced the opportunity to participate in the extra credit project, he declared himself to fit into the third category involving a significant life experience since his maternal grandfather, who we will refer

to as Paul, had passed away recently. It was not until our first lunchtime conversation about a week later that he explained the significance of this event in his life.

At the start of that conversation, FS3 began by saying that he suffered from anxiety when he was much younger, so his mother, who we will refer to as Martha, bought him a dog. Since then, Oscar has been fascinated with animals, preferring to spend time with them over watching television and playing computer games. His grandfather used to live on a farm in Inglewood, where he and his immediate family would go to visit every Saturday. On the farmland, Oscar recounted that Paul had several animals, perhaps around twenty or so, ranging from horses to chickens to dogs, and FS3 enjoyed a special bond with him because of their shared love for animals. Paul encouraged him the most to have and care for animals, and even now, FS3's career aspirations to become a veterinarian are colored by this shared passion. When his grandfather was nearing the end of his life, Paul instructed to "just keep on doing what you like and follow what I like too, and keep all your animals safe," according to Oscar (personal communication, October 5, 2018).

Since his grandpa's passing a few months ago, FS3 says that he has continued following Paul's inspirational advice by caring for his animals and pursuing veterinarian as his future profession. Having to pause two times during our conversation to collect himself, Oscar described some of the difficulties his family has faced in the wake of Paul's passing. Martha, who is Paul's biological daughter, has struggled with emotional turmoil since sometimes misdirecting her grief unintentionally towards her husband and children. Oscar says that since his passing is still recent, he oftentimes finds himself struggling to focus as his thoughts are consumed by worrying about his mother and family's emotional state. Overall, he reports being able to cope with sadness sufficiently well, given the support of his siblings and parents.

After hearing his account, I then shared a similar personal experience about my maternal grandmother's passing and how my immediate family was able to band together in communal grief and heal together. I shared how close my grandma was to me and my parents, the kinds of activities we used to do, and how it felt to lose such an integral part of our family dynamic. Oscar's consequent expression of gratitude proves Nakkula and Toshalis's (2016) claim that "if we choose to describe our own experiences and perspectives...as empathetic possibilities designed to connect with them, we position ourselves as developmental allies in our students' struggles for self-understanding" (p. 34).

Academic abilities. FS3's language classification is EO, or English Only, and they can comprehend written and oral English text fluently. Oscar speaks and writes English fluently as well, but his speech is composed of frequent run-on sentences and sentence fragments as he starts explaining ideas, then makes sharp turns other (sometimes related, sometimes unrelated) thoughts. Having grown up in a Spanish and English-speaking household, he understands written and spoken Spanish, though struggles with Spanish pronunciation.

On the most recent statewide CAASPP exam, Oscar achieved "Standard Met" for the English Language Arts/Literacy portion with "Near Standard" designation on all subsections including reading, writing, listening, and research/inquiry. On the other hand, for Mathematics, he achieved a "Standard Not Met" score that was less than ten points away from the "Standard Nearly Met" categorization, suffering the most from "below standard" designation in Concepts and Procedures and Problem-solving, Modeling, and Data analysis, with a "Near Standard" score in only the Communicating Reasoning sector. Oscar has shown adequate performance on chapter tests and proficiency on quizzes; these are evidenced by current percentages of 83% and 89% in the respective categories of Summative and Formative.

Oscar works moderately well independently and is able to complete tasks once focused on a specific activity. He overwhelmingly prefers to work with others as he has emphasized during class time and in lunchtime conversations, though he gets distracted by his and peers' cellular devices when working in groups or with a partner. When paying attention and addressed directly, FS3 follows instructions carefully; he respects classroom expectations and teacher-given directives at all times. The main factor that prevents him from completing tasks on occasion is getting distracted by and conversing about topics unrelated to the given tasks. He turns in generally complete homework, though has not been submitting assignments at all in recent weeks. As deemed by the high frequency and depth of interactions with several peers in my class, Oscar demonstrates proficient oral communication with a unique style, and his creativity is evidenced by the videos that he records and edits for his own YouTube channel. FS3 displays fair critical thinking capacities, though sometimes loses sight of conceptual perspective in the midst of computations, such as in the "Big Race" written response mentioned in the *Prior Academic Knowledge* section of Focus Student 2.

Prior academic knowledge. Oscar has an 85% average in his English class, with 73% in formal writing, 100% in informal writing, and "B" averages in all other categories, which indicates proficiency, yet room for improvement. These results reflect the loose, oftentimes grammatically error-ridden, structure that he speaks with consistently. The unconventionality of his speech presumably permeates into written expressions of his thoughts.

In terms of mathematics, FS3 arrived at my class with a strong foundation in basic number sense. He scored an 8 out of 11 on the diagnostic assessment administered in the first week of school and then retook it once, scoring a 10. This shows that he has a relatively average command of mathematical prerequisites including the order of operations with integers and

fractions, graphing, and exponents. Based on our midterm and most recent chapter exam, Oscar is currently excelling in the areas of graphing proportional relationships (CCSS.Math.Content.8.EE.B.5), determining linear equations to model situations (CCSS. Math.Content.HSF-BF.A.1.a), evaluating functions for given inputs (CCSS. Math.Content.HSF-IF.A.2), and finding the domain given a graph (CCSS. Math.Content.HSF-IF.B.5).

Areas for improvement are comparing properties of functions represented in two different ways such as in tables and graphs (CCSS. Math.Content.HSF-IF.C.9), generating equivalent expressions involving exponents (CCSS. Math.Content.8.EE.A.1), and interpreting key features of functions in context (CCSS. Math.Content.HSF-IF.B.4). His current areas of growth indicate an emphasis on skills mastery in his previous math classes; they also speak to a need for further exposure and practice with math tasks that move beyond the purely procedural and demand higher orders of thinking. These involve modeling situations with mathematics, working with those models following logical manipulations, and then interpreting the results in context.

Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity.

Social Identity. Oscar identifies as a Catholic, heterosexual male whose ethnicity is primarily Mexican in origin with a fraction of Parisian influence dating back to his great-grandfather's generation. Having grown up with a Spanish-speaking father and bilingual mother, FS3 comprehends both Spanish and English in spoken and written form, speaks English fluently, and struggles with Spanish pronunciation. He has two sisters, one twenty-one years of age and the other eleven, and he considers his family to be middle to upper-middle class. He regularly attends church on Sundays with his family but explains that he finds it boring and long (personal communication, October 5, 2018). Though he has participated in sports in the past, FS3 considers himself first and foremost a high school student whose main goal is to achieve straight

A's this semester. Oscar has many friends and acquaintances that he interacts with comfortably in class and enjoys recognition as a YouTube channel creator.

Our classroom embraces the diversity of cultural and linguistic backgrounds present in our community. We emphasize cognates (words in Spanish that sound similar in English, such as *interceptor* and *intercept*) whenever possible to tap into students' familiarity with Spanish, and we welcome the usage of languages aside from English to communicate and demonstrate understanding. To affirm students' self-concepts, we hold open discussions and activities that honor holidays and traditions that they and their families celebrate throughout the year, such as Christmas, Dia de los Muertos, and Halloween.

Socio-Emotional Development. A self-proclaimed social being, Oscar feels most at ease working with others and freely communicating his ideas; he explains that when he was a child, he suffered from anxiety when left alone, which led his mom to buy him his first dog (personal communication, October 5, 2018). This same need for company manifests itself in his behavioral tendencies in the classroom. Whether asked to collaborate with classmates or work by himself, he manages to somehow interact with his peers, whether nonverbally or audibly. He strikes up conversations without hesitation, exhibits an affable nature, and when conversing with others, dominates discussions, oftentimes straying off of the original topic to something entirely unrelated, much to his ignorance until reminded of the initial subject.

Eager to participate in class, Oscar sometimes catches himself to raise his hand before releasing the thoughts on the tip of his tongue. He speaks with his voice and his arms in conjunction, gesticulating wildly when talking about subjects of particular interest or recounting memorable events. Short and long bursts of conscious thought spill forth in a structure and syntax uniquely his own, unyielding to conventional English grammar. Sometimes after realizing

certain statements to be more outspoken than he intended, Oscar backtracks and murmurs, “maybe, I don’t know, that’s just what I think,” which illustrates “the push towards distinctiveness continually view with the pull towards belonging” that Nakkula and Toshielis (2016) claim cause adolescents internal conflict as they work to forge identities (p. 21).

To help Oscar converse more effectively, we can work on self-monitoring strategies that focus on developing thoughts more fully and on turn-taking. I can introduce FS3 to the “two before one” strategy in which he says at least the first sentence or phrase in his head two full times through before speaking it aloud; this can increase self-awareness and metacognition, helping him flesh out notions from start to finish so that when he goes to speak, he can stay on topic and complete his thought all the way through. Secondly, in an effort to as Varlas (2018) states, “set up the class so that the students have conducive emotions about the actual ideas that you are working on,” we will incorporate more Think-Pair-Shares and designated groupwork opportunities that allow Oscar to formally practice interactions with classmates in controlled settings; in this way, we can create the time and space for FS3 to focus on and express his enthusiasm during particular activities (p. 4). I can model turn-taking, appropriately exchanging ideas, and asking relevant questions and then give students’ specific feedback about their interactions as I circulate the classroom. For FS3, we will focus on achieving a more equal balance between the total length of his elocutionary turns in comparison to his partners with the goal of increasing self-management and mutuality of interactions.

Funds of Knowledge.

When I first arrived for the home visit with Oscar’s family, his mother, Martha, opened by profusely apologizing for the state of the house. She explained that they were in the middle of renovating their kitchen, and she was busy going back and forth to the grocery store to buy foods

and keep up the house in the meantime. Martha adjusted a wooden chair and gestured for me to take a seat at the dining table while asking if I wanted anything to drink. Our conversation began with Martha telling me about her family in general. She and her husband, whom we will refer to as Ricardo, have three children and are expecting a fourth at the start of the coming calendar year. Their eldest is a twenty-one-year-old daughter attending a local community college, then Oscar, who is fourteen, and then an eleven-year-old daughter in sixth grade.

FS3's mother mentioned that she speaks to her children "mostly in Spanish because I tend to want them to be able to speak it because it is important to speak two languages in this country" (personal communication, October 16, 2018). Her husband, Ricardo, speaks only Spanish, so Martha spoke on behalf of both of them for the duration of the home visit. This runs counter to the school's database, which lists Oscar as an "EO" or "English Only," serving as an unfortunate, yet real, testimony to Garcia and Kleifgen's (2018) observation that bilingual parents tend to hide their home bilingual practices for various reasons linked to "the monolingual bias in many states' home language surveys and the stigmatization that often follows a student's designation as an English learner" (p. 13).

Fourteen years ago, FS3's family moved into their current Pico Rivera residence, and most of their neighbors have lived there for decent stretches of time too. They are cordial with neighbors and know of their faces but do not associate much beyond a cheerful "hi" and friendly wave. Martha missed not a single breath before responding to the question *If anything, what would you change about your neighborhood?* by voicing concerns about the threat of gang activity and how it would be nice if the city "paid a little more attention to this side" in reference to renovations and allocation of resources (personal communication, October 16, 2018).

When asked about what activities they like to do as a family, Oscar's parents described going to church every Sunday and eating out for lunch afterward as a weekly designated family ritual. Their children still like going to the park, so they visit as a family when possible. They also stay at home to watch movies together and dine out at restaurants occasionally.

As the conversation progressed, we began talking more specifically about Oscar himself. Martha explained that "he doesn't hang out too much because I don't think that's safe for him. I just think his friends should come over instead of him going over to their houses," so his friends come over every now and then to play video games (personal communication, October 16, 2018). He has also started going to Knott's Berry Farm with some of his friends, which (according to Martha) he did not begin until very recently. For much of her description, Oscar's mom talked about him in relation to animals. For instance, she said, "He used to go to the park a lot, like every day to catch lizards. Now that he's grown up, he likes to spend a lot of time with dogs and birds too" (personal communication, October 16, 2018).

Martha supports FS3's goals to become a veterinarian and believes that it makes sense in light of his passion for animals, but ultimately just wants him to enjoy whichever profession he ends up in. Happy that Oscar is on the right track because "he has been doing better than before" in middle school, Martha explained that her dreams are for her son to "continue to go and graduate high school and go to college and have a good career, not for me but for him" (personal communication, October 16, 2018). When asked to compare her personal school experience with her son's, she described that her parents were supportive, but laid back in that they left it up to Martha to determine the value of school and higher education on her own. Their expectation for her, as she recounted, was to marry and depend financially on her spouse; however, she

understands that success nowadays in America requires one to “really have to go to school to get a good job, it’s so hard,” and she and Ricardo are there to support them in any way.

As Frank (1999) states in *Ethnographic Eyes*, these home visits have compelled me to reflect upon “the changes to her [my] own consciousness because of the experience of stepping into another culture” (p. 20). From the start, I knew as I pulled my car up on the dirt driveway and parked next to a horse stable that this way of life was different than the other two and, frankly, from any else that I have ever experienced. Yet, during this particular visit as I spoke at length with Oscar’s mother, I could feel Oscar’s experiences come to life, and I could sense embedded deep within the family dynamic the same familiar care, love, and support.

Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations.

Prior experiences and interests. After documenting all of my interactions with Oscar, the total length of the transcriptions turned out to be over double that of each of my first two focus students. While carefully listening back to the audio clips, I recorded the long and winding sentences as FS3 burst with enthusiasm, went off on tangents, and talked at a fast clip. In these conversations, Oscar freely divulged his interests, experiences, and aspirations.

FS3 played baseball, football, and soccer, each for brief periods of time before arriving at high school. The dismissive mention of his athletic career served more as a conduit to explain how he has anhidrosis, a condition which makes it impossible for him to sweat and one that runs in the family. Instead, the bulk of our conversations was largely consumed by Oscar describing with immense detail his experiences with animals throughout his life. I heard about his saving birds’ lives at a veterinary clinic, training pigeons how to do tricks in the sky, forging a deal for tortoises at a swap meet, running after his baby Chihuahua a few weeks ago, and reinforcing chicken cages against opossum attacks, amongst other stories. His grandfather, Paul, whose

influence we discussed earlier in the *Life Experience* section, played an integral role in helping his grandson discover a passion for working with animals, and his recent passing has anchored FS3's aspirations of becoming a veterinarian to see through his and his grandpa's shared dedication. Also impactful in shaping these career goals has been the family's frequent camping trips and travels to other countries (including Mexico, Hawaii, and Greece) where FS3 observed several stray animals wandering the streets in need of food, shelter, and medical attention.

Oscar's family is supportive, and his mom has been an immense source of encouragement throughout his upbringing; as FS3 recounts, "my mom wanted to like be more focused on us and more of a bond because I guess my mom didn't have that with hers" (personal communication, October 5, 2018). In the interest of helping her children to succeed academically and personally, she continually helps them with homework and extracurricular activities and holds that she "knows where to push and not push" to help them achieve their best (personal communication, October 16, 2018).

According to FS3 himself, Oscar feels connected to the high school because he has many acquaintances and enjoys involvement in drama club as an extracurricular outlet. During class time, he prefers it to be quiet because he feel he can learn more, whereas "when everyone's talking, the lesson doesn't really get to me because I get interested in their conversations"; Oscar also paused to mention that he appreciates the mobility of seats in our classroom as well as the air conditioning and use of technology like our Smartboard (personal communication, October 5, 2018). He says that his mother, especially, has encouraged attending college as a natural post-secondary path and that his older sister is currently attending a local community college in pursuit of becoming a sociology professor someday (personal communication, October 5, 2018).

Indeed, from our home visit, I learned that F3's parents do believe education to be an essential cornerstone in their children's futures and are willing to support them with whatever they need, whether it be financially, academically, emotionally, etc. As Horn (2017) declares, "belongingness is fostered through authentic connections – seeing students for who they are, their strengths, their challenges, and accepting and embracing both as we work with them and help them grow" (p. 29). Though arguably distinct roles, teachers and parents must align perspectives; in particular, it would benefit our students most for teachers to tap into the parental view of our children as fountains of potential with current assets and areas of need that we can assist them to identify and build upon.

Developmental Considerations. Oscar exhibits signs of typical development according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. These include experiencing fluctuating moods, displaying interest in interacting with peers and feeling stress from more difficult schoolwork ("Child Development: Young Teens," 2017). FS3's bodily development aligns with average fourteen-year-old males, and he is conscious of his physical appearance through remarks directed at himself and constantly trying to tidy up his hair. With regards to cognitive processing, he demonstrates above-average competency in solving problems requiring higher order thinking (evidenced by his performance on written response portions of summative exams) and fluency with verbally communicating ideas and sentiments to classmates and myself.

Action Plan.

After hours of face-to-face conversation with FS3 and interacting with his family during the home visit, I have come to better understand his cultural, familial, and experiential background, including the aspirations that he has for himself and the support he has access to. Moving forward, to develop Oscar's proficiency in mathematics, I have devised an action plan

consisting of the following two focal points: (1) organization (which breaks down into two sub-categories described below) and (2) oral communication.

The first area of focus for FS3 is organization – of materials and of thoughts. As Oscar acknowledged in one lunchtime chat while trying to find a reading book to show me, “I am unorganized. I put everything in a hidden place” (personal communication, October 24, 2018). He is generally well-prepared when it comes to getting out class materials like pencils and paper; however, he usually has papers strewn about in his backpack amidst notebooks for different classes. To remedy this organizational issue, we can work together to set up a simple three-ring binder with labeled dividers for each subject so that he can store important resources for each class (perhaps homework or projects) in an easily-accessible common location. An agenda or calendar at the front of this binder can also help him to keep track of daily and upcoming tasks.

The second aspect of organization we can improve is decluttering mental thoughts. Oscar relayed that he sometimes struggles to keep his mind focused on academic tasks and away from thinking about unrelated topics such as social media fads, his mom’s emotional strife from Paul’s passing, and his myriad of animals. I have also noticed a recent dip in his homework completion and corresponding performance on quizzes and tests, perhaps due to these straying thoughts. Similarly recommended to Izzy, my second focus student, I will introduce Oscar to the Pomodoro technique to ease the burden of psychological organization. By providing the reliable structure of short, focused intervals with interspersed breaks, I believe that this can meet FS3’s need by guiding his focus for manageable stretches of time. I will also encourage FS3 to begin a journal that he can write in throughout the day; he can, thus, record thoughts on paper and free up his mind to dedicate complete focus to tasks at hand. As Duckworth (2016) asserts, “With effort, talent becomes skill, and, at the very same time, effort makes skill *productive*” (p. 51).

