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Safe at Home: My Journey from Student to Teacher

Elena Fregoso

Claremont Graduate University

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Safe at Home: My Journey from Student to Teacher

Elena Fregoso

Claremont Graduate University

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Abstract

The purpose of this ethnography is to examine my journey through my first full year teaching. The main subjects of this work are myself, along with my 10th grade World History students from Monte Vista High School. Through an examination of my personal history, as well as interviews with students and their parents, I have traced my effectiveness as a first-year teacher, through my ability to meet each student's needs, as well as the development of relationships with each of my three focus students. Through personal anecdotes and the examination of assessment data, I have tracked my student's progress throughout the year, noting both the successes and failures of my teaching practices.

Preface

This ethnography serves as my personal journey to becoming an effective teacher, both in the technical aspects of teaching, as well as the more human nature of teaching and the development of relationships with my students. In order to best understand the significance a teacher can have on a student's life, I needed to explore my own history as a student. In doing this I was reminded of the long-lasting consequences an educator's words can have on a student – the positive and the negative. I recalled the power of having an adult who truly, deeply, believed in my ability, and the power of having an adult who enjoyed the authority being the adult in the room granted him.

This work is an examination of the teacher I have developed into after my first year in the classroom, but it is also a glimpse into the teacher I hope to become over the course of my career. In order to do that, I needed to examine my strengths and weaknesses, in order to set appropriate goals for myself, much as I would do for a student.

The following work has been significant in the need to self-reflect, and to remind myself of the need to be kind not only to my students, but me as well. Though a teacher, I am also a life-long student, and with that comes the need to give myself room to take risks, as well as room to falter. This year I experienced several difficulties, from a late placement, to feeling self-doubt, to one of my focus students leaving my class, but in the end the year has been successful, and the lessons I have learned and relationships I have developed, as articulated in this work will remain with me.

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

I found myself lying on the floor of an office. Hands flat to the ground, feet steadily planted. I needed to center myself, feel secure – I was having a panic attack. It was not my first, nor my last, but at the time I didn't recognize what it was, I thought I was simply overwhelmed. I would be graduating from Vassar College in a matter of months, and I had no job prospects, no life-changing internship lined up, and no trip of self-discovery in some far-off mountains planned. Upon returning to California, I would leave all my closest friends behind in New York, leaving me uncertain of my support system. I lived in the world of the elite for four years, and now I was going back home, jobless. I had wasted my opportunities. I was becoming less and less satisfied by the thesis I was writing, and I looked back at my grades in college with disappointment. They didn't feel good enough for me, and I had no sense of pride in what I was about to accomplish. I was supposed to be special, an exception with the world in front of her, yet in that moment all I had was my shaky breath and that dirty carpeted floor.

The floor was a comfort for me in a way beyond the sense of stability it gave, it was the floor of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano/a de Aztlan (MEChA) office. Three-thousand miles from where I grew up, that office became my new home. When I arrived at Vassar, I began orientation early with twenty other first-generation, low-income students, each of us with an assigned student mentor. My mentor was a leader in MEChA, and encouraged me to join the group. I first viewed it simply as a quick way to make friends, but as my first year in college went on, I felt increasingly disconnected from the general student population, and found comfort in students who looked and sounded like me, who valued the things I did.

In that office and within MEChA I believed I had found confidence in my identity. This is where I celebrated being Mexican American and I became a leader, working with others to stand with the surrounding community as they pushed for workers' rights, immigration, education and housing reform. I'd experienced joy in that office, along with heartbreak. I had educational breakthroughs and breakdowns, but on the floor that day all I felt was dread. Dread that I wasn't good enough, that my entire identity to that point and all my confidence was rooted in my status as a "good student," "a pleasure to have in class," just a "bright young lady," destined for a future my peers back home couldn't dream of. For so long I had been identified by two traits: long hair and good grades. And now I was entering a world in which that source of confidence was gone, where graduation and a haircut would upend the defining factors of what it meant to be me. In the safe space I had built for myself on campus with a group who believed in celebrating the inherent value of all marginalized people, I broke down. I broke down because I could not see my worth or the value of my experiences. All I could see was myself returning to my working-class family as a failure.

Development of My Personal Beliefs

My father grew up on a ranch in the mountains of Jalisco, Mexico. Google Maps won't help you find it – trust me, my dad and I have spent enough time trying – but it was home all the same. He grew up riding wild horses, chasing pigs, and hunting badgers. He would fish and help around the house, and he had six siblings to keep him company. Some days, there was a man who would come to teach the local children in a shack. When I ask about him, my dad's face reveals a sense of fondness for the man who taught him how to read, write, and do math. By the time my father reached the age of ten this man was gone. His two years working in the area were over, and a new, much less effective teacher came in. My dad stopped attending school; anything

else he learned would be through experience, through a life that required hard work and attention to detail.

The first time my father sat in an actual classroom? In his early twenties, at an adult school in the United States where he took English classes. He worked hard to make it into the United States, and he worked hard to become a citizen, and learn English, and every day of my life he has worked hard at jobs that test his patience and his body. My father never expressed to me the importance of my going to school, not verbally, at least. Frankly, he rarely openly expressed any opinions or emotions towards me. Still, the time spent at work, the reassuring, “you don’t need to get a job, *mija*, just worry about school” let me know what he expected me to focus on. The lack of resistance to attending college across the country was perhaps the clearest indication of his support for my education.

My mother grew up in Chino in a time that feels much farther away than it really was, if only because of the way the city has developed so quickly over the last 50 years. Every time we drive through town I hear how “all this used to be empty fields/dairy farms.” Mention a family name from Chino, odds are my mother knows them, either through church or school. School. Now as an adult, I look at my mom and see that much of her self-doubt is rooted in the feeling that she was “dumb” (Her words, not mine. Never mine.). She graduated from Chino High School, even took a few community college courses, but then she stopped. She got a job, started to make money, met my dad, so going to school didn’t make much sense anymore.

Asking her about her time in school isn’t comfortable. She seems to look back on it with regret, a point where she could have made better decisions for herself and her future family. When I was growing up my mom worked in a factory making weed-whacker parts. I vividly remember certain aspects of going to visit her – the incredible, overwhelming heat, the constant

noise, the thick smell of oil, and the fridge in the breakroom full of soda. That alone made it a dream job for me, but I didn't recognize the grueling nature of her job, and the amount of work it required. My mom however, was very aware of the strains of the job and encouraged me to do well in school, quietly hoping of a future for me without the sweat and aches she experienced every day from a lifetime of hard work.

This is the crux of my development as a child, the idea of hard work and the quiet support of my parents, never putting pressure on me to follow a specific path. Though my dad is one to generally keep his opinions to himself, I'm of the belief my mom never pushed me any certain way because she felt she didn't have the right to. As much as my parents wanted the world for me, they didn't know what that practically looked like, and my mom couldn't push me towards a future she didn't know. What my parents did know was hard work. They knew what back-breaking labor, in my mom's case, the kind that required several surgeries, felt like. To them, I needed to work hard so that I wouldn't have to do the hard work they did. And while never explicitly stated, they knew the role my education could play in setting me up for a life different than the one they lived. I was never told I had to do well in school, because I should do well at anything I put myself into. And doing well didn't mean being the best, it simply meant trying my best. School was my place to shine, for me to do my best work. I took this idea, and for better or for worse, held on to it for years. It guided me to that dirty floor. Sobbing, feeling like I was dying. Knowing that all the hard work in the world wouldn't help me catch my breath in that moment.

My Life as a Student

I still have the picture of myself on my first day of school: wearing my uniform, standing in front of a cork board decorated with school buses. A grin on my face, even with a couple teeth

missing. I don't remember the feeling of that day, but knowing what I know about myself now, I'd say I was anxious, yet enthusiastic. This was the beginning of a long journey that would help shape how I defined myself. Although school was where I shined, where I felt like my best self, that inevitably led to it also being a place of anxiety for me. I didn't play a sport like all my cousins did, nor did I play an instrument like my brother, so I felt there was nothing for me to be celebrated over. No recital or games for my parents to go to, just parent-teacher conferences to hear what I pleasure I was to have in class. The reality of the anxiety I felt from all my self-worth coming from this one area did not become clear to me until high school, and even more so in college. The creeping feeling that if this was me at my best, then what did it say about me if I struggled? If I was average, just like all the other students?

In elementary school I was placed into the Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program without having to test in. Here my tracked education began. That was the first indication I was "Special," different and maybe even better than my peers. I liked being "Special," and to me, being "Special" was easy, fun even. I loved school. Truthfully, I still love school, and for most of my educational experience things just came easily to me. My parents don't know why, they like to joke that I didn't get my intelligence from them, that I was just a quick learner. Still, they supported my learning any way they could. In elementary school my mom would dutifully guide my brother and I through our vocabulary words for that week's spelling test. For math, my dad was who I went to. The beauty of math was there was no language barrier to his ability to help me, and he was proud of that. By the time I got to middle school, though, my parents felt they couldn't help me with homework anymore. Suddenly the math had letters and the vocabulary was words my mom wasn't comfortable with, but they continued to encourage me. There was never any pressure on me, no reward for good grades, I

believed I was intrinsically motivated to do well as I enjoyed learning and the sense of accomplishment I felt after being challenged. My teacher's notes of how I was "Special" were just icing on the cake.

If my cousins and brother got to shine on the stage or on their sports teams, I was going to let myself be a star in the classroom. And so, I fully absorbed the identity of a "good student," someone the teacher could depend on to do the work, to behave, and to help other students. I eagerly participated in class, and my hand was often the first one waving in the air when the teacher asked for a volunteer. Some would describe me as a "teacher's pet," but I didn't mind and I didn't let that deter my eagerness to learn. From elementary into middle school I felt I had no limitations. There wasn't a subject I struggled with – my social development even seemed on track. I was a Conflict Manager in the fifth grade, prowling the playground with my orange safety vest and clipboard, there to help students work out their disagreements. I had a patient, friendly personality to go with my ability to absorb information easily, so school felt like it was made for me, making the jump to high school easy for me.