FS3 is certainly capable of achieving his desired A in this course; he entered with a decent diagnostic score and has proven an aptitude to learn and retain concepts; honing in on mental organization will make it easier for him to invest the effort he needs to succeed.

The other area of focus for FS3 is clarity of oral communication. As detailed extensively throughout the *Focus Student 3* section thus far, Oscar loves to participate in class and interact with peers and me. He is extremely talkative, and his mouth barely keeps up with his rapid thoughts and sudden changes in direction; however, this is exactly where the area of need presents itself. It would benefit FS3 to work on improving the clarity of the messages that he wishes to convey; instead of trailing off and switching topics, he could increase the effectiveness of his speech by simply completing thoughts. As discussed in the *Social-Emotional Development* section above, the “two before one” strategy, wherein Oscar thinks about what he wants to say and runs through it twice silently before speaking it aloud could help boost self-awareness. As Fisher and Frey (2014) observe, “People will talk and listen - that’s a given. The ways in which this talking and listening are used are the real key” (p. 19). We can capitalize on FS3’s affinity for socializing, helpful nature, and moderate command of the material by providing opportunities for him to work in groups and tutor peers. Through partner and group work, Oscar will practice thinking before speaking and organize ideas for maximal reception by his audience. In addition, by retrieving acquired knowledge as he explains thoughts to others, FS3 will reap the research-backed benefits of deeper understanding (Jarrett, 2018).

To track the effectiveness of these action plan methods moving forward, I will collect various pieces of formative data. Quality of homework, assignment completion rate, FS3’s feedback about the Pomodoro technique, and journal entries will enable me to gauge the usefulness of organizational techniques. During partner and group work, I will listen carefully

for the clarity of Oscar's contributions and monitor the precision of statements as he explains concepts to his peers. All in all, using the aforementioned tools, I would hope to supplement Oscar's current competencies in mathematics and socialization so that he can invest efforts with increased purpose and increase the effectiveness of his verbal communication.

Concluding Thoughts on Case Studies.

All in all, after working closely with the three focus students selected months ago, I have gained insight into their individual backgrounds and funds of knowledge. More importantly, I have come to realize that the students who appear in my classroom for fifty minutes each weekday are much more than the sum of their parts. Central to intricate support networks that extend sometimes far beyond their own fathomable reach, adolescents are active agents in the formulation of their identities, taking bits and pieces of experiences and interactions in various settings. Across my three focus students, I have discovered a demand for regular exposure to higher-order cognitive activities, ample opportunities to practice effective peer collaboration, and explicit guidance on how to maximize the learning process.

Delving deeper into support systems and asking probing, strategic questions revealed a profound baseline that I suspect applies across the board in some way, shape, or form if sought out sufficiently – that of unconditional love and support for the young people that we have the privilege of working with day in and day out. In the next section, we will widen our scope to explore and truly inhabit the community that individual families (like those we worked with during the case studies) build, participate in, and infuse with life.

Part C: What is happening in my community, school, and classroom?

Sometimes exhausted from hours of standing on my feet, interacting with students, and trying to meet competing demands for time, energy, and attention, I think about the families of my students – the parents and people charged with guarding the safety and social-emotional and academic well-being of our students when they step foot off of campus. What is it that they do on a day-to-day basis? How do aspirations and expectations for their children manifest themselves? What is it like to participate in the city of Pico Rivera from an insider’s perspective (i.e. what are their lived experiences)? These are the people that construct, contribute to, and reside in the place surrounding my school site. As an employee of El Rancho High School, I serve not only my roughly 170 students that step foot in my classroom on a daily basis, but indirectly too, their sisters and brothers, parents, grandparents, and everyone who cares for them.

It is this societal web of inevitable interdependence that we now turn to explore in this section of the ethnographic narrative. Here, I will tell my story of coming to know the community that I serve, the school through which I serve, and the classroom that ties my self (teaching and non-teaching) to this community and school.

Micro-Community Research

After a school day and having decided upon purchasing a cheeseburger with no onions, I stand in line at the In-N-Out and look around to observe. Both the interior and exterior boast the standardized and familiar off-white color scheme with mustard yellow and ketchup red accents that one finds at In-N-Out establishments across the West Coast. But this one is unique by virtue of its special location at the intersection of Paramount and Whittier Boulevard. Slightly smaller in square footage than the one in my hometown, it bustles just the same and sighs with relief from ordering “the usual” after a long work day. A mother with two young girls and a boy

secures a booth and wipes it down with handfuls of thin napkins before allowing her children to climb onto the seat. Two college-aged men talk animatedly in Portuguese as they scarf down double-doubles and animal fries. A couple makes telling eye contact before rising simultaneously to clean up their trash and head towards the exit. From young to old, people come together at the same point in spacetime to seamlessly contribute to and benefit from the synergetic ebb and flow of community – one that seems so familiar to me yet is wholly new and stands in its own right as a snapshot of the surrounding Pico Rivera area.

I write about this particular moment in time because spending the afternoon in this location removed from my own classroom allowed me to organically experience how it feels to live in the city and not just within the fences of El Rancho High School. It provided the sensory stimulation and tranquility of a bird watcher that I have joined to reflect upon my “own consciousness because of the experience of stepping into another culture” (Frank, 1999, p. 20). Transcending my designated role as a math teacher and assuming that of an active Pico participant is just a fraction of my journey to understand the community that I serve. Pollock (2017) claims that “Equity efforts treat all young people as equally and infinitely valuable. And so, they seek to remedy any situation where opportunities for some are insufficient or expectations low, particularly when young people have long been underserved by schools” (p. 7) But in order to do this, we first have to familiarize ourselves with the context within which students live, have developed their identities up to this point, and are expected to learn and succeed. We have to explore the societal, financial, and political tapestries that have been woven in decades past along with communal and individual biases (held knowingly or unknowingly) so that we can identify areas towards which we can focus our efforts to carry out equity work.

On my way home from school each day, I catch the Interstate 605 north from either Pioneer or Whittier Boulevard and then brave the late afternoon traffic on the 60 eastbound. Before jumping on the first freeway, however, I have a short, but incredibly informative, drive along the Pico Rivera city streets. Just after turning out from the staff parking lot, I pass the Pico Rivera City Hall, with its bronze-cast police officer pointing upwards towards the sky, frozen in time as he guides a young girl. The police station that I pass on my way down Passons looks comparatively barren since a large, festive holiday wreath and Christmas tree were taken down a few days after we returned from winter break. Unexpected and unassuming friends walk down the street to the nearby Dollar King, 7-Eleven, and elementary schools as cars jut out from various side streets to claim their place in line. Washington Boulevard forms a bridge across the San Gabriel River Basin, which is sometimes as dry as a bone (a stark reminder of the drought plaguing Southern California) and at others, full to the brim, populated by water birds and all. About three days a week, food trucks occupy an empty parking lot, though I have yet to witness a single customer approach a window to purchase a meal.

As I approach the freeway entrance from Pioneer, single-story homes line the boulevard. Though the season has long passed, strings of Christmas lights drape delicately across the front of more than one roof. A semi-truck is parked alongside the curb in front of a house in the opposing lane, and neighboring fruit carts appeal to passersby with their faded rainbow umbrellas and vibrant selection of fresh coconuts, mangoes, pineapples, and watermelons. Opulent orange and lemon trees spill over brick walls facing the street while black and red “Beware of Dog” signs decorate side gates. Short metal and wood fences enclose single-story properties as cacti and red blossoms protect and beautify the front and sides of residences. There is a particularly quaint white house with azure trim that always catches my eye as I drive past.

Palm trees shoot up sporadically, declaring Pico Rivera's presence in the Greater Los Angeles area. And despite the city's advertisement of decreased frequency, graffiti overwhelms entire tarps that overhang agricultural land and colors buildings, even ones visible from the onramp to the 605 freeway. A woman with dark brown hair pulled into a loose, low-hanging bun walks briskly while holding out her right arm under which a young girl in a pink, decorated t-shirt and jeans skips and twirls excitedly as they make their way down the sidewalk.

Demographics.

A geographically small city, Pico Rivera is home to over 63,000 residents within the nine square miles that it stretches across, making for an approximate population density of roughly seven thousand people per square mile. Of those residents, nearly ninety percent are Hispanic or Latino, 5.5 percent are White, 2.6 percent are Asian, 0.71 percent are Black or African American, and less than 0.4 percent are Native American according to Data USA ("Pico Rivera, CA," n.d.). The United States Census Bureau states that as of 2018, females compose 51.4% of the population, and as of the 2010 census, 25 to 44-year-olds comprise the largest age sector at 27.6%, closely followed by under 16-year-olds at 26%, then the "65 and up" category, and lastly, the 45 to 64-year-olds. Thirty-one percent of current residents were born outside of the city, with most foreign-born people originating from Mexico, followed up by El Salvador and China ("U.S. Census," n.d.). Languages spoken in the area have remained stable for several years, and Data USA reports that as of 2015, 66% of the city's population are native Spanish speakers, 0.65% speak Tagalog, and 0.51% speak Chinese, with Gujarati and Thai rounding out the five most common languages ("Pico Rivera, CA," n.d.).

The city's website establishes a prominent service sector (educational services, health care, and social assistance) as the leading industry in Pico Rivera that nearly 19% of residents

were employed in as of the most recent 2010 census (“Demographics / Economics,” n.d.). Manufacturing follows up at 13.4%, retail trade at 12.8%, and transportation, warehousing, and utilities at 9.8% of the workforce. Approximately 80 percent of employees are private wage and salary workers, while 15 percent are federal, state or local government workers, with the remainder being involved in a self-employed business. The US Census estimates the median household income in Pico Rivera to be around \$61,000, and at the same time, nine percent of households made less than \$15,000, which corresponds to the estimation that 10.6% of the population was deemed to live in poverty (“U.S. Census,” n.d.). A little over seventy percent have achieved at least a high school diploma, and of that group, 17.5% completed some college but no degree, and 12.2% attained a bachelor’s degree or higher.

In terms of housing and according to 2008-2010 census data, of the 17,000 total housing units, 79 percent were in single-unit structures, 18 percent were in multi-unit structures, and 3 percent were mobile homes. Mr. Mike Celiz, a colleague of mine and alumnus of El Rancho High School, accurately describes this data solely from his familiarity with the Pico area in claiming that most available housing is in the form of single-family residences, oftentimes single story houses or apartments (M. Celiz, personal communication, January 23, 2019). There are a few gated communities, multi-unit structures, and mobile homes in the area alongside duplexes and condominiums. As of 2010, most homes (namely, 85.3%) were deemed to have a computer, though only 72.7% subscribed to broadband Internet (“U.S. Census,” n.d.).

Community Resources.

Pico Rivera possesses many resources that it offers to its residents, yet exhibits some areas of need where more resource may come in handy. Similar to any other populous urban city, Pico has sheriff’s and fire departments, two libraries, several churches, and a total of sixteen

schools (including three middle schools, three high schools, and a Pre-Kinder through 12 and adult community education center). To help residents travel, the Montebello Bus Lines and Metropolitan Transit Authority service the Pico area, the two most accessible hospitals are Beverly Hospital and the joint Los Angeles County and USC Medical Center, and the closest animal shelter is located in Downey.

Though some resources may be located outside of its reach, Pico Rivera still offers a wide variety of educational, community-centric, and enriching activities for residents of all ages to participate in. According to the city's Parks and Recreation guide, there are fitness activities such as yoga, gymnastics, martial arts, and traditional sports (i.e. baseball, soccer, basketball, tennis, etc.), Tiny Tots sessions where parents can take small children to play and learn, and courses for senior citizens, including Intro to Computers, Life Story Writing, and Health Screenings, just to name a few ("2019 Winter," n.d.). The city hosts events like Senior Dodger Day, creative art workshops in animation, baking, dance, and music, and trips to the Grammy Museum, the Descanso Gardens, and the La Mirada Theater. The Parks and Rec Department extends its inclusive welcome by offering activities like driver's education and a video gaming center for Pico's youth as well as adaptive recreation events such as the upcoming Valentine's Dance and Glow in the Dark 80's Dance Party. It is these opportunities that people are encouraged to take advantage of, not only to entertain and better themselves, but also to build connections with fellow residents.

Community Challenges.

Lastly, to round out the overall characterization of the community that I serve, it is only fair to acknowledge the challenges it has faced in the recent past. There have been two major incidents to speak of, one that occurred in the middle of the last academic year, and one that is

unfolding in the present day. The former obstacle that was presented to the community made national news when Mr. Greg Salcido, a history teacher at El Rancho High School was caught on video spewing insults about the military and our troops fighting in Iran and Afghanistan during class time, apparently in reaction to a student's U.S. Marine Corps sweatshirt. In the subsequent days, Mr. Salcido received several threats to his safety and that of his family, and a city council meeting was held during which outraged attendees demanded that he relinquish his position as a history teacher. The public interpreted this individual's comments as representative of El Rancho High School's stance towards the United States military, so parents, veterans, and other community members organized to form a protest on a specified day. In the interest of protecting the students from potential danger, the school decided to convert it into professional development (PD) day in which faculty came to work, but students did not. On the day of, while demonstrators stood, paced, and waved posters on Passons in front of the school, Mr. Celiz recalls going out during a break time between PD sessions with other teachers to glimpse the action at the front of the school. He said, "I was standing here, and there was a sniper police officer next to me with a sniper rifle right by his leg. It was really intense" (M. Celiz, personal communication, January 23, 2019). According to Mr. Arredondo, a colleague of mine who has been at the school for ten years, this was the most significant event that has plagued the school for a long time (A. Arredondo, personal communication, January 23, 2019). In the aftermath, the district decided to fire Salcido; he filed an appeal to fight this decision for several months, but eventually dropped the bid to retrieve his job. He still remains on the Pico Rivera City Council.

The second and perhaps more far-reaching and convoluted crisis plaguing our Pico community is the realization of a bond measure to renovate El Rancho High School. In November of 2017, residents in the area approved Measure ER, a \$200 million-dollar bond

measure intended to “modernize and transform El Rancho High School to 21st century educational standards,” upgrade our schools, and make dire structural repairs to plumbing, wiring, leaky roofs, and removing hazardous materials (“Bond Program,” n.d.). Since then and in spite of factual evidence that there are insufficient district funds to implement the entire plan, the board of education has been widely selling the impractical idea of a complete demolition and rebuild of our existing school. To further complicate matters, the company hired to carry out the renovations previously completed a smaller project that most of the faculty consider much too costly for the subpar quality of work (i.e. sloppily painted walls, non-functionality of electrical wiring, phones, and public address system, etc.), and some teachers have expressed suspicions about embezzlement within the enterprise. The disparity between available district funding and estimated expenses of the modifications engendered a temporary hold on the project, but within the past month, the board of education voted to increase the city’s sales tax to make up some of this difference. In order to satisfy the perceived desires of Pico residents, the board of education made the decision to begin by constructing a new football stadium and baseball fields.

Previously, phase one was to make desperately needed structural renovations to the science classrooms and laboratories that have rusty, outdated equipment and resources. Thus, currently, the entire science department has been displaced from their building indefinitely and forced to adjust to classrooms not conducive for science education as we wait for the money to build new sports facilities. Throughout this time, the public remains largely unaware of the politics of the situation, while faculty feels disenfranchised and at the mercy of the three board members who currently hold the majority.

In *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, DeVol asserts, “Communities must have a shared understanding and a common vocabulary to build critical mass that is willing and

motivated to make the necessary changes” (Payne, 2005, p. 182). Of dire importance then, is for the public to first have access to factual information and to possess the communicative skills to speak about crucial issues in order to come to a consensus on how to best navigate these situations. Though perhaps not yet the most well-informed about minutiae of political undercurrents at work, in the face of challenges, the Pico community has demonstrated resilience in its support of the schools that serve its population and appreciation for the resources that the city provides. Largely to thank for the strong ties that keep the community of Pico Rivera together in the face of internal and external turmoil are the events, traditions, and values that residents hold essential and dear. It is these that we will endeavor to explore in the section below.

Community Events & Community Members

Key Events and Traditions.

Nakkula and Toshalis (2016) discuss Erikson’s framing of identity as a developmental concept – the “emerging fit (or misfit) between the individual self and the larger society” (p. 19). Thus, in order to come to know the students well, what their lived experiences are, and where their sights are set for the purposes of motivating and inspiring them, we first have to acquaint ourselves with the “larger society,” or community, of which they are automatic constituents and against which they continually evaluate themselves.

As I stand outside my door to greet my students before each class session, it is not uncommon to see them sporting baseball caps, Dodgers jerseys, Rams hoodies, and other like attire. The Integrated Mathematics I team that I have worked with for the duration of the school year cited sports as the number one pastime that unites Pico Rivera residents in community. From remembering the legacy of Rich Camarillo – a former professional American Football punter who grew up in Pico – to recognizing the continued accomplishments of fellow Pico

native Randy Flores, a scouting director for the St. Louis Cardinals, from taking immense pride in El Rancho High's football program to continuing the generations-long Los Angeles Dodgers fandom, from attending track meets to supporting former El Rancho student Cristian Roldán who now plays soccer for the Seattle Sounders, residents have displayed and continue to display enthusiasm for athletics. Whether it be the Super Bowl or a water polo match at home, people rally together to demonstrate their passion for sporting, a key component of Pico identity.

Many community events largely revolve around El Rancho itself because, for over sixty years, it was the only secondary school in the district. For instance, our Back to School Night kicks off the academic calendar. This year, it began at 6 o'clock with an opening address in the Main Gym to welcome students and families to the school. After this, parents and occasional students toured the campus, rotating quickly between scattered classrooms to catch glimpses of their children's teachers and hear spiels about their respective subjects. For my first Back to School Night as a teacher, it seemed rather rushed what with families filing in at different points during my 10-minute presentation due to the unfeasible time slots. Overall, despite the hurried nature of the event, it was effective in making initial contact with the parents and families who were able to attend, perhaps for the first and only time throughout the school year that we would converse in person.

Another two similar, prominent traditions in the Pico Rivera community are Night Pep Rally and the Don Games. Aside from basics of teaching advice, one of the first insights that my fellow Math I colleagues shared with me was about an event called Night Pep Rally that El Rancho has hosted for the past several years. Held on the Thursday before Homecoming, it is a culmination of spirit week in which students and staff gather for a night of class competitions, games, and fun. I volunteered to be part of the Staff Dance, so in the weeks leading up, I

attended practices and rehearsals to learn choreography to a mixed tape of pop songs along with twelve other faculty members. On the day of, we stayed after school to tidy up our classrooms and finish some grading before to a final rehearsal preceding showtime. Over the stretch of an hour or two, students filed in, dressed in outfits ranging from jeans and a class color t-shirt to full-on costumes, hair, and makeup. Each class was granted a theme: freshmen were “Under the Sea,” sophomores were “Videogames,” juniors were “Flintstones,” and seniors represented “Day of the Dead” or “Dia de los Muertos.” Class skits and dances were interspersed with performances showcasing various extracurricular endeavors such as band, choir, color guard, cheer, Pepsters, and our staff dance. The music was loud, but the voices of our students drowned out the boomboxes; during our staff dance, we could hardly even hear the music over the crowd’s screams and shouts. Before acts, during performances, and in the midst of transitions, class chants would break out, impassioned, synchronous voices warring back and forth between “Freshmen,” “Juniors,” “Seniors,” and “Sophomores!” The effort that students invested in their decorations and the spirit that everyone effused was contagious. This event left me deeply impressed by its overwhelming display of school spirit, passion, and unity. The Don Games are set to take place in mid-April of this year, at which the students and staff will be split into two teams (blue and gray to represent our school colors) and engage in a series of games and activities to earn points throughout the evening.

Also essential to the character of Pico Rivera is Smith Park. Situated in the heart of the city, it runs along Rosemead Boulevard, stretching across sixteen acres with its skate park, Olympic-sized swimming pool, soccer field, picnic benches, and other amenities. Around the corner from my school site, students from all over gather here to hang out and spend time with friends, on weekdays and weekends alike. Smith Park hosts city-organized events year-round for

community members such as Summer Street Fest, Harvest Fair, and Veterans Day Car Show, just to name a few. Oftentimes in society at various scales, divisions arise from misaligned intentions, conflicts of interest, or sharp distinctions between what we know and what we are not yet familiar with. Events and traditions like those discussed in this section provide opportunities for people to gather in common activity and empower us with the tools to reconfigure the us-them dichotomy into “an integrated ‘we,’ working together, relying on one another, to create possibilities for who we are and what we might become” (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2016, p. 27).

Community Members & Insights.

It is one thing to know about an event, another to attend an event, and entirely another to experience said event as a different person. As Frank (1999) keenly proposes, “There is not ‘the’ view of reality but ‘a’ view,” and what follows is a description of a few key community members to whom I spoke along with the insights they were able to provide from their unique experiences in the neighborhood (p. 4).

Mr. Hector Vasquez stands short and stout with a walkie talkie in one hand and pen tucked behind his right ear. Normally dressed in a collared dress shirt with black or blue tie (unless it is Friday, in which case he can be spotted in jeans and a gray, speckled, pull-over sweatshirt that hides a royal blue El Rancho High polo), he is bald and has a dark brown mustache and beard that encircles his mouth, giving the impression that he is either going to talk to or smile at you, maybe both. Mr. Vasquez has been the principal at my school site since the start of the 2018-2019 academic year, before which, he worked for the San Bernardino Unified School District. A relative newcomer, he conducted the third interview along my road to employment at El Rancho. During that conversation and several after, he emphasized the fact that “the kids here are all-around really good kids” and that the community has stuck together

through thick and thin, especially amidst last year's controversy over the history teacher's comments, which demonstrates the strong bonds between the families of Pico Rivera and their connectedness to their hometown (H. Vasquez, personal communication, December 3, 2018).

With a background in coaching during his early career, he is familiar with the structure of school sports and keeps a close eye on ensuring that the athletics program is run efficiently and smoothly for our students.

In contrast to Principal Vasquez, Mr. Zan Mason, the Assistant Principal of Student Services, stands at a towering six feet and some inches with black-rimmed glasses that drape gently over his eyes as they are supported by his nose as he extends a warm hand and jovial, sing-songy "Hello, hello, hello." An African-American male who started off his career in education working at a juvenile hall in downtown Los Angeles, he believes that the students at El Rancho are "fundamentally good. Some just need more support because they come in with emotional baggage and trauma" (Z. Mason, personal communication, January 24, 2019). In his laid-back, casual demeanor, Mr. Mason says that the community is great because we have a lot of resources including the sheriff's department next door, the new Positive Intervention Center (PIC) on site, and the support of the families of the students we teach. The morning that I spoke with him most thoroughly, we discussed some reasons behind student behaviors in the classroom that arise; he mentioned informally (and without naming names) a range of traumatic experiences that students have had to cope with, including homelessness or foster placement, unsuitability of home life for academic work, and even death of a parent. In spite of these circumstances, Mr. Mason claims that it is our responsibility as educators to ensure that we "value kids' assets and provide them with resources to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally."

On Wednesdays and Thursdays of typical weeks, the whole Integrated Math I team has prep for the first block period, which means that students do not show up until nearly 9:30 AM. I usually arrive at the same time as any other day, trudging up the stairwell to our collaborative learning space around seven o'clock. I hit the lights and make my way to my desk where I unload three bags and get settled to lesson plan or work on an assignment. Almost exactly on the dot at 7:30 AM, Mr. Mike Celiz walks in leaning to his left as his briefcase-like side bag swings from the strap perched on his right shoulder, uttering a curt, "Morning." He travels in short strides, carrying a silver mug in one hand until reaching his desk right across from mine, where he gently places his things down and reaches into his bag for dark, rectangular-framed reading glasses. Most days, he also turns on the country music or pop hits station on Apple Music to fill the morning quietness. Mr. Celiz is a fellow Integrated I teacher who used to coach the El Rancho baseball team until deciding to take over his son's travel ball team. This year, he teaches one period each of Integrated I and Integrated II, co-leads the Math I curriculum team, and serves as a support teacher for the other three periods. He is eager to share resources, such as Kuta Software, class sets of scissors, and solutions to textbook problems as well as his experiences living and teaching in the Pico Rivera community over the past twelve years.

Mr. Celiz filled in the details of the Gregory Salcido debacle with his and colleagues' personal perspective, conveying the serious weight of the implications and dangers surrounding the incident. Regarding the bond issue, he said that this is not the first time that the district and school board have acted with such fiscal irresponsibility. In general, he claims that members of the board and district, in turn, consistently hire construction companies whose costs far exceed the quality of work that they produce. For instance, he told me that the bathroom in his wife's kindergarten classroom years ago was renovated so poorly that a child actually became trapped

inside because the door was affixed onto its hinges crookedly. Mr. Celiz explained that the scoreboard for our high school's baseball field stands so short because it cannot be raised above a certain height without ADA (American Disabilities Act) approval; he said that the school refused to have ADA officials come out to grant this approval because they were afraid of being told to remedy other structural aspects of campus that are currently non-ADA compliant, such as restrooms, access to second stories, etc. Despite the apparent problems with mismanaged funds, he added that "since they hold all the power, all we can do is laugh about it," which clearly illustrates the sentiments of disenfranchisement prevalent across much of the teaching staff at my school site (M. Celiz, personal communication, January 24, 2019).

Nearing her fifties and dressed in a t-shirt and denim pants, she walks slowly and remains silent after climbing a flight of stairs in order to conserve the oxygen in her lungs. With light brown, medium length hair and green eyes, Mrs. Villanueva has a daughter that attends Cal High School in Whittier and serves as a teacher in El Rancho Unified School District (ERUSD). One afternoon, I spoke with her at a district-wide training about her experience in the Pico Rivera community. She told me that she attends every one of her daughter's swim practices and competitions; because she feels that "it makes a big difference," she rushes home from work on these days to show her constant and unwavering support but said only "a few parents show up probably because they don't care or are too busy. Maybe both parents are working or have other children to attend to" (S. Villanueva, personal communication, December 10, 2019).

This last piece of insight, in particular, strikes me as profound. Teacher Performance Expectation (TPE) 6.2 recognizes "implicit and explicit biases" as crucial elements in the work that we do as teachers, and Mrs. Villanueva's comments help me to realize that though parents and families of children may care deeply for their child's success, they may not have the time,

energy, or resources to fully support them in that journey. Schools, then, carry the responsibility to provide the opportunities and resources necessary for students to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. Some organizations have partnered with my school site to join in the efforts to provide the widest availability of learning opportunities to support students in a variety of ways that facilitate this holistic development.

Partnerships with Outside Organizations.

There are some key programs that have partnered with El Rancho High School to enrich the academic and all-around lives of students. El Rancho College and Career Center has joined with Tri-Cities Regional Occupation Program (ROP). This educational program offers opportunities for high school students in the Pico Rivera, Santa Fe, and Whittier areas to engage in career technical work while earning credits toward graduation at the same time; they can earn a high-quality education and practical experience working in fields ranging from dentistry to nursing, digital design, forensic science, and more. Right across the street from our school site is the Rio Hondo College Educational Center, which offers select courses for El Rancho students to enroll in, such as technology and public speaking. On weekdays, the Boys and Girls Club of Pico Rivera hosts after-school workshops on the El Rancho High School campus where students can go for a daily snack, free tutoring, visual arts, dance, and gaming.

Aside from the close alliances mentioned above, El Rancho High also works with several prominent community organizations through student clubs and extracurriculars. For instance, the Culinary Arts Club on campus provides meals for the City of Hope and local Children's Hospitals. Key Club is sponsored by the La Mirada Kiwanis Club, wherein students engage in fundraising for UNICEF (an international organization that provides food and healthcare to children in disadvantaged areas) amongst other community service-oriented events. Thespians

Club is an active member of The International Thespian Society, which requires students to contribute at least one-hundred hours to play production before being initiated. In this way, students can discover membership in a network of shared interests and values that extends well beyond the boundaries of El Rancho High School.

Community Resources & Services.

As general resources provided by the community of Pico Rivera were previously discussed (see “Community Resources” section in “Micro-Community Research”), we will talk about the specific community services and resources that my students access and ones that are still needed.

First off, there are several extracurricular activities and events hosted by El Rancho High School itself. Many of my students are involved in one or more sports programs, including basketball, baseball, softball, soccer, football, water polo, tennis, swim, golf, and track. Practices are typically after school, though some sports are offered as an Athletic PE course that replaces the sixth period. We have an extensive band program that has earned division recognition and awards and even played at Disneyland a few months ago. We offer digital imaging and art fundamentals alongside drama courses and choir. There are several extracurricular organizations led by students and faculty advisors, such as the Japanese Club, Key Club, and Pepsters. Upperclassmen also have the opportunity to try out for the academic decathlon team, which develops students’ collaboration, critical thinking, and interpersonal skills.

The city of Pico Rivera has a fully functioning police and fire station, regular trash pickups, street sweeping, two libraries, eight parks, a sports arena, senior center, Parks and Recreation Department, and historical museum. It also offers students and their families a plethora of opportunities for personal development, entertainment, and socializing. Amongst

these services are several eateries in the Pico, Whittier, and Downey areas, movie theaters, paintballing centers, Smith Park, Pico Park, et cetera. Mr. Celiz mentioned that there are no major grocery stores in the city like Vons, Ralph's, or Stater Brothers, so I researched the surrounding area. I discovered that there is a Food 4 Less (discounted grocery warehouse), El Super, Superior, and Northgate Market; the latter three are hubs for purchasing Hispanic and global foods, which seems appropriate for the cultural composition of the town.

There are a couple of areas where the community could improve its service to residents, mostly relating to infrastructure. Though only established in 1958 when the neighboring cities of Pico and Rivera voted to merge, Pico Rivera actually traces its roots back to the year 1870 once rail lines were completed ("Our History," n.d.). As such, the city is rather old in terms of structures and roads. Construction of buildings is weak in some places; for instance, schools in ERUSD suffer from leaky ceilings, subpar renovations, peeling paint, rusty locks and faucets, plumbing issues, and presence of asbestos and other hazardous materials. Secondly, my school has seen overwhelming numbers of tardies to the first period in recent years for two main reasons: (1) funding for school buses was severely curtailed three years ago and (2) Passons Boulevard (the main thoroughfare that runs through the heart of Pico Rivera) houses eight schools that sit directly on the street and indirectly houses five others located on side streets branching off of Passons. These two forces have converged to make for an extremely congested two-lane road in the hours sandwiching the school day. Constructing wider roads and more alternate routes and redirecting district funds once more towards making the school bus system accessible to students would free up the roads from the sheer number of cars and allow for more efficient transportation within the city.

School Site Research

The School Itself.

Careful to exit the Interstate 605 freeway at the Washington Blvd West / Slauson Ave, I drive along the curve of the offramp and slow to a halt at the stop sign. I crane my neck nearly 180 degrees to the left, looking for an opening in the morning traffic on Washington Boulevard as cars whiz by. Spotting a potential opportunity, I seize the moment, apologizing silently to the environment as I use gas to go from 0 to 40 miles per hour in the span of about 40 feet. In the right lane, one gets a clear view of the witty and welcoming “If you lived in Pico Rivera, you would be home now” sign as well as the odometer, making visible your current speed. Shortly after, I make a slow right onto Passons Boulevard, and on this short home stretch, we pass the Pico Rivera Parks and Recreations Department, City Hall, and police station, lined up on the west side of the street like ducks in a row, whereas single-story homes arrange themselves in convoluted formations on the east.

Upon approaching the school, one first sees brick – faded red mostly, with white and blue trimmings. What impressed me most when I first visited the campus was (a) the brick composition of the buildings and (b) that there are two-story structures. Facing the school head-on, the main office is to the right, adorned with the El Rancho High School name in minimalistic lettering along with seals declaring it a Gold Ribbon award recipient and Title I Academic Achievement institution. In contrast, the middle section which houses classrooms is basically unadorned, except for a small banner announcing our WASC accreditation. To the far left, the other two-story building displays an expansive series of banners reading “A-G Passport to Success” with images representative of our student population.

The rest of the campus mirrors the façade in large part. Composed of distinct one and two-story buildings, covered concrete walkways form the paths that students travel several times

each week. Parallel rows of classrooms project diagonally back from the front of the school to the back, as though saving open space for the quad, which is situated in between the cafeteria, main gym, and outer reaches of classrooms. On this sprawling campus, there is dirt with patches of struggling grass and weeds wherever the concrete pathways are not. The cloudiness of once glass windows now covered up by butcher paper and the presence of large puddles on rainy days reveal the age of the campus. Seemingly makeshift lights protected by blue cage-like metal hang under awnings that stretch over the walkways and give off soft, warm yellow light when turned on for events that run past dusk.

Reputation.

In the fall of 1952, El Rancho High School first opened as part of the Whittier Union High School District (WUHSD). Built on land previously used for to farm oranges and avocados, “Dons” which roughly translates to “gentleman farmer” was chosen as the school’s mascot. Ten years later following the merge of neighboring cities into Pico Rivera, El Rancho High broke away from WUHSD to become the only high school in the El Rancho Unified School District and only high school in the city. Because of this singularity, Pico residents held immense respect for the one and only high school that serviced their children. Fellow colleagues of mine who have taught at the school for upwards of ten years attest to this overwhelming loyalty but also allude to a decrease in Blue Pride over the recent years.

They point to a few key factors that they believe have caused a dramatic shift in reputation. Firstly, a quick eight-minute drive away, a preparatory academy called Ellen Ochoa opened up three years ago on Paramount Boulevard. Part of ERUSD, it is a public high school that is a magnet STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) program. Some teachers claim that the establishment of this school, as well as the availability of other

options in cities like Whittier and Downey, has been a “brain-drain” of more advanced students who would normally have attended El Rancho High. Especially in comparison to Ellen Ochoa, our school is considered the “ghetto school” by teachers and students alike. Aside from the Salcido incident that damaged the public face of El Rancho High School nationwide, Mr. Perez (a fellow Integrated I teacher) explained to me that there have been several administrative changes over the past two years. When Mr. Vasquez assumed the role of principal, his background in sports led him to make decisions that prioritize athletics perhaps over academics, such as switching phase 1 of the renovation to begin with the football and baseball fields instead of starting with the science laboratories and allowing student-athletes to leave class early for games even if their academics are not up to par. As the main high school for residents in the area, El Rancho High remains a respected institution, but one has faced recent challenges and is still subject to societal and political pressures.

Norms, Practices, and Policies.

In order for any establishment to function, let alone function efficiently, there must be policies to guide actions along with regular practices and agreed-upon norms. Sometimes, these may be explicit rules and other times, implied protocols.

The overarching mantra of El Rancho High School is that “Dons are respectful, responsible, and ready to learn.” This simple phrase guides much of the practices and routines that are in place, even amongst the faculty. For instance, on Sunday evenings, the principal sends out a Monday Morning Memo containing recaps from the previous week and announcements week so that all of the staff is informed of the upcoming week’s happenings. At the start of each faculty meeting or development session, we review the “El Rancho High School Meeting Guidelines” or at least have a copy of the eight standards in front of us to read. These guidelines

include items such as “We start and end meetings on time,” “We focus on positive outcomes for our students,” and “We value and respect the knowledge of our diverse group of participants,” which sets the tone for respectful dialogue and professional collaboration. Speaking of collaboration, there has been a significant push over the last couple of years to enlarge the presence of PLCs (professional learning communities) on campus to foster discussion within and across departments. We have late-start Mondays and Fridays so that we can participate in Curriculum Team (CT) meetings that are course specific, department meetings, or faculty meetings wherein all teachers, administrators, and counselors attend. Teachers are expected to develop common assessments at least twice per semester, and my Math I team essentially tries to align all of our quizzes and tests to ensure equitable coverage of content to our students.