I entered high school with confidence. I tested into honors classes and knew I could handle the rigor. When I entered my sophomore year I experienced something new to me, something that dug deep into the image of myself that I had built up and how I viewed my relationship to school. I didn't understand what was being taught in class. Math, science, both became burdens, and I didn't know how to handle my confusion. Entire lessons went in one ear and out the other, leaving me with just enough knowledge to convince my teachers I didn't need help, to allow me to pass my tests. I shifted my focus in school to extrinsic motivation, and I began to work solely for the grade, for the reassurance of my intelligence from outside forces. For some other students, this may have been fine, but for me it was a seismic shift that left me

unbalanced. I quickly came to realize that the lack of limitations I had experienced up to that point was itself a limitation. I didn't know how to ask for help, to admit that I was struggling and needed validation, and my confidence had become so wrapped up in my ability as a student that this issue became increasingly draining for me.

Rather than ask for help, I dedicated all my attention to the area I felt strongest in: social studies. If I generally had been a star in school, junior year history was where I transformed into a full-blown sun. History had hard facts I could rely on, while giving me room to analyze and interpret other's actions and ideas. It put my life in relation to the lives of others, to the decisions of people made thousands of years ago, and while at times it made me feel small, it also made me feel consequential, able to change the world. I loved every aspect of it, and it showed in my work. But along with my genuine passion, there was another motivator: a creeping negative voice making its way to the forefront of my mind. To make up for the doubt I was feeling in other subjects my mindset began to change, in history it no longer was enough for me to try my best, I had to *be the best*. With no one actually telling me this, I felt I had to prove I was the best to my parents, to the history teacher I admired to a tremendous degree, who saw a wealth of potential in me, in order to feel any sense of self-worth. Being anything less would shake the remaining base of the confidence I built up about myself as a student. This is a common enough experience for adolescents, to develop a sense of "guilt of disappointing a particular significant figure and the feeling of failure" that comes with tests to our established identity. These fears frequently develop into a sort of "overcompensation [of] time and energy" into one aspect of one's identity (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 37). For me, this took shape in an obsession with school, and for other students it may have been a turn to alcohol, drugs, or relationships. This mindset of all my value coming from my intelligence started innocently enough, and may have

been seen as healthy, as my parents thought I was simply working extra hard, but it eventually led me to that floor of the MEChA office.

Luckily for me, this history teacher, who encouraged me, and saw the potential in me, recognized me as more than my grade. He made himself available when I needed to talk, and was happy to see my personality and interests emerge in our conversations. In his class, where I pushed so hard to be the perfect student, he took the time to see me as more than a student, but as a person. He never questioned my passion, obsession even, for being the best, but in a way, I think he was aware of how all-consuming my actions were, and did what he could to remind me that being myself was admirable enough. He never praised me for being smart, like I craved, but rather he applauded my enthusiasm, my passion, my effort and thoughtfulness. Fisher and Frey (2011) recognized the significance of the way teachers interact with the work of their students, and how their words shape the development of a growth mindset and the healthy development of students feeling proud of themselves. I kept the words of my teacher in my head, of my value being rooted in my intelligence, yes, but also my caring, empathetic, and dedicated nature, and I reclaimed my confidence. I began college with this mindset, but at a predominantly white institution, three-thousand miles from home, the identity I had created for myself came crumbling down, back to the need for validation. I felt purposeless.

The Importance of Education Based in Equity

The idea to become a teacher was nowhere near my mind as I laid on the floor of the MEChA office. Becoming a teacher has not been something I've known I was meant to do. For much of my time in college I actually resisted the notion of becoming a teacher. As a history major I often heard a concerned, "Oh. So, well, I guess you're going to be a teacher!" I didn't appreciate that. And perhaps with a bit of teenage rebellion still guiding me, I swore I would

never become a teacher. This, however, did not mean I had no interest in education. Though my relationship with education was complicated by my all-in commitment to its role in my identity, I knew it was important. Education is the right of all students, and I wanted to advocate for that.

I turned to MEChA as the outlet for me to advocate for the things I believed in. That was where I came to see my educational experience in the context of my life as a Mexican American woman, a first-generation college student, a child of an immigrant, who came from a working-class home. I attended classes in college where I was told I was the exception, that by all accounts and statistics, my being in that classroom was not supposed to happen. Sadly, in a classroom of wealthy white peers, I began to believe it myself. After all, I saw the statistics, such as those from the Pew Research Center in 2011 that are reported in Kauchak and Eggen's (2014) work, that "over 28% of Hispanics live at or below the poverty line, and college attendance and graduation rates are substantially below those of the general population" (p. 135). These facts reminded me of my time in high school, when I also heard I was the exception, that I should be celebrated for the way I was different from my peers back home, and the ways I was similar to the students attending Vassar. I recognized that there was a serious problem and that I was in a unique situation, and the only solution I heard spoken about was to get more students like me to college.

With these experiences in mind, I found myself leaning towards work in college access programs, organizations that were dedicated to giving students from underserved communities help. I found myself volunteering at such an organization in Los Angeles for two years, but I grew disillusioned when it became clear that my ability to help students was limited to those with the best grades, the highest standardized test scores, and the longest list of extracurricular activities. The students who came in with C's on their transcripts were turned away. Investing

time and money into them was risky when they might fail in college. The potential value of those who were anything but perfect was less appreciated, their dreams and aspirations not worth supporting. I understood the reasoning for this, from the organization's point of view, but I no longer wanted to be a part of maintaining that.

This was a critical moment for me, when a shift came into my thinking. You see, I had come to define valuable education as college, the only way to truly be successful as a college degree, and it was therefore only in college that a student's life could be changed. I heard this in high school, and I heard it in my college courses. This was fundamentally wrong. It was a myth that I had accepted, and in accepting that myth I was embracing a hierarchical system that placed those with college dreams above others. I was allowing my worth, and therefore, the worth of others, to depend on their ability to attain a post-secondary degree. From the first step into my kindergarten class I was being changed. It was in high school that I fell in love with history, where I met a teacher who continues to be an advocate and source of support for me. That had all been transformational and important, and the power of those moments and connections did not matter less than my experiences in college. The hard work of my parents didn't matter less than my time spent at Vassar. In believing this myth, I developed my identity less in terms of what I had to offer, and more on how I was different than my peers, then my parents, heading to a better future than they ever dreamed of.

It was the drive to feel as though I belonged in college that solidified a belief I now recognize as dangerous. To some, I was a success because I left my town, because I would earn a degree, and as a child of a working-class immigrant family, that was the ultimate goal. I was the American Dream my parents should have longed for. I held onto this belief while in undergraduate school to give my decision to leave home meaning, to make myself feel as though

I belonged with people whose lives and experiences were so fundamentally different than my own. In some ways, even then, I was able to recognize it as a betrayal, that in order to fully embrace my position at a prestigious school and the bright future that lay ahead for me, I needed to demean the work of my parents, of my community. I was made to believe that my community lacked any form of cultural capital, that the relationships my family had built in church, at work, and in school, that in the context of the world, those connections didn't matter. This is a lie. This is lie that is often told with the kindest of intentions, to be meant as a form of motivation, a way to encourage students to be better than the world around them believes they can be. I believe in the idea of wanting more, or pushing ourselves to be our best, but not when it is rooted in the belief that success is defined in terms of wealth, in graduating from college.

It was this lie and the power dynamics that it was rooted in that played a part in me spiraling into an identity crisis on the floor of an office, feeling like returning home would be a failure on my part. Well intentioned or not, this is a lie I have no interest in sharing with my students. Vassar had become this incredible responsibility for me as I came to view it as a golden opportunity that I was lucky to have. To not take full advantage of this world that was not meant for me would make me ungrateful. This pressure I put on myself, to graduate from Vassar more like my wealthy peers than the person my parents raised me to be distorted my view of success for years, but it also shaped the way I view education, myself, and my role as a teacher today.

Teaching in Southern California, and particularly in the San Gabriel Valley and Inland Empire will put me in situations where I am teaching to a large population of students of color, for whom the statistics say success in college is a long shot. I don't deny the reality of that statement, but I refuse to accept it, to reinforce the idea to my students that their lives will not be fulfilling, will not have value if they do not shed their identity to fit a more mainstream view of

success. They deserve to feel pride in the hard work of their families, and communities. With the intention to attend college or not, these students deserve an education that supports their ideas of happiness, of security and peace of mind, and their understanding of what their best life can be.

My Commitment to Teaching

And so, I found myself back in my high school history classroom, speaking with my former teacher about what steps I needed to take to make my decision a reality. In deciding to become a teacher I found that I could commit myself to multiple things I felt were valuable. The significance of history, and social studies more generally, the right of all students to learn, and through that learning, to feel confident, capable, and to experience a sense of accomplishment.

For me there are teachers who exemplify the dream version of myself, as an effective teacher who makes content relevant, powerful, and understandable, while taking the time to get to know their students, to be there when they needed guidance others could not provide. Though I worked so hard in school, it was not with the intention of attending anything other than community college. I had become consumed by doing well in school with no end goal in mind, other than the immediate gratification of learning, of grades and teacher encouragement. Though by all outside perspectives I was a “good student,” this didn’t translate into any tangible future in my mind. I didn’t see a life for myself beyond Southern California.

My junior year history teacher would not allow me to be limited by my lack of knowledge. In a move that my parents and I will be forever grateful for, my teacher pulled me aside after class one day to ask if I was planning on applying to a local organization that worked to support working class students hoping to attend private colleges on the east coast. In that moment, I absolutely was not the student this program was looking for, because I didn’t even recognize it as a possibility. This mindset of lower income students has been analyzed by

scholars such as Coles (1991) who has written of “the way class and race give shape to a family’s sense of what is possible, what is impossible, what can be imagined, what is beyond the realm, even, of fantasy,” to shape the possibilities young people see for themselves in the world (p. 12). Private college never seemed like a possibility, I didn’t even understand the meaning of a private college, and for many other students this lack of familiarity with opportunities limits the goals they set for themselves. When my teacher opened this door to a new reality for me, the first person to reach out to me personally to say what he thought I was capable of, I ran through it.

Think of all the possibilities that exists for our students and how few feel realistic because there is no model for our students to follow, no point of reference or entry. As a teacher, I will make it a responsibility of mine to present students with opportunities they feel they do not have. They deserve the chance to feel that the world is open to them if they’re willing to put the time and dedication into it. My access to the world was limited to the experiences I saw in my family and my community, it was limited to a view of getting a job and starting a family, like my mother, and it was a teacher who took his responsibility to help his students develop beyond the classroom seriously for my eyes to be opened. This is an issue that has been recognized by organizations such as ACT and the Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) who put out yearly reports of student’s career and college readiness. Their research in “The Condition of College & Career Readiness 2015, First-Generation Students” (2015) indicated that first generation student’s interests and skills rarely matched, as they had no guidance in how to achieve certain career aspirations and were not exposed to programs to help them reach their goals. Their scope of possible jobs was limited to the extremes of doctor or fast food worker. They did not realize the choices they had. For me, the realization of choice came in the form of the number of colleges I was eligible for. For other students, it may be the realization of the

ability to have a job related to their interests they weren't even aware existed. I want to help my students feel successful, but I cannot choose the definition of success for them. My role is to open the door and let them choose to step through or not.

I however, am also shaped by the models of negative teachers during high school. While my teachers all took their responsibility to student learning seriously, not all took their responsibility to student development seriously. I experienced teachers who reveled in the authority they had over young people, in their ability to intimidate and belittle. Why call a student by their name when you could give them a nickname targeting their physical appearance or intelligence? Why answer a student's sincere question when you could respond with sarcasm, making them feel there was in fact such a thing as a dumb question. Essentially, why develop a relationship of reciprocal respect, when you could demand it like an authoritarian leader? These teachers may have felt they were doing their job, as by all accounts students were in fact learning, and meeting the goals set by the standards, but in reality, they were only meeting half their duty to their students. I hope to never be this type of teacher. While learning the content will always be a priority, part of my decision to become a teacher was to have a positive impact on young minds. Kauchak and Eggen (2011) has noted the importance of this dual role for teachers to serve as examples for an accepting world, stating that educators can make their "classrooms a microcosm of the kind of world [they'd] like [their] students to grow up in" (p. 139) The world some of my teachers were setting up for me was cruel, and highlighted a system of hierarchy and authority, and suffice it to say, this is not the vision of the world I hope for my students.

As much as my decision to become a teacher is rooted in hope, it is also rooted in anxiety. In truth, my educational experience, especially in high school, was incredibly insulated.

I went from one advanced placement/honors class to another, with the same group of students, cutting me off from the three-thousand other students I went to school with. I was surrounded by people who were capable, and motivated, students who rarely pushed back on the actions of teachers. Though I struggled in math and science, social studies, which I will teach, never felt difficult. The concepts were easy to understand, the names and events were exciting enough for me to remember out of interest, but not every student I have will share that passion, that ease of absorbing material. My ability to effectively teach students so different from myself is a concern of mine, as I had no models of these kinds of teachers while in high school. I am, however, very lucky to have mentors I can continue to depend on to support me as I become a teacher. From the wealth of knowledge I'm learning from my professors at Claremont, to the open communication I have with my former history teacher, my concerns feel less daunting. I know my commitment to my students' success and the commitment of my mentors to my own success will guide me when I feel unsure, no matter how different my students may seem from myself.

In thinking of the discrepancy between my high school experience and most other students, I think back to a specific moment. I was walking across campus one day, heading for the bathroom. As I was about to enter I could hear someone crying. There was a girl in the bathroom on the phone, crying because she had failed to pass the exit exam to graduate. Again. For the sixth time. I passed the exam my sophomore year. We went to the same school, but were on totally separate tracks, tracks that set us up for very different futures. There has been plenty of research done on the benefits of heterogeneous classes versus tracking, and Oakes (1986) has noted that while the goal may be achievement for all, there is a stark difference in the type of knowledge differently tracked students have access to. She found that while high-tracked students were "exposed to content that can be called 'high status knowledge,'" "much of the

curriculum of low-track classes [were] likely to lock students” into low achieving positions “because important concepts and skills were neglected.” Students were expected to fail and were therefore taught as such, and ended up with a much different education than me, as well as a much different view of what they were capable of. I think of that moment in the bathroom often, to remind myself of the reality for many students, of the patience and dedication I will need to have to encourage students for whom school is a drain on their confidence and feels like a waste of time. Students who have no aspirations to attend college, and are therefore told they have no aspirations at all. Students who have been expected to fail, and so accept that identity put on them, much as I had accepted the identity of a “good student” placed on me.

I found myself panicking on the floor because I allowed my worth to be defined by my intelligence, and only by my intelligence, much like I imagine the girl crying in the bathroom did. While my students and I may end up on different sides of the spectrum, the fact remains that for students in high school their performance is “strongly associated with life opportunities and plans for early adulthood,” (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006, p. 7) allowing one’s identity as a student to feel daunting, overwhelming even. This is where the hope comes in for me, the feeling that I can still help these students, because even if the reasoning was different, I know what it feels like when school becomes a place of worry, of exhaustion.

Additionally, I didn’t experience full inclusion classes, where students with special needs, intellectual or behavioral, shared the classroom with me. And while I am fully committed to learning how to teach to every student, to making my lessons universal in nature, I can’t deny the anxiety that comes with that. But it’s an anxiety rooted in excitement, not dread. It’s the me on that first day of school, and not the me lying on the floor until I can catch my breath. My worries make me want to get to work, to improve myself to be able to better serve my students. I hope

this drive, and motivation will serve as a model for my students, will encourage them to commit themselves to my class the way I will show that I'm committed to their learning and development.

Conclusion

I know how a teacher and a subject can change your life for the better, how they can redefine the way you view the world, and the way you view yourself. But I also know the way a teacher and a subject can make you feel useless and make you doubt yourself and the inherent value you possess, and how school can become this place that doesn't feel safe, or comfortable. I know that for the times I felt I had no limitations, that there were students who felt they had no strengths. I know the power and responsibility that comes with being a teacher, with having impressionable young people depend on you. I take that responsibility very seriously, and I'm glad to have had wonderful models of what a caring and passionate teacher can be. Scholarship, such as the work of Nakkula and Toshalis in *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators* (2006), has focused on the intrinsically relational nature of the teacher-student dynamic, and the lasting impact educators have on students' development. As such, my decision to become a teacher was not made lightly, but with a very clear purpose. I want my students to feel unstoppable, and I want to do my part to ensure that students don't see difficulty in a certain subject as a reflection of a larger failure on their part. We often hear that knowledge is power, and so my class will be a space of empowerment. A place to ask questions, and to see hardship as a step towards progress, not a marker of failure. A place for students to be recognized for who they are, not simply their grades.

And there are things I don't know, areas where I am continuing to learn, and spaces I'm still growing in. This growth within myself has not always been easy to recognize, but it is

something I can no longer deny. Though it was a long, painful process, I did eventually pick myself up from that floor. And I did graduate. I even got a haircut. And I took time to figure out who I was and who I wanted to be, and eventually I found myself in this program at CGU. While my anxiety continues to be tested, I've met the challenge head on and have been able to overcome my fears because of the support I have from my family, friends and teachers. And with their support and my commitment to be the best I can be, I no longer feel the pull of the carpet floor. My breath is less shallow, more sure. I'm proud of the progress I've made. It is because of the uncertainty and later, clarity, that I've experienced that I feel prepared to fully recognize and celebrate the growth in my students, to let them know failure is a natural step, as long as we pick ourselves up, even if it's with the help of others.

Part B: *Who Are My Students?*

Introduction

My placement at Monte Vista High School left me in a unique position in terms of my entry point to the students. I myself am a graduate of Monte Vista High School, and how this fact would affect my relationship with my students was a point of concern for me. As mentioned previously, I am aware that my experience in high school was incredibly insulated from many of my peers due to my placement in honors and AP classes. Though I had the photos and diploma to prove to my students I did in fact attend Monte Vista, few of the stories I had to share were relatable to my college prep classes. Trying to leverage my position as a member of the community, but not wanting my entire identity to depend on this fact, I was cautious of mentioning my time at Monte Vista too often. This positioning also affected my decision process in selecting focus students.

Upon first arrival to the classroom, it was tempting to be drawn to the students who reminded me of myself and use them as the focus of my ethnography. The over-eager female students I saw in class felt safe, the type of student I could understand because of their similarities to myself. As I spent more time with my classes and considered the impact I wanted to have on my students, I came to the decision to avoid playing it safe with these students. With a new goal in mind, to connect to students I, from a shallow observation, felt I had little in common with, I began my selection process in earnest.

The process of selecting my focus students was stressful, and further complicated by my late start in the school year. As I entered the class a month into school it already had an established ecosystem and relationship between students and my master teacher, Aimee. I was overwhelmed by the thought of building relationships with students fast enough to create a

genuine bond to build my ethnography around. Working with high school students, I was of the belief the project would be a hard sell, as it would simply place another set of eyes upon the students, eyes that wanted to meet their families, and understand their histories in a way many other teachers likely never had.

Aimee was invaluable in my process of selecting students and building up my confidence to ask my focus students if they were interested. With her help and reassurance that students may view it as a point of pride, rather than intrusion, I selected my students and began the process of breaching the subject with them. As I introduce each of my students in the section that follows, you will see the variety of responses students had to my decision to choose them as a focus student. I stumbled through this process right alongside my students, working through awkward home visits and uncomfortable questions before reaching a point of mutual acknowledgement of the benefits this relationship offered each of us.

Ultimately, my focus students, David, Arthur and Michael each presented me with a unique challenge in my first few months of teaching, both for their successes and struggles inside the classroom, as well as beyond the class. Through this process my assumptions were challenged, and my understanding of their needs grew, setting me up for what I believe will be a meaningful second semester of world history.

Case Study 1: David Flores**Demographic information.**

David has entered my classroom on multiple occasions out of breath, dropping into his seat with a sigh and throwing his backpack onto his desk. Once he notices the attention is on him, he looks up, smiling, offering a simple, “what?” David knows “what,” but he has a jovial nature, preferring to crack a joke rather than offer a straight answer. One day David came sprinting into class, heavy breathing, resting with his hands on his knees before his fall to his seat. This day he was late. Only a few minutes, a level that I am understanding of, as this is the first period of the day, but late nonetheless. This time when he slams his backpack on his desk it sounds heavy, echoing a loud “THUNK” throughout the class. I give him a look, eyebrow raised, questioning his tardiness and loud disruption of class. David offers his bright smile, apologizing, and asking if I like Brisk. I pause for a moment, confused by the question, repeating back to him, “Do I like Brisk?” The class laughs, David laughs. I even laugh. “Yeah, you know, Brisk!” Suddenly the weight of his backpack makes sense, as he pulls out a one-liter bottle of blue Brisk. Again, the class laughs as I offer him a blank, shocked look. He smiles, reaching into his backpack again, and proceeds to pull out another full liter of Brisk, this one a neon green color. “Well, Miss, which one do you want?”