Schoolwide policies serve as the oil that keeps our ecosystem running. Especially after a series of fights broke out between students a couple of weeks ago, the administration team and staff are working together to tweak and reinforce those policies as necessary. For instance, students should be on time to class and not wandering the halls unattended. They may not use the restroom within the first or last ten minutes of class, and when they do leave the classroom at any time, they should have a blue pass marked with the destination. Students are to treat others, adults, and their environment respectfully, which means that defacing school property, showing disrespect, and/or defiance form a basis on which any staff member can file a SWIS (School-wide Intervention System) report through the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) application. This year saw the opening of a Positive Intervention Center (PIC) wherein students who are assigned in-school suspensions are housed and given time to reflect and complete work sent by their teachers; that way, instead of simply being booted out of school for several days and further missing out on instruction, they are maintained as part of the community

and granted support to continue working academically. In the aftermath of physical confrontations between students, the administration decided to contain the students within the quad, gym, and cafeteria with the help of safety security officers (SSOs). They implemented this plan along with harsher consequences for any fight-related activities but have since gone back to usual operations where students can roam freely on campus during nutrition and lunch breaks.

Parents are welcomed to attend standard communal and extracurricular events, such as Back-to-School Night, parent conferences, sporting competitions, and theater plays. Aside from these designated times, families are not particularly welcomed into the classroom or even onto campus but instead perceived as receptacles of information for updates about how their child is doing in class, if that. Some parents only receive emails or phone calls home when their child misbehaves, whereas some receive frequent updates from teachers who set up their students with Remind or Google Classroom notifications.

Students are expected to come to school prepared (i.e. with pencils, notebooks, appropriate attire and on time) and ready to learn, though life causes us to fall short of these expectations sometimes. Teachers are encouraged to stand outside of our doorways to welcome students into the classroom, and it is generally suggested that homework be kept to a minimum, perhaps achieved by starting it during class. The Integrated Math I team has decided to allow for late submission of homework without penalty as well as retakes of quizzes if students come in for tutoring during office hours. Other resources that students may access on campus are the tutoring lounge in the downstairs library and the Boys and Girls Club as mentioned earlier.

Federal, state, and district policies surely influence our practices here at El Rancho. The No Child Left Behind Act shines through in schools' incapacity to withhold students who are not yet deemed ready to move onto the next school from moving on. For example, a student who

fails all of their classes in eighth grade will advance to become a freshman the next year at the nearby high school. This has resulted in a rough transition for many ninth graders, who have yet to develop the study skills, fortitude, and knowledge base required for success. California's acceptance of the Common Core State Standards in combination with ERUSD's decision to move forward with the Integrated Mathematics pathway has led to our adoption of the College Preparatory Mathematics (CPM) curriculum used throughout Integrated I through III at the high school. Within the mathematics department, we also host a week-long workshop to help juniors prepare for the CAASPP test in May. Lastly, the ERUSD is piloting a Peer Teacher Support Program this year, which comes with an on-site mentor teacher, occasional observations, and approved observation days to accrue teaching strategies and see others in action.

Leverage of Technology.

El Rancho High School has roughly four to five Chromecarts per core subject department (i.e. math, English, science); Principal Vasquez has expressed a desire to become one-to-one over the next five years so that all students can have access to the educational technology. Some classrooms have Smartboards on which we can project presentations, videos, and other content, and our Math I team has access to sets of scientific calculators. There are insufficient amounts of textbooks for each student, and we do not have enough for a complete classroom set either. In terms of web-based resources, we utilize Aeries Student Management to conduct Tel-a-parent announcements and make current grades accessible to students and their families. Google Classroom, Remind, Kahoot, Khan Academy, and Demos are also frequently used to keep assignments organized digitally and provide practice and enrichment activities that stimulate student recall and critical thinking.

School Morale.

Horn (2017) defines “belongingness” as “when students experience frequent, pleasant interactions with the sense that other are concerned about who they are and for their well-being” (p. 29). It is this type of culture that I aim to foster in my classroom each day, but it is also worthy to acknowledge the school climate that extends well beyond my four walls. At the start of the academic year, school spirit was riding pretty high, especially around the time of our Homecoming football game and Night Pep Rally. However, since then and especially upon returning for the second semester, morale has dwindled notably. Students who are involved in extracurricular activities display significantly more pride in our school and in the time and efforts that they invest into their endeavors; some are excited to tell me privately about events they have coming up, whether it be a wrestling match or a winter choir concert. Generally, though, morale is mediocre and inconsistent across campus as the underwhelming reputation of a “ghetto” school dampens the atmosphere. Some students mockingly recite our “Dons are respectful, responsible, and ready to learn” motto, and stricter school policies in reaction to a series of fights that broke out two weeks ago made for a “prison-like feel” from the students’ perspective and reinforced their claim that the school is ghetto.

In terms of the staff, this year boasts an entirely new administration team as compared to last (with the exception of the principal who is in his second year of service). The composition of the team has changed dramatically from being all female to nearly almost all male – six out of seven positions are now occupied by men. Teachers are adjusting to these new changes, and my colleagues relay that morale has decreased significantly as some well-respected faculty depart for other schools due to differences in educational philosophy and beliefs about where our priorities should lie. Mr. Perez, for instance, perceives the principal as “siding with students and their

parents even up against teachers,” whereas he feels that Mr. Vasquez needs to recognize that “empowering teachers empowers students” (R. Perez, personal communication, January 11, 2019). The Integrated Math I team expressed disappointment with the subpar renovations and the inconveniences of the collaborative pods wherein four classrooms share a common space. Especially in the context of the political and monetary challenges that currently plague our school district, Mrs. Rosales (the Assistant Principal of Curriculum) coins the overwhelming and unfortunate sentiment that “They don’t listen to us” (A. Rosales, personal communication, February 8, 2019). Though speaking specifically about our board of education, the feeling is palpable in the way that some teachers speak about administration and that way that students towards teachers.

It is extremely difficult to maintain a positive outlook when the air is filled with such tension, complaint, and unspoken disagreement. However, belief in the success of our students comes first and foremost, and a discussion of how the school supports the needs of all students follows below.

Addressing the Needs of All Students.

El Rancho High School serves a wide variety of learners. A majority of students come from low to middle-class families with nearly 14% on a reduced lunch program and 61% on free lunch. Students can join most extracurricular activities for little to no cost, and our school hosts events to fundraise for needed equipment, clothing, sports registration fees, and the like. As an institution serving ninety-nine percent minority students in a community where thirty percent are foreign-born, we do have a large population of emergent bilinguals. To support these students, we offer ELD (English Language Development) courses in the provision of designated instructional time focused solely on language acquisition; in addition, teachers across content

areas utilize graphic organizers, reading and writing strategies, and vocabulary models that benefit our emergent bilinguals and all other students as well.

Our school also has a notable number of students receiving special services. Not including our individuals with a moderate/severe disability, each of the four resource specialists at my school site has approximately thirty students with mild/moderate disabilities on their caseload at any time. General education teachers and education specialists work together to provide appropriate accommodations for each child, including preferential seating, visual organizers, guided notes, additional time for assignments, separate testing environment, et cetera. El Rancho does not utilize the GATE (Gifted and Talented Education) classification or anything comparable, but for students with advanced proficiencies, we offer several Honors courses as well as twenty Advanced Placement (AP) classes. We partnered with Rio Hondo College to allow students to earn transferable college credits during high school and are preparing to roll out International Baccalaureate (IB) courses next academic year.

Our school site has an average of thirty students living in foster homes or with foster families. According to Mr. Celiz and Mr. Haro (another mathematics teacher), a small population of students is affiliated with local gangs yet remain respectful for the most part. Many of the children also come to us having lived through some type of trauma, either directly or indirectly. To support these individuals, teachers offer an open-door policy, listening ear, and forgiving academic policies depending on the situation, six academic counselors, one mental health counselor, and a school psychologist alike serve the social-emotional and academic needs. As mentioned in the “Community Members & Insights” section, PIC offers an environment for students to collect their emotions, reflect, and maintain academic efforts. The College and Career Center provides guidance for students looking for resources and direction related to planning for

post-secondary life. These supports, along with day-to-day conversations that we have with our students, constitute the vehicle through which our school's mission is realized.

School Mission and Demographics

Our Mission.

Students spend at least seven hours out of each school day on campus, maybe more if they are involved in extracurricular activities; as they invest time and energy towards acquiring academic and practical skills, interactions with each other and with faculty shape what they think of themselves, of their surroundings, and what they can become. Realistically, though the common perception is of schools as solely academic institutions, especially at the high school level, "our work in schools is identity work" (Nakkula, & Toshalis, 2016, p. 18). Thus, the professed mission of the school and its vision for how students are to learn and what they are to develop into inevitably shape its culture and practices; in this section, we examine the vision of El Rancho High and how it influences the identities of the individuals we are honored to serve.

On the school's official website (fondly known as the Don Page), we proudly display our school's mission statement and vision for schoolwide learner outcomes. The mission statement reads as follows:

The community of El Rancho High School is committed to creating an environment in which students develop the skills and ethics to be college and career ready. This will be achieved through a student-centered, teacher-guided curriculum that recognizes diversity in a climate of positive parental involvement. ("Mission Statement," n.d.)

Filled with many key points, the message importantly declares the community (including parents) to be a contributor to our efforts to develop learners who possess academic preparedness and strong moral values. According to Mr. Arredondo, the mission statement has been essentially

the same over the twenty years that he has worked at El Rancho. Recent additions have been made to the schoolwide learner outcomes in order to adapt to shifts in society and policies at the federal and state levels. Some of these goals include improving “literacy and writing skills through a shift to the Common Core Standards and complex texts” as well as acquiring “21st Century skills, including critical thinking and evidence-based analysis, technological, collaborative and communication skills” (“Mission Statement,” n.d.).

Tenets of El Rancho’s vision manifest themselves in banners that are visible from the street. A-G Requirements and Student Success for All are the main mantras that adorn these along with posters hung sporadically on brick building walls throughout the campus itself. The front office boasts another poster of “The Six Pillars of Character” (trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship). Aside from the somewhat disjoint and scattered messages, the administration sends out TeleParent voicemails and emails, and the district has hired a company to use an official school account to make Twitter posts about schoolwide progress, upcoming events, academic and extracurricular updates, etc. In my classroom, though there are no posters and slogans hanging on the walls, the school’s vision is embedded in the routines that we do and the standards we hold ourselves to. For instance, the syllabus clearly outlines academic and behavioral expectations, and daily Do Nows continually reinforce standards for quality of work, the restroom policy, and resources that students can access to bolster their success. We utilize the CPM textbook, carefully designed to cover key Common Core Standards in a spiraling sequence, to guide our lessons and provide practice for students. We build in opportunities for students to exchange ideas and information with partners, in small groups, and with the class through team posters, whiteboard work, and strategically paired

seating. Each lesson has a clear learning objective to guide activities and help students develop mathematical literacy and skills to be college and career ready.

Composition of the School.

According to a report by US News based on the 2015-2016 school year, El Rancho High School has 99% minority enrollment, with 98% being Hispanic and 1% being Asian (Rankings, 2018). Forty-nine percent of the student population is female with the remaining fifty-one percent being male. The same report revealed that nearly three-quarters of the student body is classified as economically disadvantaged, and the typical adolescent ages range from thirteen to eighteen.

In comparison, the staff is 64.7% Hispanic and of the non-Hispanic faculty members, 5.9% are Asian and 29.4% are White/Caucasian. Fifty-six percent are female employees and forty-four percent are male. Six out of seven administrators are Hispanic; however, the administration team disproportionately represents the gender balance amongst the students and staff, with 85.7% being male. The principal and assistant principals range in age from thirty to forty-eight, capturing the mid-40s median age of the entire teaching staff. Outside of English, Spanish is the dominant language spoken by staff and students.

Student Success.

The overall four-year graduation rate of the school is ninety-five percent, according to Great Schools (“Explore El Rancho,” 2019). Of those graduates, 56% achieved UC and CSU entrance requirements; it exceeds California’s 50% proportion, though still shows room for improvement towards preparing our students to be college and career ready as our mission statement suggests. Mr. Celiz recalled that the graduation rate used to be at least ten percentage points lower, but that a few years ago, El Rancho lowered its standards for graduation; for

instance, a D- letter grade instead of C- is now considered passing, and a 2.0 cumulative grade point average is no longer required to graduate. Other graduation requirements include passage of only Integrated Math I, satisfactory citizenship, attendance, and completion of 220 units in different subjects.

Despite our staff's mantra of "Ensuring High Levels of Success for ALL," student achievement is all over the board in terms of academics and extracurriculars for a variety of reasons. Male students are disproportionately elected for IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and 504 Plans as well as written up for referrals and suspensions for exhibiting undesirable behaviors. On average, females incur fewer disciplinary measures, though several fights occurred on campus between ninth grade females that stemmed from social media conflicts. Those who are disruptive in the classroom garner more negative attention and disciplinary action rather than receiving academic resources and social-emotional support beyond spending a day or two in PIC. Lastly, as mentioned in the "Demographics" section, less than three-quarters of students have Internet access at home. So, while we look to incorporate more technology into their academic lives inside and outside of the classroom and move towards becoming one-to-one in the near future, these students are inconvenienced by having to find the time and initiative to seek out resources on their own.

Students who tend to succeed are those who seek help when they need it. There are plenty of resources for students to access, even just with regards to learning mathematics – free tutoring in the downstairs library, teachers' office hours every day during the week, the Boys and Girls' Club, and Khan Academy practice. In essence, students who are quiet tend to be overlooked or helped last because of the sheer volume of classes (twenty-nine to thirty-nine in each period), whereas those who proactively utilize resources and are comfortable asking

questions receive the guidance they need. AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination), Honors, and AP courses are offered for academic development, and many extracurricular programs are available for students to get involved in such as community service clubs, Academic Decathlon, band, and sports. All of these opportunities coalesce to provide a well-rounded, enriching experience for those who are willing to seek it.

Parent Involvement.

It is no secret that some students have differing levels of academic and socio-emotional supports outside of the school that indubitably influence their attitude and habits when they step onto campus. A statistical study by Jeynes (2011) on parental involvement and which aspects are more significant in determining educational outcomes concluded that “parental involvement has a positive impact on secondary school student’s academic achievement” and that these findings “hold across various populations” (p. 70). As such, it is imperative that I turn a critical eye towards the landscape of parental involvement at my own school site.

In the vein of transparency and brutal honesty, I have not seen parents aside from Back to School Night, in the front of the school as they drop off and pick up their children, and one parent conference towards the end of the fall semester. El Rancho does host various events such as Freshmen Parent Night, Future Freshmen Night, and Scholarship Night to inform parents about resources and programs that the school offers; however, since these information sessions are largely the only times that parents are invited onto campus, they contribute to the widespread assumption that parents of high school students are mainly to be kept informed and not involved. Perhaps this conception arises from the sentiments like those that Mrs. Villanueva expressed in her logic that many students may have a single parent, both Mom and Dad may work, there are

more children to attend to, or they have something else that demands their time and attention. Whatever the reasons, the presence of parents in school activities is considerably low.

Whether it be mass TeleParent phone calls or emails announcing upcoming holidays, calls home to notifying of issues that need to be addressed, or information sessions, one-way communication currently dominates the relationship between our school and the families of the children that we serve. Judging from administration's frequent urges at faculty meetings to call home to deliver positive feedback, I gather that the all-too-common trend of calling home only to discuss undesirable behaviors and issues that need remedying is prevalent throughout the school, myself included. Some parents do email about their students' progress, and then I engage in an open and honest discussion about the ways we can support their child, even inviting them to join their child's Google Classroom page. However, I would like to include all parents and families in this joint communication process, not only those that ask.

Based on my observations and experiences at the school so far, one thing that I definitely believe can and should be improved is the school's relationships with parents and families of our students. We need not only to make a connection from school to home, but also to invite them into a mutual partnership in which we and they work together frequently in order to positively support our children. Though only a math teacher and single branch in Pollock's Foundational Image of Schooltalk in each of my students' webs, I am yet a piece of the puzzle that can contribute positively to the culture of the school by virtue of the classroom that I create.

Classroom Exploration

The Environment.

After entering the double doors to the library, I go forth a few paces in between lighted display cases on either side featuring artwork and trophies from past decathlons until reaching

the staircase on the left-hand side. Trudging up the flight of carpeted stairs, I imagine how it feels to be a student doing the same. Once reaching the second floor, one first sees lights – bright, fluorescent lights along with alternating dark gray and blue carpeting that stretches out to two open classrooms straight ahead. To the immediate left, there is a small alcove, fit for tutoring or holding a small group session, and in back of that, a room with glass windows covered up with white butcher paper adhered gently with loops of masking tape. The royal blue door is swung open yet the laminated sign reading “Ms. Goodwin” remains invisible, blocked by me standing directly in front greeting students with a cheerful “Good morning,” “How are you?” and “Nice to see you!”

My classroom looks white, organized, even sterile. There are six rows, with each containing either six or seven chair-desk combinations. They are contraptions, supposedly ergonomically designed. With comfortable seating, attached desktops, and circular storage spaces underneath, the fact of the matter is that these chairs roll, which has its benefits and drawbacks. Their default arrangement now is paired rows, making it easy for students in rows 1 and 2 to work together and likewise for those in rows 3 and 4 as well as 5 and 6. In theory, groupwork formation is easily accessible, though I have not quite gotten the hang of facilitating that with efficiency; we also conduct community circles, which the chairs allow us to transition into with ease. Whiteboard panels cover nearly two walls of the room that meet at an awkwardly acute angle, and blue painter’s tape demarcates spaces reserved for the daily agenda, topic, goals, and homework. A Smartboard claims its place diagonally against the far wall of the room. There is another door with a window cut-out that I have chosen to decorate with a student-made PBIS poster about respect. A Chromecart stands unassumingly at the back of the classroom, topped with a stack of scratch paper and plastic black bucket for students to deposit restroom passes.

Sometimes, it is freezing cold in the room, and other days when the air conditioner has broken down, it is stuffy and nearly unbearable; located right above the library, we do not have access to climate controls, so days of fair temperature are treasured by all. At the back of the room, we have a quilt-like Wall of Thanks, upon which hang various colored Post-its with lists and lists of people, things, and opportunities that my 170 students are grateful for.

My educational philosophy is focused on students – what they know and need to learn. I prioritize planning and organization. Everything must have its place and a rationale for why it is there, which leads me to maintain an orderly, minimalistic learning environment. Just as I expect students to be ready to learn, I make sure that I and my classroom are ready to teach, so before school each day, I prep the room by writing up the daily agenda, topic, goal(s), and homework, ensure that I have appropriate handouts and/or guided notes, and have my iPad connected to the Smartboard with the Do Now projected on the screen. As we work with a vast number of seats (thirty-nine for my largest class) in a space of little square footage, our classroom layout is simplistic and clear to help us place the subject rightfully at the center.

There are a number of details, big and small, that I have considered ensuring to help students feel welcomed into the classroom space. For instance, the layout of the chairs and desks is clear and predictable, the Smartboard is angled towards its audience for maximum visibility, and the whiteboard is prepared each day with visual clues and resources to guide students into getting settled (i.e. bell schedule on the whiteboard, date, and magnetized visual symbols indicating permitted activities). Though Thanksgiving has long passed, I decided to keep the Wall of Thanks as a permanent staple to remind us to practice gratitude, and I post student work like team posters and creative design projects on the walls, albeit, not as frequently as I would

like. I stand outside of my doorway at the start of each class, welcoming students in with a fist bump and friendly “hello” or “How are you today?” as they come in to take their seats.

Norms, Routines, and Procedures.

From start to finish, we have certain norms, routines, and procedures that govern our collective and individual behavior in the classroom. Cummins (2001) argues that “Micro-interactions between educators and students form an interpersonal or an interactional space within which the acquisition of knowledge and formation of identity is negotiated” (p. 19). It is the gravity of the situation, then, that necessitates guidelines to ensure positive and productive interactions and behaviors during class time.

When students walk in, they are greeted by me at the door and then expected to take their seats and begin on the Do Now warm-up projected on the Smartboard. Once the tardy bell rings, I walk to the front of the classroom and say, “Welcome in, everyone. Thank you for being early and on-time today. Good morning, Period 1,” for instance, to which students respond, “Good morning, Ms. Goodwin!” I then begin the usually 5-minute timer for them to settle in and work on the Do Now as I take attendance on my phone. I thank students for having their materials and working on the Do Now, sometimes handing out Don Dollars to show my appreciation. Students may turn in Don Dollars at the Student Services office to enter weekly raffles for prizes like t-shirts, prom passes, and Clippers tickets. We then review the Do Now as a class, get out materials for the day, and conduct a check-in. During check-in, students may be asked to think of a high and low, discuss how their day has been, or share something they are looking forward to. They talk with a neighbor and then share out if they wish.

We follow a loose version of Cornell notes in which topic and goals are written in the top margin. Notes are normally interactive, where I write in real-time on my iPad using OneNote and

project it on the Smartboard so that students know exactly how to format their notes. If completing different repetitions of a similar concept, I will model the first all the way through and then engage in the gradual release where I ask for volunteer participation and then let them try it on their own in pairs and by themselves. During independent practice time, students are allowed to listen to music if it helps them focus, and they are welcomed to utilize the whiteboards with permission. When engaging in teamwork, we implement CPM team roles so that each person has certain responsibilities to fulfill. I utilize positive narration throughout the class, rewarding students with specific verbal praise for on-task and notable behavior. If any student needs to use the restroom, they follow the protocol of leaving a signed pass in the black bucket on the Chromecart and taking a plastic blue pass with them.

About five to ten minutes to the end of class, depending on whether we have an exit ticket or not, I ask students to return to their seats, line up with their row numbers and clean up their areas. I quickly summarize our activities, revisit the daily goal(s), give a preview for the next day and any reminders, and then excuse them by rows depending on who is seated, silent, and straight.

Classroom Resources.

In our Integrated Math I classroom, we have access to many resources, though could always use a few more to improve our learning experience. We utilize the CPM curriculum; for the second volume containing chapters six through ten, we have half of a class set of textbooks, whereas, for volume one, we had only four textbooks for the entire class to use. Mr. Celiz signed up the school for the CPM eBook licensure, so my students and I are able to access the electronic version of the textbook for free. We have a Smartboard, a complete set of thirty-eight Chromebooks, thirty scientific calculators, whiteboard walls, and mobile desks and chairs. I have

purchased pencils, spiral notebooks, and dry erase markers for classroom use. Beginning the second semester, I was given a teaching assistant during my fifth period to help with grading, logistical tasks, and even tutoring to an extent. There is an individual aide for one of my students diagnosed with autism in my second period, and during all five class periods, there is at least one support teacher who roams between all four Math I classes to provide further assistance.

Other resources that would be beneficial to have in the classroom include the following: individual whiteboard and marker sets, a speaker for playing music in the background to guide activities, a step stool and tack board walls so that I can hang student work and posters up more easily, more table space to house standard classroom materials and relevant handouts. It would be nice to have alternated lighting panels so that I could dim the room a bit for a more relaxed atmosphere when appropriate. Though implausible, more square footage would help create a more open, breathable atmosphere as opposed to the cramped feel that currently exists. Lastly, a remote-control stoplight would be useful for students to gauge the amount of time remaining for any in-class activities so that they can self-monitor and take appropriate actions; for instance, when it switched from green to yellow, that means 5 minutes remaining so students should begin cleaning up their group project or something of the sort.

Class Composition & Comparison with Other Classes.

The class that I am focusing on for the purposes of this ethnography and for the CalTPA credentialing process is my fourth period, which consists of twenty-nine students. They are 100% Hispanic or Latino, 48% or 14 are females while 52% or 15 are males, so there is a pretty even gender balance. Many of my students speak Spanish at home since six of them are classified as English Learners, ten as RFEP (Re-classified Fluent English Proficient), three as IFEP (Initial Fluent English Proficient), and the rest as English Only.

As mentioned previously, my school site does not utilize GATE categorization, but from what I can tell, there are potentially three to four of my students who would likely qualify if assessed. For the advanced learners, I offer challenge problems that reach higher on the DOK (depth of knowledge) rankings. Sometimes, they are given the option of completing more complex problems and other times, they are strategically dispersed in heterogeneous groups so that they can practice communicating their ideas and justifying their solutions. I have one 504 student who requires frequent check-ins and four students with IEPs that warrant a variety of accommodations including preferential seating, graphic organizers for notes, small group reteaching, reduced assignments, extended time, and separate testing in their resource room.

I teach a total of five periods, which are all Integrated Math I. Some similarities across the classes include the upbeat energy of students. Because this is a foundational level math course, most of my students are freshmen aged 13 to 15 years old, so they come with a lot of energy and excitability; they sometimes do not know how to best direct that energy, but they are overwhelmingly good-hearted and respectful. Other commonalities include students' attachment to their cellular devices (especially Snapchat and text messaging), their affinity for standing and working at the whiteboards, and tendency to socialize with their peers.

Differences do arise as a result of the distinct student populations in each class. For example, my second, fourth, and sixth periods exhibit stronger overall academic proficiencies; these are the periods that exhibit more self-sufficiency and cooperation when it comes to students supporting each other. My third period houses a disproportionate number of male students, leading to an unsurprisingly noisier classroom culture in which it is more difficult capturing everyone's attention simultaneously. The fifth period comes right after lunch on most days, leading to a similar buzz of energy and stimulation from socializing with peers. It is these

dynamics that I must navigate to ensure that across all differences, I adequately support my students to funnel their abilities towards attaining the daily learning goals.

Assets, Funds of Knowledge, and Social-Emotional Learning.

Cummins (2001) states that “transformative pedagogy uses collaborative critical inquiry to enable students to relate curriculum content to their individual and collective experience” (p. 222). Utilizing students’ assets and tapping into the reservoirs of knowledge that they already possess is key to engagement and to making our content objectives accessible and relevant. From the start of the school year, I asked students to write an About Me card, detailing their preferred name and pronunciation along with who they live with and goals for the future. During community circles, time and space are set aside to share about activities and foods that we enjoy, memorable experiences, descriptions of loved ones, etc. We practice listening actively and responding respectfully. Furthermore, with this information about who my students are as individuals, I then incorporate their interests and hobbies into tasks and assignments; for instance, in the sequences unit, I crafted word problems centered around amusement parks, taco consumption, and college savings accounts.

Whenever students participate willingly in class, I make it a point to thank them first for their contribution and then provide them positive and specific feedback. Whether it be sharing a high or low during a check-in or offering up a mostly correct solution to a posed question, I affirm their willingness to participate by saying, “Thank you for sharing your idea with us” and then proceeding to highlight the valuable parts of their reasoning; if any part of their solution is flawed, I normally direct their attention to studying that portion in particular and searching for alternate ways of thinking about it. I avoid language such as “nope” or “that’s incorrect” and instead opt for phrases such as “let’s see how else we might think about it,” “try double-checking

your solution,” and “should we make any edits?” To ensure equitable participation, I have tried using a random number generator and alternating male and female individuals, but I plan on utilizing equity sticks in the future. Even if a student may not have a response of their own, I allow them to “phone a friend” who can help them out. Then I have the original student repeat the answer to hold them accountable and compel them to practice their listening skills.

Payne (2005) contends that "to honor students as human beings worthy of respect and care is to establish a relationship that will provide for enhanced learning"; not only should we invest time and effort into cultivating such a caring relationship between ourselves, as educators, and each one of our students, but also amongst students themselves (p.111). Every day, I stand outside of my door and welcome students into the classroom with a quick fist bump and cheery greeting; this minute action allows me to get a quick read of individual and whole class emotions so that I can keep an eye on any concerning behaviors during the class period. Through efficient check-ins, community circles, and group work, we allow the time and space for students to practice interacting with each other and communicating ideas openly, honestly, and respectfully in an environment where we can guide them. In the most recent community circles from this semester, we discussed our family artifacts and their significance as well as processed feelings and thoughts about the series of fights transpiring on campus. Folding in opportunities to share their ideas and interact with each other builds classroom community, brings meaningfulness to their studies, and frames discovery and coming to know as a collective endeavor.

Part C - Conclusion

To be honest, when I first learned about this particular section of the ethnographic narrative project and saw the twenty-page minimum, I anticipated struggling to gather enough information to meet the specified length. However, when I actually sat down to brainstorm ideas,

draft an outline, and then make the full composition, ideas poured in from my personal experiences, notes from interactions with colleagues, observations of my surroundings, and relevant insights from academic texts. When weaved together in a coherent manner, part C represents a great majority of the knowledge that I have accrued about the community I teach in, the school I am employed by, and the classroom that I have created over the six months I have dutifully shown up. Learning the ropes of El Rancho High School and Pico Rivera alike while coming into my own as an educator has been an incredibly challenging, yet equally rewarding, feat. I can only hope that my words do justice to the familiarity and compassion that have grown in my heart for the students, families, and community that I serve. In the fourth and final section of this ethnography, we will detail the current state of whole-class progress, the effectiveness of my focus students' action plans, and next steps for myself as a developing educator.

Part D: Analysis of Teacher Effectiveness

Much too early for sunlight to begin prying in through the cracks of my window blinds, my cell phone proves good on its promise to reliably wake me up at 5:30 A.M. Though the tune it sings is called "Uplift," I dread the sound as it signals to rise against the wishes of my bemoaning eyes that yearn for further sleep. All days are hard in their own unique way, but some days are harder than others and for one main reason.

As described thoroughly in part A, my primary motivation in pursuing the teaching profession is a desire to make a positive difference in people's lives. After a long day of teaching, talking, disciplining, and attending to several different needs, the first thing that I do upon arriving home is decompress. I change into more comfortable clothing, wash my face, and spend a few minutes with my dogs. Only after completing a brief deep-breathing exercise do I flop down on my bed to type out my reflection.

The glows and grows weaved throughout the chronological record compose a string of experience – my experience of coming into my own as a teacher, realizing the responsibility of this special profession, and negotiating expectations with reality. Days, where I feel like I have connected with students and made a positive difference, leave me inspired. Days where I do not are the toughest. Beyond the emotional aftertaste of daily efforts though, it is imperative to examine teaching effectiveness through the objective lens of data – quantitative and qualitative – and to synthesize the past and present as we look towards the future.

Whole Class Perspective

Academic Progress.

Now well into March, my Integrated Math 1 class is nearing the halfway point of the second semester. For the particular period that I am focusing on to study, our academic performance is not stellar, by any means. The overall average grade percentage is currently at sixty percent, and thirteen of my twenty-nine students have a passing grade.

There is a wide range of proficiencies within this single class period, yet despite the variation, overall characteristics include low submission rate for homework, missing or unfinished quizzes, and poor scores on formative and summative assessments. For instance, on the most recent quiz on elimination method to solve systems of equations, 33% of my students scored a four out of four, 20% scored a three out of four, and 25% scored a two out of four, leaving the remaining 22% at a zero out of four. We utilized Khan Academy as a platform to administer the quiz so that students could practice again within the testing period and even come into office hours for retakes to improve their score. On another set of quizzes that were given two weeks prior, students were assessed on the Equal Values Method and Substitution for solving systems and scored an average of 60% on the former and 50% on the latter.

Information from formative data like quizzes, exit tickets, observation of group work, and so forth influence my instruction as I try to spiral material so that we can review essential concepts while still moving on to cover topics according to my curriculum team's pacing plan. I fold in key review topics into our Do Now warm-ups and daily lessons, especially if they are relevant to the day's goals. I most recently carved out an extra day for students to practice with the three various solution methods to handle systems of equations wherein they practiced identifying the most efficient method for a given system and then applied that method to solve the system with the help of a partner.

Summative assessments essentially tell the same story. A little over a month ago, our chapter five exam covered sequences (both arithmetic and geometric) and asked students to identify the patterns in given sequences, construct explicit equations, determine specific term values, and model real-world contexts. On students' first attempt, the original average percentage was 43%, which took me by surprise because I thought that understanding was high throughout the unit. Since other Math I teachers obtained similar results, we collectively decided to offer a retake opportunity outside of classroom hours. The retake boosted the average score to roughly 50% overall, which is still a humbling statistic. Surprisingly, students receiving special services scored an average of five percent better than the class as a whole, which indicates that some of the strategies I have embedded within lessons are working. These include preferential seating, graphic organizers, pre-printed note outlines, strategic pairing and grouping, and frequent checks for understanding. On the other hand, the emergent bilinguals as a group scored roughly seventeen percentage points below the average, which signals that the color-coding, graphic organizers and collaborative discussion opportunities are ineffective scaffolds. Perhaps I can incorporate more equitable opportunities for students to practice and demonstrate their content

knowledge as well as more authentic vocabulary building activities to strengthen their mathematical literacy.

Primarily ninth and tenth graders, my students took a practice algebra-based interim assessment for the CAASPP to monitor their current standing in relation to the SBAC type material that they will see in their junior year. Results again were extremely humbling as my students' mean score was 20% and 0 were deemed proficient or advanced. Some of it may be attributable to the technical difficulties as students' Chromebooks were freezing, the graphing tool experienced glitches, and some of the material they simply have not yet seen. The practice SBAC was administered via the Illuminate Education program, which is easily desegregated for convenient data analysis. For the content standards that we have covered in Math I, about 44% of students demonstrated mastery, which aligns with our classroom assessment data.

Because of results like these, I have begun to be more responsive during class and execute impromptu reteach lessons on the spot before letting the students practice on their own. I also have tried to time lessons so that we have at least five minutes for me to summarize the day's activities and have the students write a brief summary directed towards the learning goals. Given the structure of the Math I team at my school site, we have at least one support teacher during each period, so we could make more effective use of their expertise to pull out or push into the classroom to work with small groups of students who need additional support. I can incorporate more independent practice time and work with small groups off to the side as well as refer students strategically to weekly office hours. Having observed my classes several times, my faculty advisor has suggested that having students learn the concepts can help provide the framework onto which they can latch (A. ChenFeng, personal communication, March 7, 2019). From there, they can hang their skills and knowledge, but conversely, without an understanding

of the overarching concepts, any knowledge becomes disparate, irrelevant, ephemeral pieces of information. Thus, established topics and goals are imperative in focusing student attention on what they are to learn from day to day, with a healthy balance of concepts and skills.

After seeing formative and summative assessment results like those above, a natural reaction might include wanting to go back to the basics and focus on material from a solely skills-based standpoint. Though we may experience what Delpit (2012) describes as a familiar middle-class tendency to assist our children by “protecting them from life’s challenges, solving their problems, and tying their shoes,” this precludes the development of higher-order thinking skills (p. 54). Contrary to the stubborn, widespread belief that math education should be a “drill and kill” format of lecture and rote practice, it is actually through exposure to genuine, complex problems that students can discover opportunities to connect with each other, access prior knowledge for meaningful purposes, and hone their mathematical reasoning. Thus, I have designed a chapter 6 assessment that consists of a team project centered around the analysis of real-world systems of linear equations. This, ideally, will help facilitate higher-order thinking as they think about math from different perspectives and make connections across their ideas.

The Intangibles.

Aside from the strict quantitative facts and scores, there has been progress in ways not reflected in grade percentages. For instance, engagement during notetaking and expectations for learning have improved significantly. After the first five minutes of class during which students are tasked with attempting the Do Now warm up, I announce that we are going to get started, kindly ask students to remove earphones, and put away cell phones before we begin. Then, I state which materials we will need for the day’s lesson while I encourage students to check-in with their peers. By the time we start notetaking, students have settled into the room and are

prepared to learn. There are much fewer disruptions during notetaking than at the start of the school year, and students respond quickly to my callback (“eyes and ears on me in three, two, and one”), even reminding their classmates to pay attention.

Perhaps most importantly, the culture within the classroom has grown stronger, though there is still room for improvement. By building in ample opportunities for students to interact with each other through check-ins, partner tasks, and teamwork, they are able to connect and feel comfortable in the space. Whereas at the beginning of the academic year, cricket sounds and awkward avoidances of eye contact abounded during check-in time, now good-natured chatter fills the room as students share highlights and life experiences. As the teacher, I self-disclose highs and lows from my own life before opening up the floor for anyone else to share; some classes express more enthusiasm than others when it comes to sharing out, but it is safe to say that all appreciate the time to relax and settle in before diving into math content. Cognizance of our social-emotional states cultivates community and individual competencies as well.