The process of choosing focus students was difficult for me. It was a careful balance in my mind of which students I believed would be willing to participate, which parents would be willing to participate, and which students I felt I had built a connection with after my first month in the classroom. While David was a friendly face from the moment I was introduced to the class, I admit I was afraid he would resist the offer to be a focus student. To me, he seemed like a student who enjoyed being noticed in class, often for a goofy joke or comment, but did not want

any extra attention. David presents no behavior issues, and his grades align with the average of the class, allowing him to float on by, generally unnoticed. Several of the classified EL students in my class are quiet, either due to their language proficiency, or their personality, but David did not follow this pattern. Though not one to speak up at any chance given, David will ask questions, offer opinions, and tease his classmates when he wants to, not afraid to speak up in front of his peers. This willingness to speak is what first drew my attention to him, but ultimately, it was the moment with the Brisk when it became very clear to me. This was my focus student. When I finally broached the subject with him, he responded with an easy, “sure. Oh damn. This means I have to clean!”

The truth is, David is by all accounts perfectly fluent in English, even with his sprinkling of Spanish thrown into his phrases. Speaking to him, there are no pauses, no uncertainties, no moments of translation, just free-flowing speech. David speaks without any discernible accent – there are no clues that he would not be classified as EO, or an EL who has already been reclassified. He speaks like many of his fifteen-year-old peers, not with an overflowing academic vocabulary, but with what I believe is common for his age and community. His ability to speak English, and his comfort in speaking in front of others, undeniably stood out as a strength of David’s. At first, I saw it simply as a personality trait, one I admired, but did not realize this was also a social or academic strength.

It was not until I interacted with David more directly on academic assignments that I began to see why he continues to be classified as an EL. His writing skills are the most evident area of growth for David, both in his scripting, and in his grammar and language structure. While I have no trouble interpreting his understanding while speaking to David, in writing his ability to

show his mastery of content is muddled, lost in misused grammar and unsure spelling. The disparity between the David I spoke to and the David I read from, was jarring.

As much as David's writing stood out to me, another area of growth that needs to be addressed is his reading ability – not only in reading to himself, but aloud to the class, as well. If I have not established it clearly enough, David is comfortable speaking in front of the class. He does not mind having all eyes and ears on him, and he does not have a problem asking questions for the class to hear. It was this confidence that made his hesitancy while reading aloud so much more alarming. See, ask David to read aloud in front of his peers, and suddenly his voice gets quieter, a bit shaky and unsure. He will offer an uncomfortable smile and a, “nah” before finally starting to read after a bit more prodding.

As much as the dynamic and friendly personality of David drew me in and led to my decision to ask him to be one of my focus students, it was also the sound of his uncertainty while he read aloud that secured my decision. This was a student who was able to mask his EL classification with his bright smile, with his goofy attitude, and with his comfort speaking, and later I would come to find his personality along with average grades, allowed him to largely hide his SPED classification as well.

Academic standing.

David has been classified as an EL student, and because he was born in the United States, and has retained this classification since elementary school, David would further be classified as a Long-Term English Learner (LTEL). His status fits into the norm, as data has shown that Spanish speaking students are “twice as likely as those who speak other languages to remain categorized as English learners” (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018, p. 15) throughout their educational careers. While David retains his status as an LTEL, he is showing progress, and verbally can

pass as fully fluent. According to his most recent ELPAC test, taken in March of 2018, David earned an overall score of 3 out of 4, placing him in the “Expanding” category. Within these results, David has shown a proficiency in speaking and listening, scoring 4 out of 4 in the oral language category, however, in the written language category, David performed low, earning only a 1 out of 4. In the breakdown of the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing – David scored all over the map, from well-developed in the listening category, to beginning in reading.

This low scoring in reading correlates to the struggle I see David have in class. During lecture or discussion, David is usually engaged, listening as I explain details from our notes, or relaying a story to the students. However, when a reading is placed in front of David, his engagement levels drop dramatically. All the excitement and energy David brings to class suddenly dissipates when it is time to read. These readings do not have to be high level primary sources, but simple guided focus lessons, or summaries of secondary sources. No matter the content or difficulty, when faced with a reading, David’s change in engagement is clear. This disengagement comes in two distinct ways.

The first sign, David begins to look around, digging through his backpack, occasionally talking to the people around him. Though David is the type of student to talk with his classmates during class, often when this happens during a lecture or activity, they talk about what we are learning. When he speaks during reading activities, it is rarely if ever about the text.

The other reaction I see from David is zoning out. At least once a week we will begin class with a focus lesson activity, where students will read a page about a topic we are learning, then answer questions about the reading. All the students usually take some prodding to relax and begin to read as class starts, but with David I will look up and see him staring at the wall, not

blinking, completely zoned out. In these instances, I usually wave my arms to get his attention, at which point he will shake his head, smile at me, and make a big gesture of picking up his focus lesson book to begin reading. Often even after this I must check in on him again to remind him to begin reading.

This discomfort with reading became most obvious to me when David was asked to read in front of the class. Whatever the occasion, reading a question from a focus lesson, or a summary of his notes, David's eagerness to speak in front of his peers falls when reading. It does not appear to me as an issue of embarrassment, but rather of vulnerability and genuine uncertainty about how to pronounce certain words. This is not an uncommon trait among my students, but the contrast between his usual comfort when speaking and when reading is what is noteworthy for me.

Beyond these struggles with reading, another area David struggles with is writing, making his mastery of English the biggest area of growth I see for David in my class. David's writing is marked by misspelling, and a general lack of understanding of grammatical structure and rules. These struggles are apparent in David's more casual, free response writing seen in his personal history, as well as more formal content driven essays (Appendix A1, A2). A look at his freshman year grades shows David's struggles with English as well. In his ninth grade English course David earned an F the first semester, and a D- second semester. When he retook the course during summer school, David earned a D- for the class. While I do consider these grades a reflection to some degree of David's skills with English, I also know they are the result of a student who has openly shared with me that he hates school.

Further complicating David's relationship with English are his grades in ELD specific classes. Over the summer before entering his freshman year at Monte Vista High School, David

took a class titled “ELD II” and earned an A in both parts of the summer for this class. Then, during his ninth grade English literacy class he earned a B first semester and a B+ the second. This year he does not have a full time second English Language Development course.

Though Spanish is David’s primary language, and his mastery of the language is demonstrated in his verbal abilities, David does not have any formal education in reading and writing Spanish. Growing up in the United States, all his formal education has been in English, meaning though he is arguably fluent in speaking Spanish, reading and writing are still an area of growth for him in both languages. Looking at David’s transcripts provide further insight into this, as he is currently earning a C- in his Spanish II class. When I asked him about this grade and his comfort level with the Spanish language, he shared part of his grade reflects his lack of interest in the skills needed. “I speak it, why do I need to take a class to write it?” (personal interview). There is a reasonable point made here, at least in David’s mind, if he views Spanish simply as a tool to communicate with his family and friends, developing academic vocabulary and grammatical rules is of little concern.

Knowing this, I rarely use Spanish as a tool for learning with David, but rather, I use it as he sees it, a means of communication, and a way for me to relate to him. Though scholars such as Cummings have argued the benefits of using the home language as a meaningful scaffold to learning English, I do not see it as a reasonable tool to use with David. As Garcia and Kleifgen note in their work *Educating Emergent Bilinguals* (2018), translations are only useful if students have been educated in their home language, which David has not been. To use Spanish as a scaffold then, would be disingenuous, and likely only further confuse him. Let me be clear though, this does not mean that Spanish is entirely kept out of my classroom. Many of my students primarily use Spanish in class as slang, in informal ways of speaking to each other, or

Aimee and myself. By my use of Spanish in the class as a means of casual communication I am making it clear to my students I value their language use.

In this way, my integration of Spanish into the classroom is done less as a scaffolding tool, and more as a way to create an inviting, and culturally responsive environment for my students. Students know their language, and by extension, their culture, are respected in my classroom. David very much presents himself as being proud of his Mexican heritage, often telling me and his classmates about his family visits to Mexico, even offering to bring me back candy if I'd like. Though I turned down the generous offer, David's attitude about his family trips to Jalisco were points of excitement for him, showing me how much he valued not only the trips, but the cultural and familial heritage tied to the trip. The demographics of Monte Vista High school reflect my classroom, including David, as the school has a Latinx population of 87.4% (School Loop – School Profile), which makes my decision to celebrate the use of Spanish in my class critical to creating an environment where student's ethnic and cultural identity are not stifled.

Socio-emotional development & social identity.

David enters class the way many of my students do, nodding his head at his fellow classmates, and dapping fists. The extent of his friendship with many of the other students is unclear to me, but in this community, there exists a level of recognition that is common between students. A simple, "yeah, I know you," along with the nod that have little emotional weight attached to it but represent capital in the community. When asked why he does it, David laughs and shakes his head, he's not sure. It's just something people do. Whether the reason is known, and just not shared with me or not, the message seems to be clear: he fits in.

David is like many of his peers, a child of Mexican immigrants, growing up in a bilingual, working-class household in the surrounding community. This identity, along with his easy-going attitude and friendly smile make David a firm member of the culture of the school. David is respectful, yet goofy, and perhaps one of his greatest social strengths is his ability to crack a joke, and more importantly, to joke about himself. Though prone to speaking to the friends seated around him in class, David is very deferential, and understands the authority of the teacher in the classroom when necessary. Yet, David is still very much himself, knowing how to balance between respect and familiarity, as he is vocal in letting me know when something I say or do is “wack, Miss.” Nevertheless, David uses his humor to build relationships with myself and his peers, rather than push them beyond their limits.

My classroom is currently arranged in rows, students often work in pairs, moving their rows closer to each other to discuss concepts, or share questions and responses with each other. David’s partner has become a close friend of his. On the days when David arrives to class on time, without his liters of radioactive colored Brisk, he arrives alongside his partner, Melissa. Though clearly friends, once in class they both are aware of the time to be social and the time to work.

While David is generally not a behavior issue, he, along with many of his peers have a particular response to sensitive subjects we discuss in class. As a high school world history teacher, I pride myself on being as honest as possible with my students, showing them the dark and hopeful sides of history, pushing them to come to their own conclusions of what is right or wrong, what is justified and what is not. For many students in my class, the first critical look at history is uncomfortable. The common, and understandable response I see is students distancing themselves, usually through jokes or disbelief.