The Individual Student Perspective

In part B of this ethnography, we detailed various aspects of three particular focus students, Mina, Izzy, and Oscar. For each, we developed an action plan to facilitate growth in areas needing improvement, and in this section, we will examine the effectiveness of different strategies, evidence of progress, and a recommended action plan moving forward. As all of my focus students reside in the same class, some of the strategies inevitably overlap; however, we will describe them as they relate to the three individuals – Mina, Izzy, and Oscar.

Focus Student 1: Mina.

Over the year, Mina has demonstrated the capability to maintain her academic success as well as her friendships and extracurricular activities. Last semester, she ended up with four A’s

and two B+'s in English and English Language Development. This semester so far, she has three A's and three B's, one of which is in our Math I class. When asked to reflect upon her current grade, she cites our chapter five test on sequences, especially the word problem, as the main item bringing it down (personal communication, February 28, 2019). Mina frequently asks if she can leave her athletic bag in my classroom during the school day; on a regular basis, she comes with her best friend from another of my Math I classes to pick up her sports bag at the end of lunchtime before basketball practice.

Overall, I have observed Mina as continually hardworking. FS1 has exemplified admirable dedication to her studies, turns in all of her assignments, and scored 100% on each quiz during this semester. As evidenced in Figure 1, she takes advantage of color coding, such as in using elimination to solve systems of equations and proactively utilizes this strategy both inside the classroom and out. I have observed an increased willingness to participate in pair and group work now that she is seated next to a peer with whom she attended middle school. Still, she speaks aloud less often than her English fluent counterparts but has notably increased her frequency of participation.

According to our action plan, she has met the first two goals and is still working on the third: (1) maintain skills-based proficiencies, (2) develop higher-order thinking skills, and (3) engage in verbal discussion with peers. She has demonstrated fluency with algebraic manipulations in solving for one variable (Figure 2) and an ability to correctly interpret different components of linear equations (Figure 3). Figures 4 and 5 illustrate her accurate analysis of a complex linear comparison scenario in solving a system of multiple equations to identify points of intersection; these showcase her critical thinking skills that we have cultivated through trying greater depth of knowledge tasks throughout the year. Slightly more frequently than at the start

of the year, I have found Mina engaged in quiet conversation or laughing with peers nearby during class. A few weeks back, she worked on a sequence analysis poster with three teammates, drew on the whiteboard to brainstorm, contributed to the overall product, and helped advance discussion by facilitating the conversation. This demonstrates great progress towards goal three, but FS1 exhibits trepidation when tasked with speaking to unfamiliar peers and about concepts she feels less confident about, so there is still room for improvement.

To cultivate Mina's progress throughout the year, I implemented a range of strategies. Each time I expected students to take notes in class, I explicitly modeled what I expected them to write by utilizing OneNote on my iPad, which is connected to the Smartboard screen. I used intentional color-coding, which FS1 found helpful for organizing different components of processes and concepts. Likewise, Mina says that she appreciates the graphic organizers because they help her to make connections between problems in terms of the structure and patterns (personal communication, February 28, 2019). I could have used Khan Academy more frequently as a skills practice or even extension activity since it provides immediate feedback and guiding hints as it saves students' progress.

Daily check-ins, turn and talk activities, and partner work gave Mina ample opportunity to connect with her peers and practice using English in relational contexts. She has become more comfortable interacting with peers she sits around, but I could have explicitly modeled productive pair work and introduced CPM team roles to give her an idea of the socio-linguistic expectations for given tasks. As Hattie et al. (2017) asserts, "intentionally introducing these [vocabulary] words in a context and expanding the meaning of each term...have a much greater impact on the development of deep understanding" than working with them in isolated, nontransferable settings, so to help facilitate the natural infusion of academic language into

discussions, I could maintain a word wall for each unit as a visual anchor (p. 49). Additionally, to develop FS1's higher cognitive processing, I could offer more critical thinking tasks extended over periods of time (i.e. a week) so that she can practice problem-solving and then revisiting and revising her solution to examine intricacies either by herself or with a group.

For the new academic year, there are a few action steps and pieces of advice that I would give to Mina and her future teachers. First, I would recommend that she practice her oral skills by speaking aloud when she writes (in any subject, but mathematics in particular). This way, she would have already formed the thoughts and simply exercise the verbal pronunciation so that she can gain familiarity and confidence with the sounds. FS1 should continue asking questions to others and to her teachers when she needs clarification, and she should strive to maintain the same level of dedication to her studies as she exemplified this year. To her teachers, I would recommend that they provide graphic organizers whenever appropriate, perhaps especially in her English and ELD courses and secondly to consider asking Mina who she feels most comfortable working with; she is attentive and on-task nearly all the time, so sitting by someone she feels comfortable with will help her to practice oral communication of her insightful ideas.

Focus Student 2: Izzy.

FS2 is performing fairly well academically and has shown improvements in some portions outlined in the action plan. We set four main points in part B of this ethnography: (1) building quantitative literacy, (2) practicing mindfulness, (3) increasing connectivity to classmates, and (4) developing a growth mindset. Izzy has demonstrated progress in her mathematical literacy and number sense; she can apply a series of inverse operations to solve for a multivariable equation for a specified quantity (Figure 6). After completing any new concept, we completed a series of practice problems in class, which gave FS2 an opportunity to exercise

newly acquired knowledge; however, Izzy currently has four missing assignments, which means that she is passing over the chance to deepen her understanding of the material by investing efforts outside of the classroom. To address this, we could have utilized an informal parent, teacher, student contract to monitor her progress by executing frequent grade checks and writing weekly action steps to answer the perpetual question, “What can I do to maintain/improve my grade?” This continual self-assessment may help her to develop habits of accountability, timeliness, and ultimately mindfulness.

On the second goal, she has admittedly made minimal progress. Izzy states that “when I get home, I just want to relax, and I get distracted,” which altogether is not uncommon (personal communication, February 27, 2019). FS2 also expressed that there has been an extended discussion at home about whether they are going to move or not to the neighboring city of Whittier next year, meaning that she would enroll at a different high school altogether. This has been another factor occupying mental and emotional space, though to find inner peace amidst external forces, I recommended the Pomodoro technique to help Izzy focus on small, manageable tasks, and she reported that “It worked, but I just haven’t done it since the first day,” which implies that some regular tracking system may have been helpful to ensure that she invested conscious effort to grow mindful habits (personal communication, February 27, 2019). Perhaps we could have even tried out the Pomodoro method in-class with a visual timer so that students, including FS2, could experience the effect of the strategy in real time.

By implementing think-alouds, I was able to model metacognitive problem-solving, including strategic questioning and responding. Izzy demonstrates this self-monitoring aptitude in Figure 7 wherein she asks herself how to find the y-intercept and slope in various

representations (table, graph, equation). We have utilized Khan Academy assessments to provide instant feedback to students as they develop their math competencies.

As for the third goal, I decided to seat Izzy with another tenth-grade student who she feels comfortable talking to. This proved an effective strategy because, during short check-ins, think-pair-shares, and partner work, FS2 would participate willingly, needing only an occasional reminder to keep the talk on-topic. The pair that I have Izzy and her peer sitting next to are both ninth graders, but of relatively high proficiencies, so their group of four has strong team chemistry. Socially, they are engaged, and they challenge each other academically when it comes to math as well.

I have noticed that the needle has shifted ever so slightly towards the “growth mindset” and away from “fixed mindset” on the continuum, mainly in the way that Izzy behaves while doing classwork. At the start of the year, encountering difficulty on a problem would send her into a tailspin of “I don’t know how to do this” and “I’m just not good at math” as she succumbed to the fixed mindset; this “right versus wrong” mode of evaluation is embodied in her self-assessment (Figure 8) from the start of the school year. Nakkula and Toshalis (2016) say that identity can be influenced by “unexamined parts of ourselves we have internalized without consideration or critique,” and the only way to reverse the trend is to recognize implicit biases and address them head-on (p. 32). Thus, after working with her individually and in small groups and after giving abundant content and process-specific praise, she has grown to stay with a problem and keep trying one or two more times, sometimes opting to ask a neighbor or me for help as she pursues the solution.

For next year, I would recommend that Izzy obtain a planner of some sort, such as a small notebook so that she can write down daily tasks each time she goes to class. She can

practice regular self-monitoring and possess the organizational skills to stay accountable for completing assignments and preparing for assessments. I would also suggest that she read *Mind for Numbers* by Barbara Oakley because it provides a neuroscientific perspective of what actually happens in the brain when learning and what strategies one can utilize to learn mathematics and science well. To her future teachers, I would advise them to implement a strict and consistent technology policy to minimize the distractions for Izzy and her peers and build strong self-control. I would also recommend that they give specific and helpful praise for students' effort as opposed to general comments ("Good job!") or praise for quickness and talent, as is all too common in mathematics classrooms. This way, Izzy can continue developing her growth mindset into the next academic year and beyond.

Focus Student 3: Oscar.

Oscar has exhibited growth in academic, social, and emotional realms. In our most recent conversation, for example, he visited during lunchtime office hours to work on the substitution method of solving systems of equations and then try retaking the quiz. As we reviewed together, I prompted him with metacognitive questions to guide his process, and he readily responded with a combination of logically-sound explanations and furious jotting of notes. In response to, "How should we finish this problem?" he replied with, "We can write our final answer as a coordinate pair" and then proceeded to record it on his paper (personal communication, March 7, 2019). This small interaction provides a window into the small, yet significant, progress that FS3 has made over the school year thus far. Oscar is currently sitting at a solid 85% in the class. He has maximized his Formative quiz grade to 100% by coming in for tutoring and retakes at lunch, there is only one outstanding homework assignment that he still has left to complete, and his

chapter five test grade of 73% indicated an average understanding of the arithmetic and geometric sequences content.

Throughout the second semester, FS3 has displayed a consistent willingness to invest the time and efforts to improve his understanding and try the strategies that I have implemented whole-class and recommended to him individually. I introduced the Pomodoro technique to Oscar through a video and short explanation, and he reports that the method helps him get started on an assignment or project that seems overwhelming (personal communication, February 25, 2019). We have practiced more metacognitive exercises in class, sometimes as simple as a brief exit ticket and self-grading to assess understanding; students award themselves a check mark to indicate proficiency and an X mark to show a need for improvement like in Figure 9.

At my suggestion, he has been keeping a loose journal to record thoughts in on occasion, but I think that it would have been more effective if I had created more structure and accountability around this documentation (i.e. if I asked him to write in it for 5 to 10 minutes a day and then had him show me at the end of each week). He cites the journal as a good outlet when he needed to express his feelings when necessary, but more consistent practice would have built a habit of reflective written expression of his lived experiences. I provided FS3 and his classmates with a Learning Log (a simple chart to record daily assignments), which has helped his accountability; he has only one outstanding assignment whereas before, he was missing three or four at a time. To further supplement his organization, I could have sat down with him during one of our lunchtime sessions to arrange materials into a three-ring binder for easier access.

From implementing the “2 before 1” strategy as detailed in the *Action Plan* for FS3, Oscar has become notably more thoughtful in his responses, able to articulate intended thoughts with greater accuracy when he participates in class and speaks to me during tutoring sessions; he

now pauses regularly before speaking, which indicates improvement in his clarity of verbal communication (the second goal of his action plan). This intellectual mindfulness also prevails in his written communication as well; in class, we have utilized simple graphic organizers that encourage students to detail their mathematical reasoning, and Oscar demonstrates his procedural understanding in the Math and Meaning charts in Figure 10. Granted, there is room for improvement in the visual organization and neatness aspects of his work, but FS3 is increasingly showing progress in conveying his thought process in detailed and coherent ways. As Hattie et al. (2017) affirms, “students, like the rest of us, are social creatures who learn and remember best when they’re interacting with others,” and so frequent, structured opportunities to capitalize on Oscar’s sociability such as Think, Pair, Shares and task-based teamwork have enabled him to practice verbal communication skills through collaborating with classmates (p. 62).

Knowing that Oscar has an affinity for socializing and a passion for animals, I have incorporated more activities offering freedom to select different topics, work with peers, and express understanding in different ways. For example, we recently completed a project in which teams chose a real-world scenario, then modeled it and solved a key question using sequences; Oscar’s group chose to work with a rabbit population problem, designed a decorative poster, and presented it proudly to the class. His communicative skills and academic proficiencies have grown stronger from repeated peer collaboration activities involving evaluation and synthesis of learned concepts. FS3 has even approached me during office hours, asking to review questions that he created on his own and subsequently solved (Figure 11).

For his future teachers, I would recommend that they continue to expose Oscar to a range of tasks, including rigorous ones requiring higher cognitive thinking. I would also suggest offering a variety of opportunities to work with peers in pairs or small groups so that he can

practice clearly articulating his thoughts. According to his work in tackling a linear system of equations to model multiple racers in Figures 12 and 13, however, FS3 still displays areas for improvement in interpreting more complex problems on his own, so I would additionally recommend that individual challenges be incorporated so that he can practice applying critical thinking skills to analyze information accurately. Action steps for Oscar include developing a regular system of organizing class materials, maintaining a journal with daily entries, continuing the practice of “2 before 1” as necessary, and taking on a leadership role in group work. By taking on a facilitator or task manager role in group work in any subject, FS3 can practice communicating his and his teammates’ thoughts and synthesizing them to advance discussions.

Now that we have examined progress from a whole-class and individual standpoint, we shall take a step back to reflect upon my teaching experience overall.

The Developing Professional Perspective

It was 12:36 AM on a weekday morning, and I was frantically composing an email to CGU coordinators, trying to make a case as to why I should stay in the program and seriously worried that I would be expelled for turning in the first assignment late. The first online module in the hybrid TLP I course, I had begun at four o’clock that afternoon and worked straight up until that point, stopping for only a half an hour to scarf down dinner. The tasks were deceptively time-consuming and having just finished a month and a half break from school, my efficiency was not exactly top-notch yet. That night, mentally fatigued and panicked, I thought to myself, *Wow, why did I sign up for this?* Little did I know that that was just the start.

Over the summer, I completed the student teaching at a small charter school in Pomona. I helped to teach a summer math enrichment course for students transitioning from sixth to seventh grade. Because I shared the classroom with two other math candidates and a master

teacher, the going was rather smooth. I languished in the time I could afford to spend on each lesson plan (we had to teach one lesson every three days because of the alternating schedule), and the expectations were established by my master teacher. All we had to do was unleash our creativity in designing lessons and ensure that expectations were upheld. It made for a rather pleasant entrance and gave me the impression that teaching was easy. Ha.

When I first arrived at El Rancho High School, I met the other Math I teachers, other teachers, and administrators. I was excited to become part of the staff to serve our students and eager to begin, though unsure how exactly to do so. In the first few professional development days before students arrived, I sat by thinking about how to organize my whiteboards as my colleagues unpacked boxes and boxes of supplies from their old classrooms. I planned out welcome activities and glanced over the first chapter, thinking that I was prepared for school to start. To be honest, that was one of the few weeks that I have been fully prepared heading into a new week of teaching. Since then, I have been swamped with CGU readings, assignments, and TPA projects; I typically struggle to thoroughly lesson plan and find myself creating resources throughout the week and making copies on the day of.

Acclimating myself to the textbook, to the campus itself, and to the students has been a steep learning curve, but one through which I have learned a lot about myself and where I fit in society. It has been stressful beyond belief at times and thoroughly rewarding at others. Below, we describe some of the challenges and successes that have colored my journey so far.

Challenges.

Firstly, Emmer and Evertson (2013) define consistency to mean “retaining the same expectations for behavior that are appropriate or inappropriate in particular activities...to every student on all occasions,” but I discovered the hard way that this is easier said than done (p. 132).

It turns out that it is rather difficult to maintain consistent expectations if those expectations are constantly subject to change. Largely attributable to my dire lack of experience upon stepping in front of my students that first day of class on August 15th, 2018, I worked on forging expectations (for myself, for students, for colleagues, and for interactions) and continue to do so even to this day. Due to their unfolding nature, my expectations perpetually fluctuated as I doubted myself and how I was supposed to respond to certain occurrences in the classroom.

Some periods pose more significant and frequent problematic behaviors, and I struggled intensely as I feared being perceived as uncaring if I suddenly became “strict,” but at the same time, a particular class of mine was falling apart and falling behind my others due to constant disarray and disruption. I have made a few resolutions on different occasions to become stricter and more put my foot down, so to speak. I gave out warnings left and right, wrote names on the board, conversed with students about their behavior, and called home to communicate with families. Still, I grapple with the discomfort of feeling dictatorial at times and essentially acting as someone whom I do not personally like. I think this wavering stems from a continual and natural question of who I am and who I want to be as a teacher.

A psychological phrase that describes someone who feels out of place, “imposter syndrome” is precisely what I suffered from during much of my first semester of teaching. As a recent college graduate and current student in a credentialing program, I felt I had to hide who I was in order to gain students’ respect. Already, I had others tell me that I appear young, and as a short female, I might struggle with earning their respect. And so, I respond to inquiries about my age with “Older than you,” tell students and parents that I am attending Claremont for my Master’s (and leave out the credentialing part) and wear a blazer as if it were a shield of authority. Yet in the midst of my search for external sources of integrity, Palmer (1998) reminds

us that "power works from the outside in, but authority works from the inside out" (p. 32). I am still trying to solidify my integrity as an adult and teacher, but I feel as though I am growing my wings through this arduous process of trial and error. Instead of a room that I was given to learn how to teach in, I now perceive the space as my classroom with its own character and integrity.

One other challenge was struggling with what curriculum to use. My district officially uses College Preparatory Mathematics (CPM) textbooks for our math classes, but four of the five fellow Math I teachers that I share a collaborative space with oftentimes rag on the text, complaining that it does not incorporate enough problems for students to sufficiently develop necessary skills and that the arrangement of the material is so particular that one must teach the lessons in order for it to work. Instead, they utilize their own content, draft their own worksheets, and pull from other sources. Overall, this has made lesson planning overwhelming as I struggle to make relevant, original content each week. At the same time, my faculty advisor recommends that I have faith in the CPM textbook for its thoughtful development of concepts, yet I feel inadequate and unprepared to implement the strategies as though I need training before I try it.

Successes.