The issue became obvious when learning about the Haitian Revolution. The class had just finished learning about the violence and glory of the French Revolution, finding the beheading of King Louis XVI exciting, an act of violence worth celebrating. My students understood what the French were fighting for, and most, including David, concluded that the execution of King Louis XVI was justified, an act of viciousness for a greater cause, one worth fighting for. When I explained to my class the situation in Haiti as the French fought for “liberty, equality, fraternity” they were unsure how to react. This hypocrisy was difficult for my students to wrap their minds around.

David was reading documents about the realities of slavery in Haiti under French rule. He was doing this as part of a group, having three other students, including Melissa, his usual partner, to try to make sense of the history they were reading about. I recall walking by David’s group as they read a page whose theme was labeled “unfavorable conditions,” where the realities of slave life in Haiti were listed. As his groupmate read about slaves being buried alive, burned, raped, and committing suicide, David was laughing. “David, what about this is funny?” He looks up, smile on his face, “Nothing Miss, but this shit’s weird.”

David’s reaction was similar to many of his classmates, as I recalled everyone’s attention to discuss what they just read. As I explained that what they read was true, and based on a culture of fear, I heard a student ask, “this is real? Swear to God?” And so, an opportunity was presented to me to both teach the content, as well as skills for social awareness and empathy. David, like his peers, was not callus, making light of a cruel reality, he was trying to find ways to express his discomfort. I presented my class with a situation, where an outsider saw them laughing at the truth about slavery and prompted them to think of what that would look like to

others. I explained I knew their intent, but others would not, and because of this, as a class we needed to work on how we reacted to uncomfortable or upsetting facts.

Teaching students to be aware of their own feelings and the way they present those feelings was difficult. David shared with me later that this experience was awkward, that he hadn't taken the time to consider what his reactions may look like to others. Though uncomfortable, it was helpful, and David apologized for laughing, saying he would try to control his responses better next time.

Funds of knowledge.

"My mom wants to know if you like meat."

I smiled. "Yes, yes I do like meat."

"Cool. Thanks, Miss."

It was a quick exchange after class one day, as students moved in and out of the room around us. With his answer in tow, David left class, chasing after his friends. Later in the day, when I had a moment to myself, I thought back to David's question and laughed. Before ever taking a step into the Flores home, I felt very much welcome. This question provided me insight into the family David was raised in, a traditional Mexican family rooted in idea of being "*bien educado*," a concept described by Garcia and Kleifgan (2018) as including an education in "moral values and respect along with having book knowledge" (p. 140).

David lives further from the school than my other two focus students, in fact, David does not live within the city of Monte Vista. Though the city is small, and there are many students who live beyond the limits of the city, the location of David's home is only a block away from the southern border of Monte Vista High School's boundary line.

When I arrived at his home, David was embarrassed, sharing with me that he did not wish to be there. “I don’t need to be here when you talk to my Ma. I already know what you’re both going to say.” At this point David’s voice raised into a higher pitch, imitating the feminine voices of his mother and myself, “What does David think of school? Oh well he hates it!” (personal interview). He laughed, telling me he was going to go spend time with another student in my class. His parents did not find this as funny as David did, and told him not to be rude. As we talked and ate, much of the conversation occurred in a mix of English and Spanish. Where I understand Spanish, but am shy of my ability to speak it, David’s parents felt a similar way about English. And so, we discussed David in two languages, with David serving as our translator for anything that may have gotten confused.

David’s parents are immigrants themselves, from different states in Mexico, and many of their traditions and hopes reflected their lives, bridging the gap between the United States and Mexico. Mr. and Mrs. Flores shared with me that their major goal is for their children to take advantage of the free education opportunities that the United States offers. In Mexico, a quality education comes from private schooling, requiring parents to pay for their child’s education. The Flores’ very much see education as a marker of success, and so they push their son to do well and graduate from high school. Their vision for what their son can do after high school is unclear though, marked by a general hope for their son to have a good life, with no clear meaning to the phrase. This response is common among Mexican immigrant parents, as the work of Guadalupe Valdés (1996) showed that many of the parents she spoke with had goals for their children that were “very imprecise and ill-defined,” and that while “[t]hey wanted what was possible for their children in [the United States], they were not yet sure of what that was” (p. 182). David’s parents very much reflected this trait of Mexican immigrant parents, as they do not lack goals for their

children, they are simply limited in their scope of the opportunities that exist in this country for them.

With these open-ended goals in mind, Mrs. Flores was honest with me, admitting she felt her son was intelligent, “*pero es muy flojo* [he is very lazy]” (personal interview). This was frustrating for David’s parents, to know their son had the skills, but made the decision not to use them to the best of his abilities. Knowing my own history as the child of an immigrant, they expected me to understand their point of view on the matter. I agreed with them, but also made it clear I felt David did not have all the tools he needed to succeed, as he is not only an English Language Learner, but has an IEP as well.

When the conversation turned to the matter of David’s IEP, there was a general sense of uncertainty from the family. David’s IEP describes his disorder as issues in auditory memory and visual processing. When I ask for clarification on what this specifically looks like for David, both David and his family seemed unsure of the meaning of the “disorders,” as well as the intentions of the IEP, and if the supports were benefiting David’s academic success. Mrs. Flores explained they simply attended the meetings they were informed they needed to (personal interview). There has been much research done on the possible reasons for the disconnect between culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents and SPED coordinators, ranging from acculturation levels, familiarity with education structure, language barrier, cultural differences, and so on (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000). In speaking with the Flores’, I felt there were two major causes for their lack of understanding, and therefore involvement, in David’s IEP.

First was the language barrier. Though David’s parents understand conversational English, the “jargon” of special education left them confused, a point of contention for many

CLD families (Salas, 2004, p. 185). This language confusion was then mixed with a lack of understanding of the process of these meetings. Mr. and Mrs. Flores have hopes for David, and want to encourage him to succeed, but they do not have the skills needed to be an educational advocate for their son. Coming from a limited education system in Mexico, the Flores family is unsure of what is expected of them, and what they believe works best for David. Put simply, David's parents lack the cultural capital to actively engage in their son's IEP meetings. The Flores family assures me they are invested in their son but are overwhelmed by the meetings. This call to be seen as involved in David's education likely is an attempt to not appear as "passive" parents, a label often placed on CLD parents, whose confusion is seen as lack of concern (Jung, 2001).

Hearing the confusion from the Flores family, I began to wonder to what extent David's academic performance was tied into his status as an EL student, as a SPED student, and/or both. Studies have shown that "many of the U.S.-born children who remain emergent bilinguals after middle school have language disabilities," and this status as a long-term English Learner (LTEL) leads to "some students who are designated as emergent bilinguals [to be] referred for evaluation to receive special education services" (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018, p. 23). Though I kept this point of curiosity to myself, and I do not feel I have the necessary knowledge to be able to differentiate between a language disability and genuine long-term English learner, this became a point of interest for me.

Upon further research, it became clear to me this distinction, between English Learner and/or SPED is at the root of much discussion in the education field. As it currently stands, there is no nationwide parameters to distinguish between the differences (McCardle, et al., 2005), and districts and SPED practitioners have trouble noting the differences because of the "tendency for

both students identified as ELLS and students identified with [a learning disability] to perform poorly on academic tests with high language demands.” (Sullivan, 2011, p. 120)

To further complicate the effectiveness of David’s IEP, the Flores family worried that David would use his SPED status to avoid work, tying back to their earlier point of David being lazy. A look over David’s IEP shows that all his accommodations are to be given upon request. Over the last three months I have spent as David’s teacher, he has never once requested accommodations or even mentioned he has an IEP. This was a point I did feel comfortable bringing up with his parents, and they did not seem to understand why David would need to make requests in class for measures that were agreed upon during the IEP meetings.

After a friendly, and informative dinner with the family, I was left with a sense of gratitude for their time, and their honesty. Seeing David in his home environment, I was able to see the context of David’s life, furthering my understanding of his feelings about school, and his own future. As has been shown to be the case with many Mexican immigrants, the goals presented by his family, and as will be seen by David himself, encapsulate modest, yet vague dreams, based on ideas financial stability and a sense of hard, honest work. At fifteen, I could see David’s work ethic was still in development, but the foundation his family set for him was sturdy, and I believed in David’s ability to develop this trait to support the glimpses of brilliance I have seen from him.

Experiences, interests & developmental considerations.

“I hate school.”

David says this with his trademark smile plastered across his face. He shares this with me without a follow-up, a clear enough statement that does not need explanation in his mind. As I

carefully pushed David to consider why he felt this way, I was met with a shake of the head and an “I don’t know, Miss. Just do.”

I grew accustomed to this uncertainty of a response in my time interviewing David. His reason for not enjoying school? He didn’t know. His goals for the future? He didn’t know but made a vague joke about money. His favorite subject? He didn’t know. His least favorite subject? Math. He knew the answer to this question with absolute certainty. But beyond his strong feelings towards math, David had few details to share with me about his aspirations.

Let me be clear, David was not averse to sharing details of his personal life. Within the first few weeks of school my master teacher, Aimee, had students write out their individual family histories. When reading over David’s history, I was shocked by the details he shared of his parents crossing the border, as well as a terrifying moment in his life, when his mother was shot. Beyond this written history, David shared stories with me in conversations with each other. What he shared ranged from his love of soccer, to his stories of time spent in Mexico, to his hobby of boxing with another student of mine. David regularly made it a practice of coming and sitting with me at my desk before class started, eager to tell me about his time spent with friends or his escapades in “Shell Shockers,” the game of choice for my students. Often when David would attend tutoring after-school he preferred speaking with me, rather than trying to improve his grade, stating he was satisfied with his B- in the class and did not want to put in the work to bring it up any higher.

I lay out these encounters to note the ways David presents himself as an open book. His quick acceptance of my offer to be a focus student, and his continually asking, even in front of his peers, when I was going to complete my home visit further highlight this point. It is with this knowledge that I have concluded, for now, that David is not hiding his goals from me, too

embarrassed to share them, but rather is being painfully honest with me. He does not know what he wants. He does not know why he doesn't enjoy school, it is simply a fact for him. He does not know what he wants his future to look like, beyond mumbles of money and fun.

David is fifteen years old, approaching an age where the question of what one dreams for their future becomes less a moment to share their wildest fantasies, and more an expected realistic, mature response. Beyond the reasonable uncertainty of most teens, David's options for his future are also limited by the scope of opportunities he sees as attainable for himself. As it stands, David's feelings towards school indicate his view that an education will do little to help his future. This disengagement among students is common in African-American and Latinx students, as Noguera (2003) argues that at an early age students "begin to recognize that education is not working for them and will not provide them with access to socially desirable rewards" (p. 343). I believe this is the case for David.