Despite these challenges, I survived to complete the final portion of this ethnography! It seems rudimentary enough, but I feel accomplished to have endured the many days and nights of real anxiety from being perpetually behind. There was a stretch of a few weeks during November of 2018 when the stress became unmanageable, and I seriously considered leaving the program altogether and looking for an alternative career. In these times, I lost sight of my goal to help others and doubted whether the pressures of the profession are actually worth it. After speaking with loved ones and some experienced teachers, I resolved to take better care of myself, be present, and try my best to see through to the end of the year. I am in a much better place now,

albeit, still stressed, but somehow, I have settled into my position contented by the knowledge that I am more than halfway through the program.

Little victories also keep me going and give me the inspiration needed to continue investing the ample time and efforts that I do to care for the classroom, plan organized, engaging lessons, and keep showing up day after day. I normally try to stand outside of my door to greet students as they walk in, my attention signal now works (for the most part), the students are familiar with the Do Now routine, and we successfully execute check-ins and self-disclosure during daily lessons. I am inspired by the student who finally decided to attempt the final after I explained how I believed that she was capable of succeeding, by the student who hugged me after being in my class only one day before leaving to a credit recovery school the next, by the student who comes in sleepy to class, yet still expresses appreciation when I hand him a pencil to use. Whether during highs and lows in the large class setting, private conversations, kind compliments, quick check-ins, or after school talks, these small connections with the individuals that enter my classroom remind me that I am making a difference.

Becoming an Effective Educator.

Overall, the academic progress of my students is fair, yet shows room for significant improvement. I aim to implement best first teaching practices such as explicit modeling of notetaking, graphic organizers, and opportunities for peer collaboration. Based on the Teacher Performance Expectation (TPE) clinical evaluations, my greatest strengths currently lie in “Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning” (TPE 3), “Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Student Learning” (TPE 2), and “Developing as a Professional Educator” (TPE 6). From my extensive tutoring experience, I am well-versed in trying to break down subject matter into understandable components. As such, I design lessons to

offer low-entry tasks that build into grade-level content standards with appropriate academic scaffolds.

In facilitating classroom culture, I have also grown substantially. From the start of the year to now, firsthand experience has taught me how nuanced and complicated managing a classroom full of nearly forty adolescents is. Classroom routines are imperative, and I have developed and faithfully implemented a regular structure of doing a warm-up activity (Do Now), executing a notetaking portion or exploratory activity and allowing for peer collaboration to practice concepts and skills. I have developed my own set of expectations for students, which are still under construction. I have enforced differing levels of consequences for noncompliance with certain student behaviors, and they have worked to varying effects. Overall, my classes exhibit adequate student engagement, even despite some struggles with behavioral decisions.

Other areas that I would like to work on include TPE 1 “Engaging and Supporting Students in Learning” and TPE 2. I would say all of them, but in order to focus my attention and energy towards making a notable improvement in specific areas, I will choose these two. As Gay (2018) contends, “teachers must learn how to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies” (p. 1). In the CGU program so far, we have learned about culturally responsive teaching through readings that speak about the concept generally; as someone who needs examples to learn effectively, I would like to see more specific models of what this looks like when put into practice so that I can do so myself.

TPE 2 serves a double function because it represents a primary area that I would like to continue improving. Sometimes, in class, I pause in the middle of a lecture or stutter-start because I am focused on addressing a problematic behavior; however, Lemov and Atkins (2015) hold that the key to least invasive intervention is to “keep teaching and keep moving and embed

corrections in the larger flow of class” so that we can maintain momentum (p. 397). By continuing to teach while addressing behaviors in subtle ways, students can also hold each other accountable as we try to make progress and uplift our community together.

Goals for next year include clearly defining expectations for academic work and behavior with my students from the very start, maintaining these expectations for all students and fairly implementing consequences if individuals fall short, and incorporating more culturally responsive teaching practices to boost engagement and connectedness within the classroom.

The Self that Teaches.

As detailed in part A of this ethnography, I entered the profession of teaching so that I could make a positive difference in the lives of others and, ideally, the world at large. This primary motivation remains the same, though, over the several months of serving as a teacher-of-record for the first time, I have encountered challenges so great that caused my sight to waver and lose sight of these intentions, mainly along the lines of incurring student disrespect and competing demands for my time and energy. Introducing doubt about my capabilities and suitability for teaching have been difficult to grapple with, though ultimately strengthened my resolve to continue reaching out and trying to positively influence my students.

Some days are tougher than others, and some days, it seems as though a light is shining down and illuminating essential truths of humanity, but those are far and few between. A work that I have found most influential in shaping my teaching philosophy and refocusing my vision on the importance of my presence in the classroom is *The Courage to Teach* by Parker Palmer. Lent to me by my faculty advisor, I read this book from cover to cover over my glorious three weeks of winter break. I pored over the pages and read through anecdotes and reflections about this man’s experience in teaching and connecting with other individuals who teach. He

profoundly weaves the definition of vulnerability (also researched extensively by Brené Brown) as he describes what it means to put our core identities at risk each and every day by showing up as our true selves and the courage that such openness demands. From his writings, I have learned that it is okay to give ourselves the grace to exist, to try our best, and to be human as we endeavor to connect with others and touch their lives through our own.

Conclusion

Aside from serving as a documentation of my first year of teaching, participating in this ethnographic narrative project has encouraged me to engage in a deep reflection upon my practice in its crucial, beginning stages. The process of writing compelled me to question beliefs and broaden my perspective by coming to know different levels of the institutions and people that constitute the community that I served over this academic year. Palmer (1998) points out that “deep speaks to deep, and when we have not sounded our own depths, we cannot sound the depths of our students’ lives” (p. 31). I would hold that this paper urged me to examine my own biases and practices in relation to my students as well as acquaint myself with the world in which my classroom is situated. From an introspective dive to home visits, and from calibrating my classroom against the external world to assessing overall efforts and effectiveness, the varying scope of the project has given me an additional purpose in teaching.

Once more, I will lean upon the profound wisdom effused by Palmer (1998) in saying that “when the Student from Hell ceases to be relevant to me, my life becomes less relevant to the world” (p. 49). Because the fate of myself is inevitably tied to the well-being of my neighbor, and ours tied to everyone else’s, my identity and integrity (let alone my effectiveness as a teacher) wholly depends on my intense regard for all others and, in particular, my students. We must perceive ourselves as valuable and inexcusable parts of a collective effort to uplift our

individual selves, our classroom, our school, our community, and our earth. And so, I hope to make a positive difference to the world through maintaining a steadfast, courageous faith in the infinite capacities and goodness of humanity.

Sure, some test scores will be hard to swallow. Sure, sometimes my students may not like me or the tasks that I choose. Sure, some lessons will be a complete flop. But it is holding onto hope, the gritty kind that “rests on the expectations that our own efforts can improve the future” that can make the changes we long to see (Duckworth, 2016, p. 169). Taking appropriate accountability for the factors under our control is a serious and weighty responsibility, yes. But it is also an essential source of empowerment from which we can derive the resilience to continually try our best in making the future a better place – and to cultivate the same courage within our students.

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Appendix

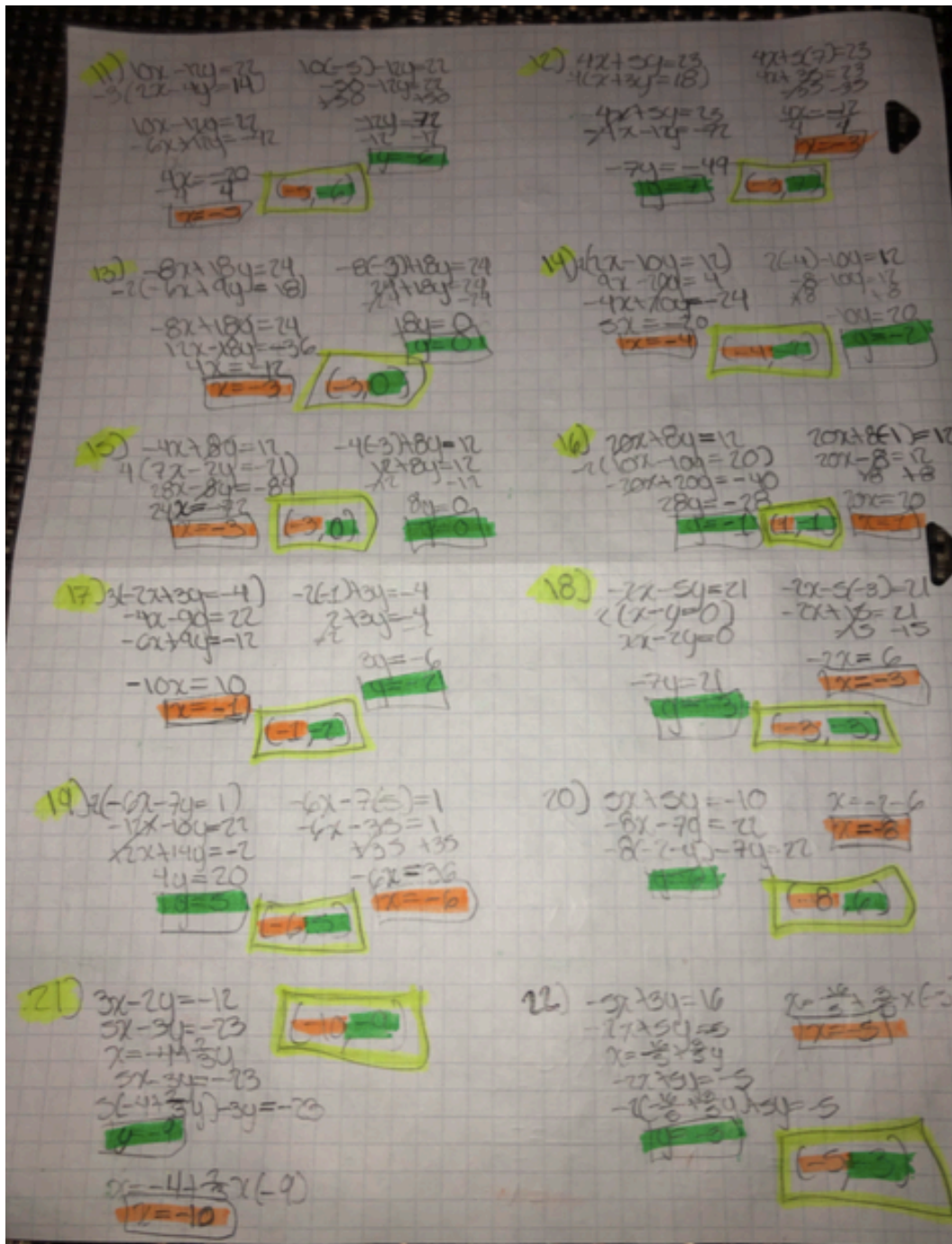


Figure 1. Mina's use of color-coding to solve systems of equations using elimination.

<p>Equation: A Solve for: y</p> $\begin{array}{r} 3x + 6y = 24 \\ -3x = -3x \\ \hline 6y = -3x + 24 \\ \\ \\ \hline y = -\frac{3x}{6} + \frac{24}{6} \\ \phantom{-\frac{3x}{6}} \phantom{\frac{24}{6}} \\ \hline y = -\frac{1}{2}x + 4 \end{array}$	<p>Equation: B Solve for: y</p> $\begin{array}{r} y + 4x = 2(3 + 2x) \\ y + 4x = 6 + 4x \\ \\ \\ \hline y = 6 \end{array}$
<p>Equation: C Solve for: y</p> $\begin{array}{r} 5(-3 + y) = 35x \\ -15 + 5y = 35x \\ \\ \\ \hline 5y = 35x + 15 \\ \\ \\ \hline y = 7x + 3 \end{array}$	<p>Equation: D Solve for: x</p> $\begin{array}{r} 4x(x+1) = (x-3)(x+5) \\ 4x^2 + 4x = 4x^2 + 10x \\ \\ \\ \hline 4x = 10x \\ \\ \\ \hline x = -\frac{10}{4} \end{array}$

Figure 2. Work sample for Mina; solving equations for a specific variable.

DO NOW!

$y = mx + b$ represents a linear pattern where " y " and " x " are variables.

- ① x represent the figure number.
 y represent the number of tiles.
- ② m means: The number that grows by
 b means: being, starting point (# tiles in Figure 0)

Figure 3. Mina's explanation of components of linear equations.

(+34) / 36

Integrated Math 1A
Chapter 2 Exam
Written Response
Total Points 32

Spectacular work, Mina!

Today is the Final, FINAL, big race. The race is 20 meters long. Use GRAPH PAPER to GRAPH the following racers.

- ✓ Racer Mr. Celiz: Got a 3 meter head start and travels 2 meters every second. (3)
- ✓ Racer Mr. Garcia: Began at the starting line and rode at a constant rate of 4 meters every 3 seconds. (3)
 $b=0$
- ✓ Racer Mr. Perez: Got an 6 meter head start and rode 2 meters every 5 seconds. (3)
- ✓ Racer Mrs. Goodwin: Rode 3 meters every second and got a 1 meter head start. (3)

Find the equation for each racer?

Mr. Celiz: $y = 2x + 3$ (2) ✓

Mr. Garcia: $y = 3x + 4$ (2) ✓

Mr. Perez: $y = 3x + 6$ (2) ✓

Mrs. Goodwin: $y = 3x + 1$ (2) ✓

Who won? Mr. Garcia (2) ✓

Second? Mrs. Goodwin (2) ✓

Third? Mr. Celiz (2) ✓

Last? Mr. Perez (2) ✓

* all graphs & results correct according to your equations! :)

When did two players meet up?
Who are they? Racer: Mr. Celiz ✓ & Racer: Mrs. Goodwin ✓

How many seconds into the race? 7 seconds ✓

At what meter? At meter 7 ✓

How long will it take Mr. Garcia to reach 100 meters? (4) 32 seconds ✓

Please show all your work

$$100 = 3x + 4$$

$$\frac{96}{3} = \frac{32}{1}$$

$$y = \frac{4}{3}x$$

$$100 = \frac{4}{3}x$$

$$x = 75 \text{ sec}$$

Figure 4. Summative assessment for Mina, page 1.

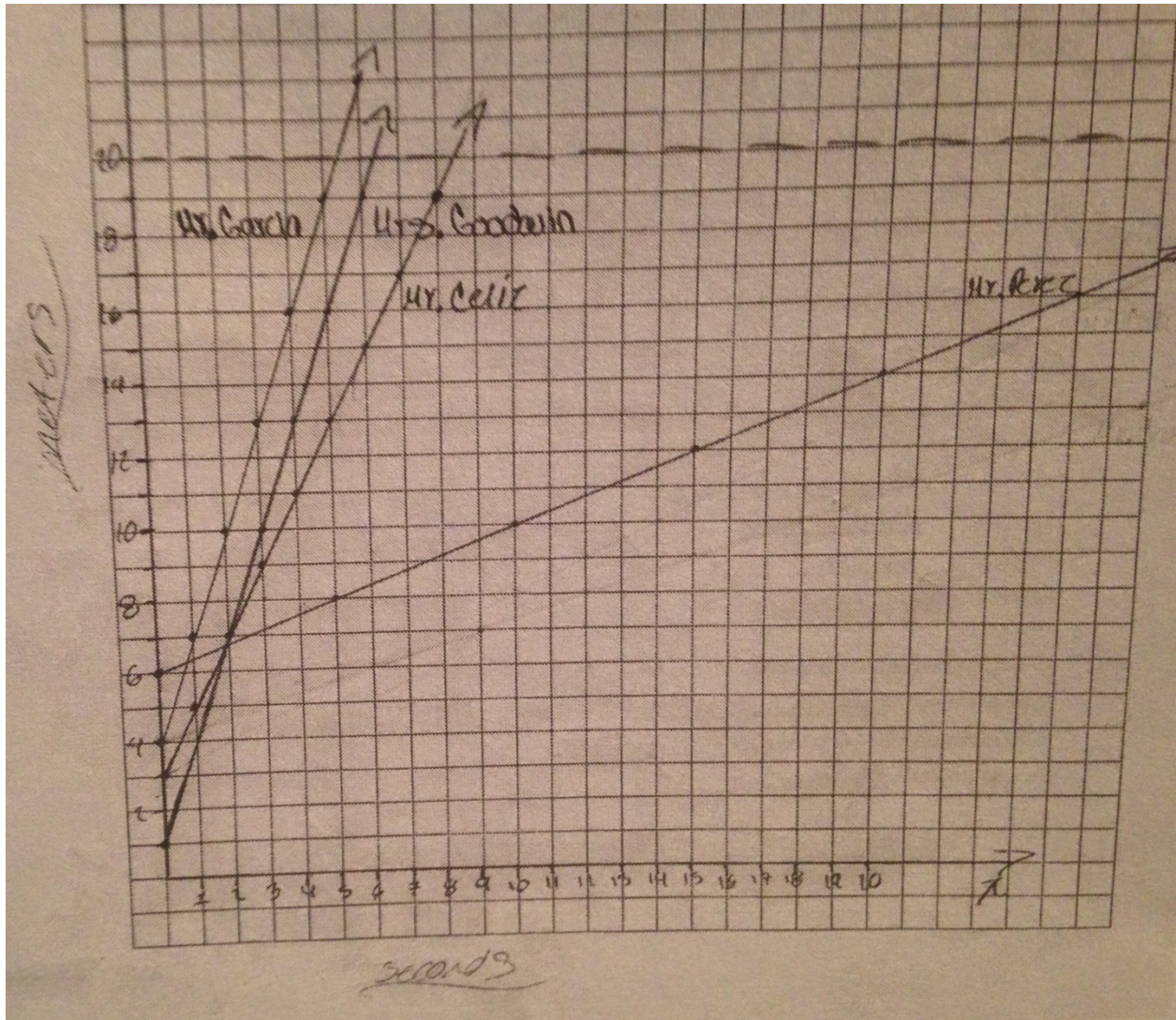


Figure 5. Summative assessment for Mina, page 2

<p>Equation: $3x + 6y = 24$ Solve for: y $3x + 6y = 24$ $-3x$ $-3x$ $\underline{6y = 24 - 3x}$ $\frac{6y}{6} = \frac{24 - 3x}{6}$ $y = 4 - \frac{3x}{6}$</p>	<p>Equation: $y + 4x = 2(3 + 2x)$ Solve for: y $y + 4x = 2(3 + 2x)$ $-4x$ $-4x$ $y = 6 + 4x - 4x$ $y = 6$</p>
<p>Equation: $5(-3 + y) = 35x$ Solve for: y $5(-3 + y) = 35x$ $-15 + 5y = 35x$ $+15$ $+15$ $\underline{5y = 35x + 15}$ $\frac{5y}{5} = \frac{35x + 15}{5}$ $y = 7x + 3$</p>	<p>Equation: $2 - 3(2x - 1) = -6x + 5$ Solve for: x $2 - 3(2x - 1) = -6x + 5$ $2 - 6x + 3 = -6x + 5$ $+6x$ $+6x - 5$ -5 $\underline{2 + 3 - 5 = x}$ $\emptyset = x$</p>