School is not a place David feels confident, and so it is not a space David feels will be useful to him in the future. School is a chore he must complete, and he completes it with the minimum effort required on his part. When I asked David why he does not request the accommodations guaranteed to him by his IEP, he dismissed the question with ease. David's response was blunt. He did not care enough to ask.

Action plan.

Meeting David's needs troubles me. Much of my concern comes from my own inability to distinguish between the root cause(s) of David's performance in school. Is his LTEL status due to test anxiety? The disorders laid out in his IEP? His own lack of interest in excelling in school? His belief school is not helpful to his future? A combination of all these factors? The last option seems most likely to me, but I am unsure how to address such a complex issue.

In terms of providing academic support, I have worked with David to develop his writing skills. To both meet the needs of my class, as well as specific skills laid out in his IEP, I have worked with David to develop thesis statements. This process involved several scaffolds, and grew from topic sentences, to argument statements, to a full thesis with evidence. While David has made progress in creating a thesis statement, there is still work to be done on developing his overall writing skills. While I continue to provide scaffolded lessons in creating an essay, much of what I feel capable of teaching David is in structure and content, not in the finer intricacies of grammar and spelling. I have made the conscious decision not to grade my students on their spelling or grammar, but rather their content and argument structure, as a way to build up their confidence. Also, as a history teacher I do not feel comfortable addressing certain aspects of writing with my students, but I feel this is an area David does need support in.

To address David's struggles in reading, next semester I will attempt to implement group seating for my students. In these groups I will provide my students with opportunities to read aloud. Here, David will be able to practice his reading aloud skills, but at much lower stakes than reading to the entire class. This practice will be a scaffold I hope will develop David's comfort, confidence, and ultimately skill in both reading, and reading aloud.

As to the matter of David's motivation and feelings towards school, I am less certain of the strategies I will implement. As mentioned, David does attend tutoring with me, however keeping him focused during tutoring is difficult, as he is not motivated to improve his grade, let alone his skill. I need to find ways to leverage David's comfort with me and willingness to stay after-school in my class, to make the time productive, hopefully working on the writing skills David is weak in. Overall, David is on track to graduate, and he is content with his academic situation, as he has no plans of attending any form of post-secondary schooling. I am proud of

David's success in school so far, especially considering his classification as EL and SPED place him at a higher chance of dropping out of school (Sullivan, 2011), however, I hope to encourage David in seeing the opportunities school has to offer him. In the conversations I have had with David about school, he is unwilling to have a serious discussion of the matter, preferring to rely on his humor to escape the topic. I do not have intentions of pushing college too hard on David, but I do feel it is my responsibility to ensure he is aware of all the opportunities his performance in high school will grant him, to allow him to see the value of his hard work.

For this reason, I will continue to develop a genuine connection with David to allow for a greater possibility of him internalizing my suggestions. Through both his academic and personal development, I look forward to sending David into his junior year with the skills and mindset needed for him to continue to be on track to graduate, and live a successful life, however he comes to define that.

Case Study 2: Arthur Esparza**Demographic information.**

Arthur Esparza is a student who is most comfortable going unnoticed. He prefers to be on the periphery of the class, out of the way and able to do his work at his own pace, alone. For all his desire to draw as little attention as possible, a shock of self-bleached blonde hair makes him stand. His hair is long, draping over the sides of his head, slightly covering his eyes. Arthur often wears his hood, the glimpse of blonde hair peeking out under the lip of the hood. Along with the hood, Arthur often has his earphones in, providing him a sense of comfort.

The first interaction I had with Arthur that made him stand out was when he came to ask my master teacher, Aimee, and I when we offered tutoring. As we spoke, Aimee reminded him of the class earphones policy: acceptable when working independently, unacceptable when a teacher was talking. Arthur apologized, and explained that his IEP allowed him to use his earphones as needed. And so, a question about tutoring became a lesson for Arthur and me about self-advocacy with an IEP.

The decision to choose Arthur was not a simple one. Arthur did prefer to go unnoticed, and this desire for privacy left me with the impression he would have no interest in being a focus student. If nothing else, this ethnography has been a reminder to me to be careful of my assumptions, because as I explained my decision to Arthur, he was quick to accept. Later, during one of our conversations, Arthur would inform me that my initial hesitations was justified, as he “doesn’t like other people knowing about [his] life,” (personal interview) yet he spoke to me with ease, sharing his feelings honestly. In these discussions and Arthur’s willingness to share his life with me, I learned the importance of creating an air of mutual respect, and of a measured

concern for his well-being. I came to realize Arthur is mature for his sixteen years of life, but also had very little patience with adults and others who felt they know what is best for him.

A definite strength of Arthur's is his self-awareness of how he learns best. Whether from a strong sense of self, or from his experience advocating for his needs with an IEP, he understands the differences between a learning environment that is beneficial or harmful to him. And for Arthur, this means working independently, and seeing a need to end his classification as a special education student, and his placement in special education classes.

Special education classification.

Arthur's IEP states that he has a Specific Learning Disability, more specifically defined as disorders in auditory processing and attention. Arthur shared his belief that he has ADHD, as well as his reliance on headphones to focus his attention. The disabilities defined in the IEP correlate with what Arthur sees as the largest barriers to his learning, adding to my belief that Arthur is attuned to how he performs best in school. A glance at his IEP goals also show Arthur's sense of self, as most of the goals focus on his transition to adulthood and the development of personal responsibility. While one goal is academic, focusing on essay construction, the other goals focus on learning how to ask for support, engaging in the community, as well as completing surveys to assist in determining future employment for Arthur. In comparing Arthur's IEP goals with my other students, I was interested in their focus on life beyond high school, and when meeting with Arthur and his mother, Carmen, one of my main goals was to gain a better understanding of what the IEP process looked like for them.

Getting to the core of Arthur's special education classification and current IEP was a path much more complicated than expected. I asked Arthur how long he had an IEP, and he informed me he has had one since fifth grade. I was meeting with Arthur and his mother at this point, so I

asked if they were willing to share what the process was like, getting that first IEP. This is where the story began to spiral out of control.

This story is told to me by Arthur's mother, Carmen. I never had the opportunity to speak with Arthur's father. I choose to believe the scenario Carmen placed before me, as she asked Arthur to correct her if she got any part of the story wrong, and he never corrected her. I also believe Carmen because she told the story with such care and hesitation. Before she began to explain the story of Arthur's SPED classification, she asked Arthur for permission. "Is it okay if I tell her what happened? I want to be sure you're okay with this." Arthur nodded, "sure, go ahead."

Arthur is a child of divorce. Soon after his birth, Arthur's parents separated and though Arthur is now with his mother full time, his parents shared custody of him for several years. By the time Arthur was in fifth grade his father was remarried, and a change in custody was desired by this father and step-mother. The lawyer of Arthur's father had an idea – get Arthur classified as SPED, and a judge would grant custody to the father, in a stable, two parent household, rather than leave him with his single mother. Carmen continues to explain her ex-husband paid three-thousand dollars for Arthur to be tested. Arthur performed exceptionally low on the test. He was designated as SPED, and custody was granted to his father. As she tells the story, Arthur sits across from me, laughing, and shaking his head. His mother asks if she said anything wrong, Arthur continues to shake his head. No, she was right. He is simply shaking his head in disbelief, still not able to comprehend what happened to him.

I sat across from them in shock, unsure of what to say or how to react. Arthur looked up at me and leaned across the table, "Wanna know why I failed? I had to get up early on a weekend to take that test. I went in and they told me the test didn't matter. That I wasn't being graded or

anything. So, I didn't care. Didn't even try" (personal interview). He says all this with a wry smile on his face, withholding a chuckle. When he finishes he puts his head down on the table between us and I see him begin to shake. For a moment I think he may be crying, but no, he is laughing, on the verge of hysterics. His mother looks worried, suggesting we move on to another topic, but Arthur just looks up, still laughing and says its fine, but has one last thing to say. "Just, I mean, who does that to their own kid?"

After Arthur catches his breath and Carmen decides to move on, the conversation turns to an argument that Arthur and his mother have clearly had several times. There is an ease to the discussion, a sign the issue is not new for them, but there is also a tension. Suddenly Arthur brings his hood up closer around his neck, his posture changes, and his mother turns to me to back up her side of the argument, to which I remain quiet. "I don't blame my mom for my IEP, that's my dad's fault. I blame her for still having it." Arthur believes his placement does more harm than good, holding him back rather than helping him move forward. As it stands, Carmen supports Arthur's continued SPED classification, while Arthur has become his own advocate of sorts, doing what he can to lessen what he sees as the tight grip of his IEP over his academic career.

Academic standing.

Arthur is a fast learner, able to understand content and ideas easily, as well as push himself to think critically about history. This critical thinking and content knowledge can be seen when Arthur is given the opportunity to write. In an argument statement about the impact of the Industrial Revolution (Appendix A1), Arthur was one of a handful of students who took the challenge of arguing for a greater positive impact of industrialization. During the unit I tried to give students information on the negative and positive impacts, but with a surface level

understanding of the content as well as a limited view on only the immediate impacts of industrialization, many students were unable to look beyond the negative effects. Understanding and arguing for a positive impact, as Arthur did, required personal reflection on individual values, as well as placing the Industrial Revolution in the larger context of the modern world we live in today.

In this argument statement, as well as other written assignments, Arthur flourished when given space to share what he mastered in his own words. In comparing the scores of Arthur's summative assessments over the semester, Arthur averaged 84% on written assessments, and 73% on more traditional multiple choice and vocabulary matching assessments. This data highlights Arthur's strength in writing, while indicating that well he does not perform too poorly on more traditional assessments, free-response written exams better fit his learning style.

The area for the greatest amount of growth comes in Arthur's ability to collaborate and work with his classmates. Examining Arthur's comfort with working in pairs or groups led to a clear conclusion: Arthur works alone. This is not simply a preference, this is a fact. Arthur works alone. Not in pairs, not in groups. Alone. Attempts to get him to work with other students will result in him shutting down, as he disengages completely, rather than work with a peer.

Though this was something I observed throughout the semester, the evidence became unavoidable to me on one particular day during our unit on the Industrial Revolution. I planned a lesson where students would be analyzing primary source texts and images about the city of Manchester, serving as a case study for the Industrial Revolution as a whole. Though each student would have an individual copy of the documents, I had students sit in groups of four, encouraging them to work as a group to decipher the documents together.