Figure 6. Student work sample of solving equations for one variable for Izzy

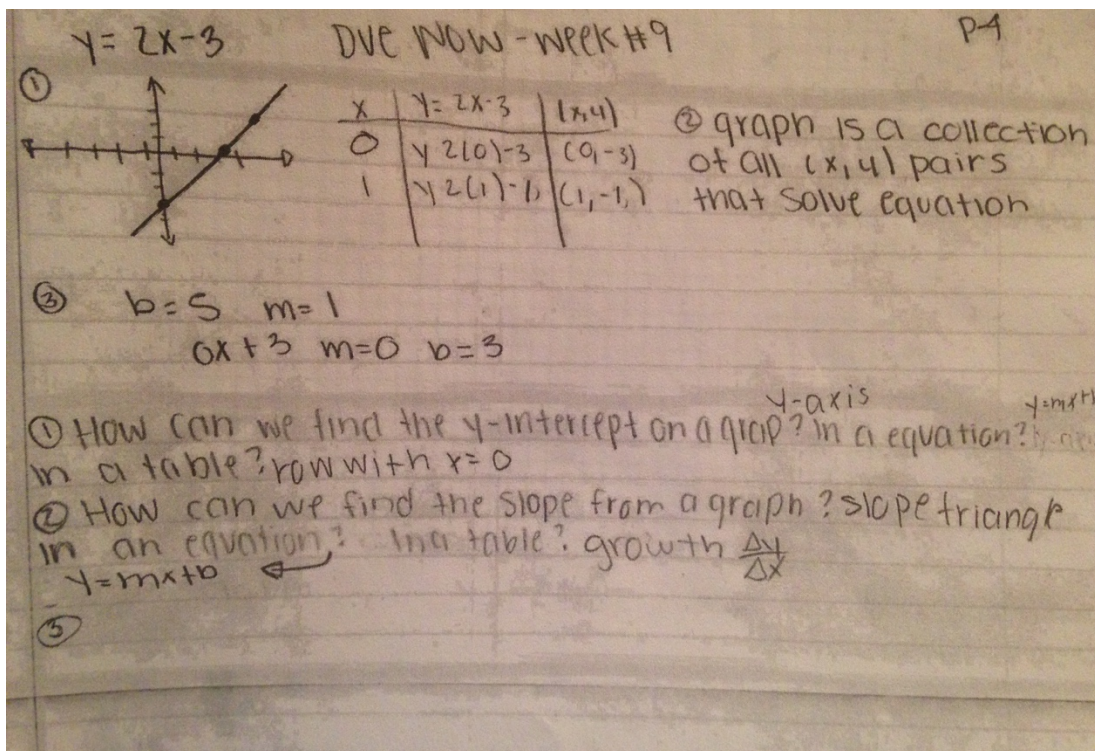


Figure 7. Student work sample about linear equations for Izzy

	1 - Growth Area	2 - Fair	3 - Proficient	4 - Advanced	FS2 #1
Topic Name	Self-Score				Explanation of why you gave yourself this score
Find "growth constant" from tile pattern	3				because most of the answers I get them right
Identify "starting point" from tile pattern	2				I sometimes get right or wrong
Construct $y = mx + b$ equation from tile pattern	2				
Graph line using table of values	3				most of the time I get my answers right
Graph line using $y = mx + b$ equation	3				
Evaluate function for given input	1				I don't really get it
Exponents	2				sometimes get it

Figure 8. Self-assessment for Izzy

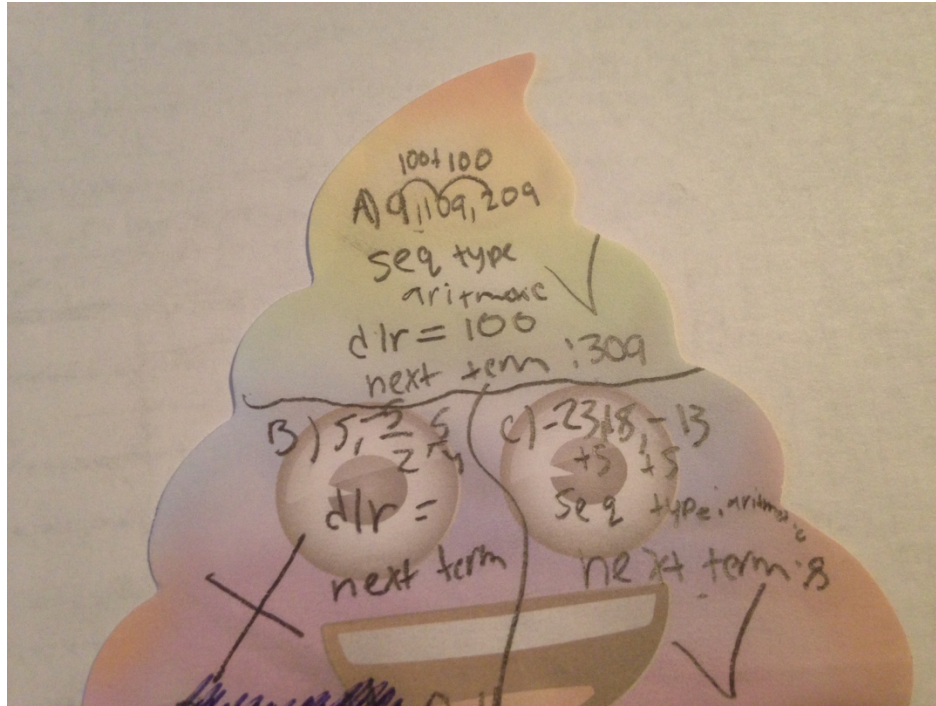


Figure 9. Informal assessment for FS3; exit ticket about sequences.

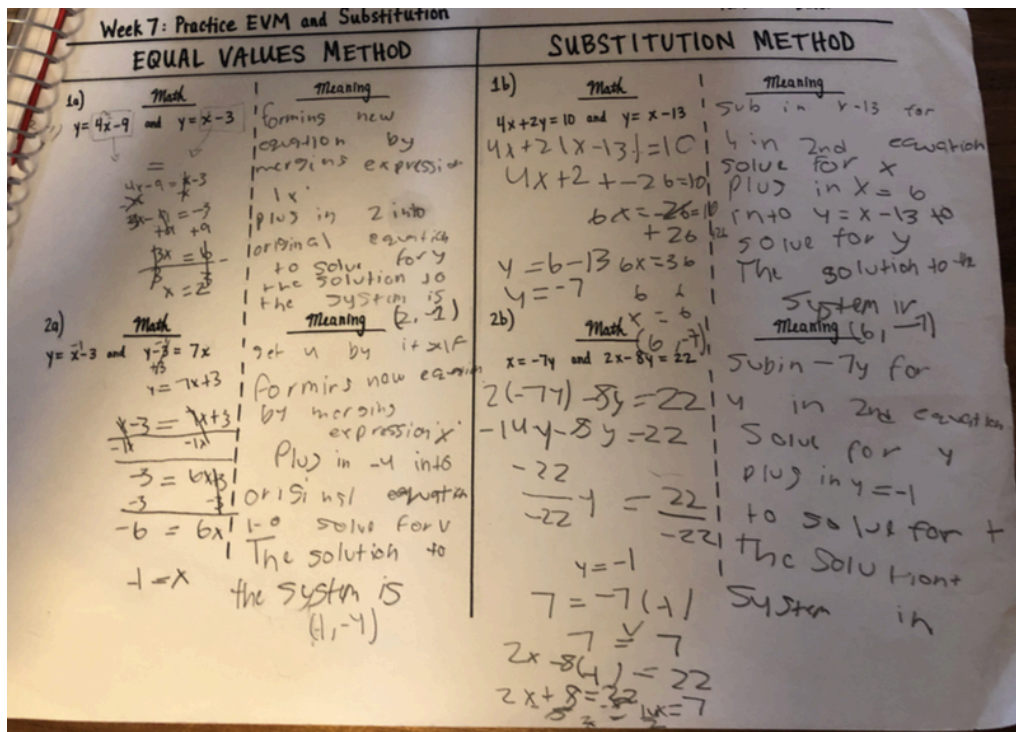


Figure 10. Student work sample for Oscar; Math and Meaning charts

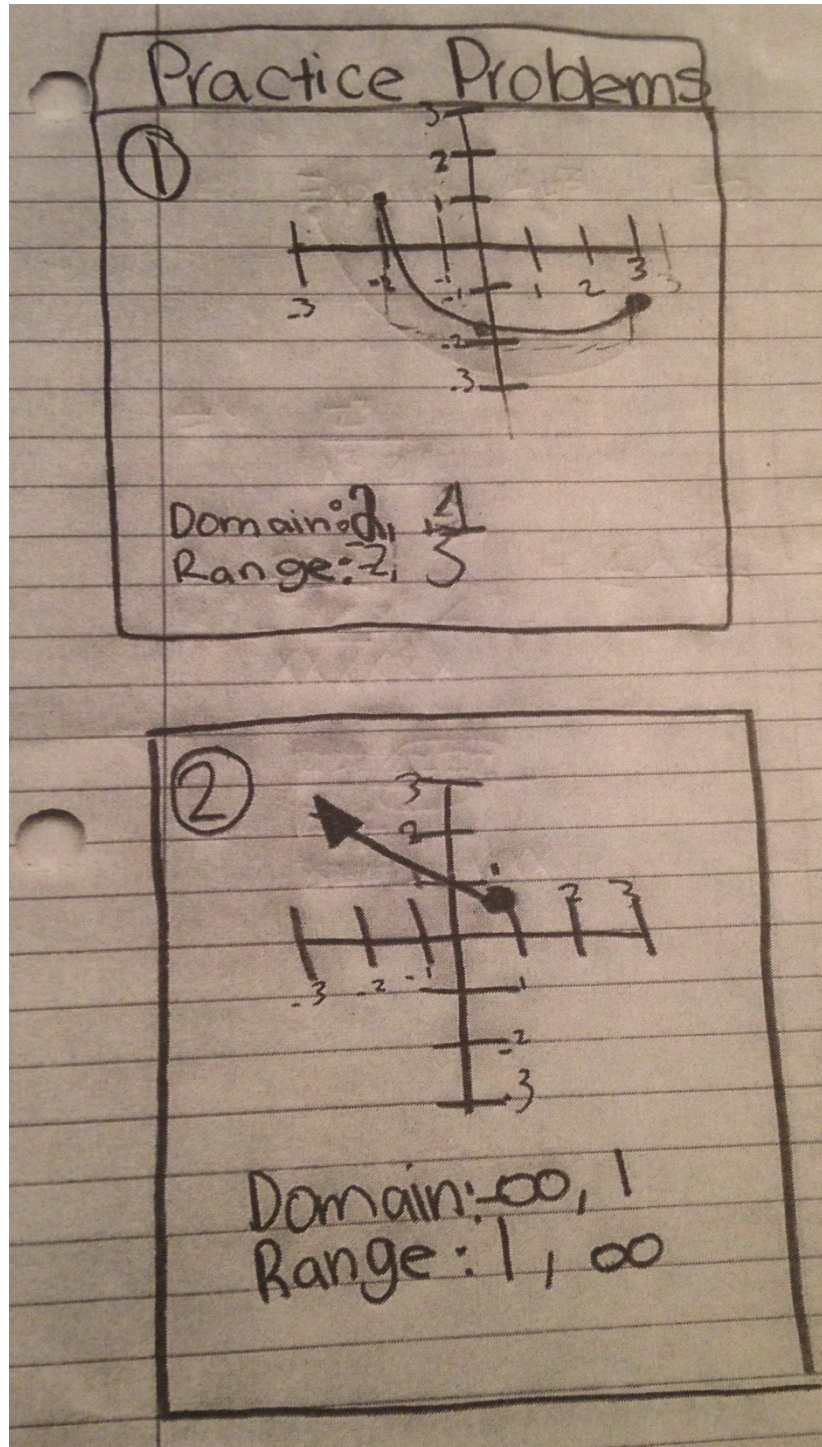


Figure 11. Student work sample, FS3

Period: 4

(+24) / 36
Integrated Math 1A
Chapter 2 Exam
Written Response
 Total Points 32

Today is the Final, FINAL, big race. The race is 20 meters long. Use GRAPH PAPER to GRAPH the following racers.

-1 Racer Mr. Celiz: Got a 3 meter head start and travels 2 meters every second. (3)

-1 Racer Mr. Garcia: Began at the starting line and rode at a constant rate of 4 meters every 3 seconds. (3)

-2 Racer Mr. Perez: Got an 6 meter head start and rode 2 meters every 5 seconds. (3)

-2 Racer Mrs. Goodwin: Rode 3 meters every second and got a 1 meter head start. (3)

Find the equation for each racer?

Mr. Celiz: $y = 2x + 3$ (2) ✓ $-\frac{1}{2}$ Mr. Garcia: $y = \frac{4}{3}x + 0$ (2) ✓ $-\frac{1}{2}$

Mr. Perez: $y = \frac{2}{5}x + 6$ (2) ✓ $-\frac{1}{2}$ Mrs. Goodwin: $y = 3x + 1$ (2) ✓ $-\frac{1}{2}$

Who won? Mr Celiz (2) -1

Second? MS Goodwin (2)

Third? Mr Garcia (2) ✓

Last? Mr Perez (2) ✓

When did two players meet up?

Who are they? Racer: Mr Garcia ✓ & Racer: Mr Perez ✓

How many seconds into the race? 7 sec ✓

At what meter? 2 meters ✓

How long will it take Mr. Garcia to reach 100 meters? (4) 37 seconds -3

Please show all your work

y
 $100 = \frac{4}{3}x$
 solve for x. $x = 75 \text{ sec}$

Figure 12. Summative assessment for Oscar, page 1

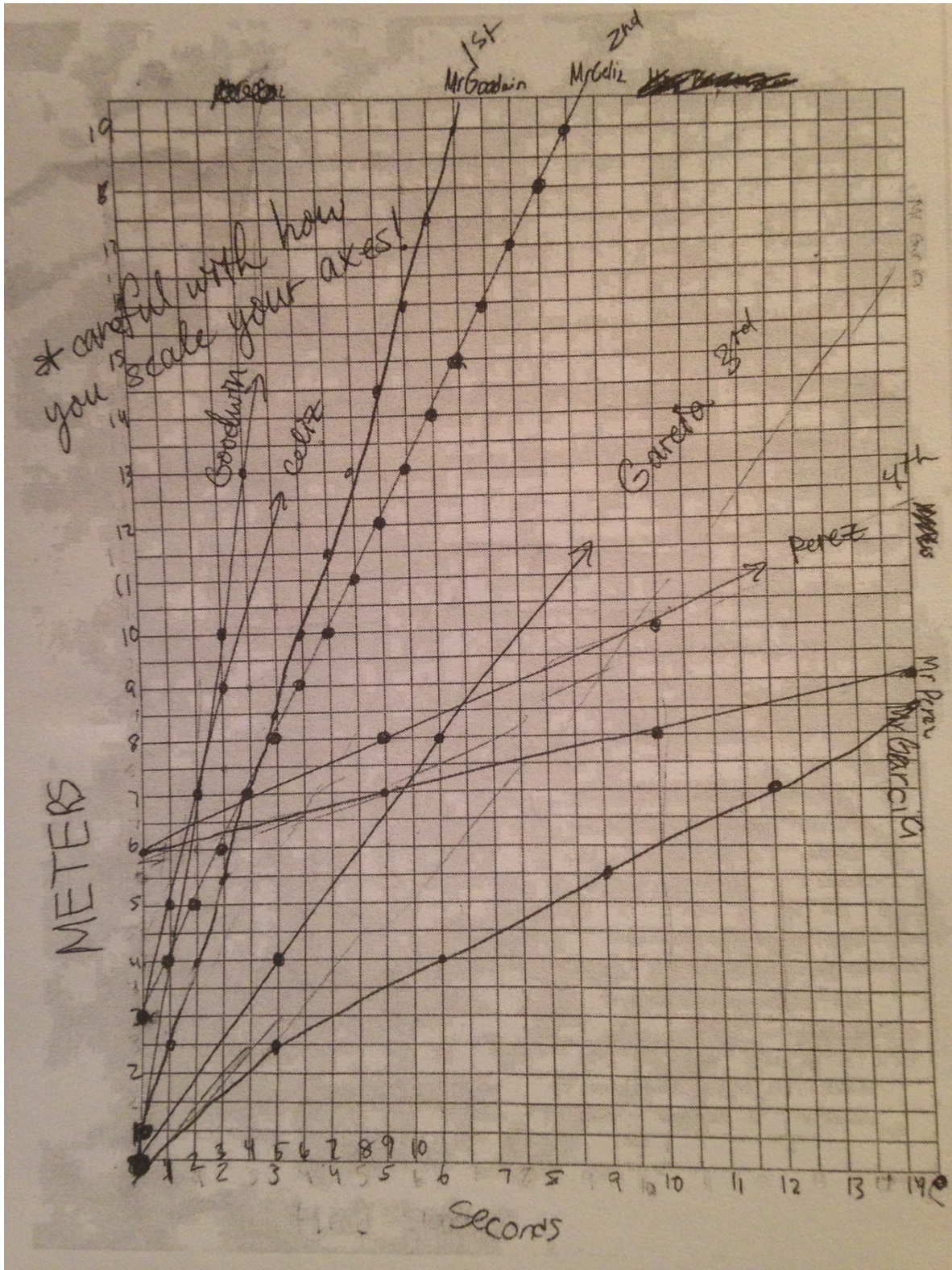


Figure 13. Summative assessment for Oscar, page 2