Arthur came to school a couple minutes late that day. I stood outside and walked into class with him, chatting pleasantly. As we walked into the room he was explaining to me why he was late – he was planning on giving himself a haircut that morning but ran out of time. I laughed and told him that was not a good enough excuse. He smiled, apologized, and said it wouldn't happen again. Once in class I moved him away from his usual seat along the wall of the classroom, more in the center of class, to account for his absent partner, wanting him to have a group to work with for the later activity. This was a mistake on my part. Instantly the cheery, talkative Arthur I spoke to a minute before had shut down. The shift in routine threw him off, and when I explained the need to work in groups, I lost him completely.

During the activity I encouraged Arthur to work with his classmates several times to no avail. Even when I would ask him questions to check his own individual understanding, he quietly mumbled one-word responses. The group he was sitting with was talkative, easily working together to fill in each other's gaps of understanding. Still, Arthur sat there, quietly working alone, never even looking up to see what his groupmates were doing.

Arthur is aware of the optics of this, explaining to me that he knows people think he is a “douche” for his solitary nature, but he doesn't mind. Truth is, Arthur's partner in class has pulled me aside before, sadly sharing with me that she believed Arthur didn't like her. “He never talks to me. Ever. I think he hates me.” I smiled at her weakly, assuring her she had done nothing wrong, it was simply how Arthur worked.

When meeting with Arthur I mentioned my awareness of his preference to work alone. I recalled to him the day they worked in groups and he smiled, “oh yeah. Didn't like that” (personal interview). He was honest with me that he didn't like being moved, and he simply finds other students a distraction. When I asked if there was any student in class he wouldn't

mind working with, he paused, thinking for a moment before ultimately deciding that no, there wasn't anyone. Friend, stranger, even his girlfriend who is in the same class, it doesn't matter. Arthur wants to be left to work on his own. I acknowledged this, and he was quick to thank me for understanding, an understanding that I would find later was critical to a healthy relationship between Arthur and his teachers.

Socio-emotional development & social identity

Do not let the solitary nature of Arthur in class lead to the assumption that he prefers to be alone outside of class. While I would like to scaffold Arthur into working more with his peers, his relationship with students outside of the classroom is typical for a sixteen-year-old. One day as I spoke to Arthur after-school during our tutoring hours, almost all the male students who came in and out of my class acknowledged Arthur, giving him the signature greeting in the community of a head nod and dapping fists. As mentioned with David, this greeting is more a matter of mutual respect than any deeper friendship. As far as close friends, Arthur has a small, but tight group of friends that he holds dear. When meeting with his mother, she shared that their house is the hang-out spot, where Arthur and his closest friends would lounge around, occasionally playing music together. Walking around campus, I often see Arthur with the same group of boys, one with a guitar strung across his back at all times.

When I asked Arthur about his friends, he shared that he feels he is the adult among them, having to remind them of the importance of school and staying out of trouble. Arthur takes this role seriously, and clearly commands respect among his friends. On more than one occasion Arthur has brought friends to tutoring, even if they are not our students, simply to give them a space to complete their work. I have also seen Arthur taking his friends to their teachers after

school, helping his friends set up tutoring schedules. I have celebrated Arthur for his support of his friends, noting his loyalty and kindness to others.

In discussing the nurturing qualities I saw in Arthur, the matter of a new student in our class came up. The student, Rene, recently moved to Monte Vista High School from a city about 20 minutes away. Simply put, Rene was having a difficult time adjusting to the culture of Monte Vista and my classroom, leading to many of his peers becoming irritated with him. Arthur, in his usual blunt fashion shared with me that he hated Rene, when pushed as to explain why he felt this way, Arthur explained that Rene reminded him of himself from the previous year - unfocused and careless.

This moment was significant in my understanding of Arthur, as it allowed me to see his process of self-reflection and growth. Arthur was aware of the progress he made from his freshman year, when his grades ranged from Cs to D-, to this year, where he has several Bs, as well as an A+ in his geology class. This was in part due to an attitude change, one where Arthur decided to put more effort into his work and take school more seriously for the sake of his future. When asked about his freshman year, Arthur feels his grades are more a reflection of his work ethic, or lack of work ethic, than his intellectual ability. There was no moment of epiphany for Arthur's change in course, but instead a gradual maturing process that has occurred over this semester.

Praising the way Arthur took control over his education and his goals for the future, as well as recognizing his uplifting interactions with his friends, I suggested extending that self-awareness and growth to Rene. Arthur scoffed at the idea and informed me he had no interest in smoothing the transition of our newest addition to the class. I left the idea at that, not wanting to

push Arthur too far on the matter but leaving him with clear reassurance that I felt he could have a positive impact on Rene.

The following week I witnessed Arthur and Rene exchanging nods and dappling fists with each other. A few days later, Arthur shared with me that he offered Rene some advice, and Rene was thankful for his help. Arthur appeared proud of himself, knowing he had helped a peer, and I thanked him for looking after his classmates, emphasizing the caring and mature qualities of Arthur that made him a great candidate to be a mentor of younger students. In his own words, Arthur told me he was “built to talk to adults,” (personal interview) that he has a hard time connecting with people his own age. In his interactions with Rene, Arthur showed he can maintain his mature nature, while not being condescending. This is very much a strength of Arthur’s that I hope to further encourage.

Funds of knowledge.

I met Arthur and his mother, Carmen, at a Starbucks in Monte Vista. When I first asked Arthur if he would be willing to participate as a focus student, his mother called me to gain a better understanding of what my intentions were. As we talked on the phone she was very personable and thankful for my interest in her son. When the discussion of visiting her home came up, she grew hesitant, asking me if I needed to perform a “home check.” Upon hearing the word “check” I immediately apologized for not explaining my intent and purpose clearly enough. I began to explain my project and she understood, apologizing herself for her misinterpretation. Carmen did invite me to her home, but as the day got closer, she asked if we could meet somewhere else. I was happy to oblige, not wanting to push her into an uncomfortable position. So, we found ourselves at a Starbucks, a casual, neutral environment that seemed to ease her fear of me being there to judge her.

“Independent.” That was what Carmen wanted to be sure I knew about her son. She continued to share with me what while she saw this as a strength of Arthur’s, it also scared her. “He’s so independent I’m afraid if I get mad and tell him to leave, that I’ll never see him again” (personal interview). As she shared this, Arthur sat across from me, nodding his head slowly in agreement. Unsure of how to respond, I agreed with her, noting his solitary nature in class. Arthur is independent, never needing to be given instructions more than once, and comprehending the content on his own. While independent, I also highlighted that Arthur would occasionally come to tutoring when he was confused, not afraid to ask for help when needed.

I, like Carmen, could see the positive and negative aspects of being so independent. Arthur undoubtedly works well on his own, and his work in class shows he understands the material. However, in the social skills one learns in school, we both worried that Arthur may be defaulting to what was comfortable, rather than reaching out to work with others. Arthur is very personable and respectful, the concern is not his ability to connect with others, but to work collaboratively, to be an effective team player.

This independent spirit aligns with how Carmen described her family. When asked about how her experience in high school has differed from Arthur’s, she spoke of the resources that Arthur has that she did not, inside and outside of school. Carmen explained to me that she began working at the age of fourteen, because in her family, “everyone had to fend for themselves”(personal interview). Further discussing her experience growing up, Carmen attributes much of her parenting style on her upbringing in a Mexican-American household. She, like many of the parents studied in Valdes’ (1996) *Con Respeto*, focused heavily on developing a sense of respect in Arthur, as well as a strong work ethic.

This sense of both working hard and individuality from Carmen's upbringing seem to have extended to Arthur. Beyond simply working alone in class, Arthur has pushed for his mother to take him out of school and place him in an online schooling program through the district. This is a touchy subject between the mother and son, an irritated look crossing Arthur's face as he explains, and his mother, turning to me, reaching out with her hand, trying to get me to side with her on the issue. She believes Arthur needs to be in school, with the guidance and structure that he cannot get through an online program. Arthur feels school is slowing down the process of his growing up, which he defines as working and taking care of himself.

When we talked about Carmen's dreams for her son, she said she was only focused on getting him through high school. And by this she means a physical high school, where he is surrounded by people, rather than any online program. However, as she kept talking it became clear she had ambitions of wanting her son to attend some level of college. Carmen has an associate degree of her own, and various certificates in nursing. Though she currently works as a cashier, she feels her time at school was beneficial, and urged Arthur that whatever job he wanted, he could earn more money by going to school. Arthur nodded along, "I know, I know."

The relationship between school and the Esparza family is complicated. Both Carmen and Arthur see the value of an education, and both strive for Arthur to earn his diploma, but the amount that school has helped him is up for debate. This feeling circles largely around Arthur's classification as a SPED student.

"Do you believe in this 'ADHD' stuff? I think it's all made up" (personal interview). Carmen leans over and whispers this question to me, making finger quotes as she says ADHD. Here Carmen is once again looking for my support, and I avoid her request, giving my full attention to Arthur, asking him to tell me more about his ADHD. As Arthur continues to explain

his trouble maintaining focus, he rolls his eyes at this mother, indicating that this topic, like several of the topics we discussed, was a common point of contention between the two. In research looking into the ways different racial and ethnic groups view mental health and disorders such as ADHD, there has been evidence of Mexican-origin families generally seeing ADHD as fake, an excuse to hide lazy or rude behavior (Perry, Hatton, & Kendall, 2005). Carmen is of this belief, complicating her ability to convince Arthur she is genuine is her desire to help him succeed in school. This belief places Carmen in a strange situation, as she believes the SPED coordinators assessment that Arthur benefits from his IEP and special education classes, yet does not believe in the disorder that arguably is at the root of Arthur's continued SPED classification. This is a cause of frustration for Arthur, who hopes his mother would allow him more freedom on the matter of his SPED classification.

As mentioned earlier, Arthur blames his mother for his continued SPED classification. For her part, Carmen feels the placement in special education classes, as well as the IEP, are benefiting Arthur in ways he refuses to understand. Carmen trusts the teachers and SPED counselors who work with her son, believing that they know what is best for Arthur. This deference to professionals is a common point researched in the SPED community, as culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) parents "found it difficult to disagree openly or challenge the professionals because of a deep-rooted deference towards teachers" (Kalyanpur, Harry, & Skrtic, 2000, p. 126) Carmen follows this belief common among parents of color, and this limits her willingness to accept Arthur's view that this SPED classification is limiting him, rather than supporting him.

Experiences, interests & developmental considerations.

There is a clear resentment from Arthur about his identification as SPED. The issue is not the label itself, Arthur makes that clear, it's the limits he feels are placed on him because of that title. Not in the way students treat him, or his ability to make friends, but in two class periods a day going to basic skills classes. In him being pulled out of class in elementary school, distancing himself from the learning his classmates were doing, leaving him constantly needing to catch up. Due to the unique circumstances of Arthur's original placement into special education, he sees the last five years of special education classes as useless. Arthur admits he has ADHD, and feels his IEP is helpful, but would rather be removed from the program completely than be granted any support services with an IEP.

This year Arthur's frustration with his SPED placement came to a head, leading to behavior issues. His freshman year Arthur was placed in a special education class, Basic Study Skills, and this year he was placed in the class again. He explained that during the first week of school he realized the big project they were to complete over the semester was the same project he had completed the previous year. Arthur did not feel the project was particularly valuable the first time, let alone to complete it a second time. So, in response to this Arthur's behavior began to shift, as he would walk out of class, leaving the teacher to mark him truant. This behavior continued and led to an emergency IEP meeting. At the end of the meeting, Arthur was no longer in the Basic Study Skills class, freeing him a class he could fill with an elective, a spot he filled with guitar.

I believe this struggle with his identification as SPED has contributed to Arthur's desire to take online classes. Arthur takes learning seriously, and even shared with me that he sneaks into his local middle and elementary schools to do homework when there is nowhere quiet to

work at home. Arthur makes an effort to go to tutoring when needed, and even though he is currently failing math, it is not for a lack of trying. And though Arthur takes learning seriously, he doesn't seem to take the institution of school and teacher too seriously.

Arthur is a student with a chip on his shoulder, that much is clear. When I ask what he and his mother look for in a teacher, they both quickly respond with a desire for teachers to be understanding. Not forgiving, or lenient, just willing to listen to the reason behind Arthur's actions. Earlier in my conversation with him and his mother I mentioned his use of earphones in class. I asked why he used them, and he shared they were a comfort to him. There was a lot of yelling in the house when he was growing up, and so his music became a safe haven, a way to drown out the sound and his anxiety. He explained he puts them in when the class starts to get loud, to block out the extra noise. I thanked him for sharing, and explained I was okay with this, but I needed him to keep an ear free to listen to me when I talk to the class, he agreed. As we talked I told he should realize his other teachers do not know why he puts his earphones in, and so they assume he is being disrespectful.

This was what Arthur and his mother were looking for. I did not give him a free pass, but I allowed him to explain his side, and explained my own, and this willingness to listen to the reasoning was enough to earn their appreciation. To the point, when I asked Arthur why he wanted to graduate early, he mentioned the desire to not deal with teachers anymore.

I mentioned earlier that Arthur takes his *learning* seriously, there was a reason I chose these words instead of simply saying school. I did this because Arthur seems to see school as a barrier in many ways, keeping him from his full potential, and his ambitions. Arthur clearly understands the value of an education, but he does not see the value of attending a physical school.

Arthur wants to transfer out of Monte Vista High School and enroll in the online schooling program offered through the district. With a current 2.5 GPA, Arthur is on track to graduate, so his decision is not rooted in the need to recover credits. Rather, the root of Arthur's decision is his desire to be independent. Alluded to throughout this study of Arthur has been his discomfort with teachers, and his behavioral issues around the dynamic between himself and his teachers. While I have built a positive relationship based on understanding with Arthur, this is not how he feels about his other teachers.

Generally, he has a tense relationship with his teachers, beyond the confrontation between himself and his Basic Study Skills teacher. A look at Arthur's discipline record describe a disrespectful, insubordinate student. When I broached this subject with Arthur and his mother, Carmen takes the side of the teachers. Carmen's view is typical among CLD parents (Jung, 2011), whose respect for authority leads her to feeling the teacher is always right and must be shown respect. Arthur does not share this view but has adjusted his approach to dealing with his frustrations towards his teachers. Where he would previously argue with his them, he developed a different tactic as his freshman year progressed, to simply not attend class. "I'd rather ditch or not go to class than show up and it cause a scene" (personal interview). This mindset ultimately hurt Arthur's grades, further straining his relationship with teachers, and further enforcing his intention of leaving a traditional school setting.

Arthur sees two major benefits of attending high school online, his lack of interaction with teachers, and his ability to work at his own pace and in his own style. Arthur is aware of his limited patience with teachers, and views online schooling as a way to avoid any possible disagreements with his instructors. As a student who also feels aware of his own learning style, Arthur also feels the isolated nature of online schooling will benefit him.

Learning styles have been described as how a student acquires information, as well as how they interact with other students and teachers (Diaz & Cartnal, 1999). In examining different learning styles, it has been argued that students benefit from different environments, including a change in setting. Referred to as “distance education,” online classes have grown in popularity over the last decade, extending beyond college campuses into secondary education. The benefits of online learning have been found by the Center for Online Learning and Students with Disabilities (2016) to be particularly helpful for students with disabilities, as it offers them flexibility, individual differentiation, and a safe space to learn. Carmen has been hesitant to support Arthur’s wishes, but Arthur is set on the opinion this change will be best for him. Ultimately, Arthur sees this course as a way to speed up his graduation process, allowing him to begin his adult life as a working man faster.

When Arthur speaks about his future, he envisions himself as a hardworking father. His interests lie in automobiles, looking to work as a mechanic. He is currently in a regional occupational program (ROP) focusing on auto mechanics, which he is taking to prepare for what he hopes will be his future career. At age sixteen now, Arthur is not working, but it is what he looks forward to in life. “I’m meant to work with my hands. I just want to start working” (personal interview). Working is how Arthur defines his future, with little detail beyond this.

Arthur has shared with me that part of his desire to do well in school is rooted in his relationship with his parents. If it needs to be stated clearly, Arthur does not feel as though his parents have supported him academically. Arthur shared with me that he has had to learn how to ask for help at school, and frequently attends tutoring because no one in his household is able to assist him. How this ties to Arthur’s future? “I wanna do well in school because when I have

kids, I want to be able to help them do homework. I wanna be able to support them” (personal interview). At 16 years old, Arthur is thinking of how he can take care of his future children.

It is not simply the consideration that *if* he was to have children Arthur wants to be able to help them academically, much of Arthur’s future circles around being a father. He already has the names of his future children picked out, one for a girl and one for a boy. At his age I am both impressed and concerned by his focus on having a family, however for Arthur, this is how he defines success: a financially, emotionally stable family. The family he does not feel he had growing up. This dream of being a parent, a parent very different from his own, is at the center of the future Arthur dreams of for himself. His definition of being a responsible adult goes hand in hand with being a supportive parent. This view alone gives insight to Arthur’s feelings towards his mother and father.

Ultimately, at sixteen, Arthur feels mature and independent enough to not need the support or input of his mother. When explaining why he was willing to share details of his life with me, Arthur made it clear, “I don’t want a mom. I don’t need a mother figure. And you’re not trying to be one. I appreciate that” (personal interview). Mutual respect and understanding is what Arthur thrives on, the willingness to stand back and let him make his own decisions, rather than make them for him. Arthur is in the process of taking his life and education into his own hands, to reshape the traditional education setting into an environment that fits his individual assets and needs. It is an honorable decision Arthur is making, and while I am unsure of the outcome, I appreciate and support his decisiveness and strong sense of self.

Action plan.

As the end of the semester approached, Arthur informed me he was approved to begin taking courses online. Though I was proud of his perseverance, I was saddened by the thought I

would no longer have him in my class. The feeling must have been clear on my face, as Arthur was quick to explain he would still be in my class. In a truly individualized educational plan, Arthur will be taking his core classes at school, history, English, math, and science, but will take additional credits online, leaving him with just half a day in a traditional setting. Beyond the knowledge I will continue to have Arthur in my class, I feel this half-time schedule is a good plan for him, allowing him to test the successfulness of online schooling, while continuing in a traditional setting as well.

I believe the hybrid learning environment will benefit Arthur, as well as serve as a compromise of sorts between himself and his mother. Though not completely what Arthur was looking for, studies have shown the benefits of hybrid schedules for students with disabilities (Sublett & Chang, 2018). This flexibility will allow Arthur to strengthen his personal responsibility skills of working independently, as well as offer him the social time and relationship building he needs to work on among his peers and teachers.

While I understand Arthur prefers to work alone, I very much intend to develop his willingness and comfort in working with his peers in the upcoming semester. As I move the class into groupings of four, Arthur will need to interact with his peers to be successful. Though he pushes back on any mention I make of working with his classmates, I believe Arthur can do well with others. Along with the relationship Arthur was built with Rene, I have also seen Arthur make progress with his usual think-pair-share partner as well. This was the student I noted earlier, who felt Arthur hated her. I informed Arthur of her feelings, and he indicated his sadness at her feelings this way. Within the week I saw Arthur making an effort to talk to his partner, smiling and having friendly conversation with one another. As I will continue to teach Arthur in

a traditional classroom setting, I plan to focus on developing the social skills he is looking to avoid by taking his online classes.

Beyond his social development, I am also considering ways to support Arthur's academic vocabulary development. While strong in his content knowledge, in both assessments seen in the appendix (A1, A3), Arthur needs to develop his understanding and use of academic vocabulary. This discomfort with academic language is typical of his peers, and so the development of sounding like an expert in the historical subject they write about is a focus of mine for the whole class.

Similarly, as I discussed in my plan for David, I am nervous about getting into what I consider to be finer details of writing mechanics, such as vocabulary. However, I feel it is a skill worth developing in class. With scaffolded sentence frames, and having students practice using vocabulary terms in sentences, I am hoping to develop this skill. In doing this I believe Arthur will benefit tremendously, as he will continue to grow in his writing, an area that is already among his strongest skills, while also developing more traditional test-taking skills such as filling-in-the-blank with vocabulary terms.

Case Study 3: Michael Diaz**Demographic information.**

Michael was the first student to speak with me after I was introduced to my class, a month into the school year. When class ended he came up to me, not to introduce himself, but to ask how he could earn extra credit from me. He stood out immediately. With his question, I knew I wanted to work with him to make this class as meaningful as I could for him.

As the weeks went on, Michael continued to be a student who engaged with me, asking for help and approaching me fully as another teacher in the classroom, while many of his classmates were still unclear on my role. Through this I came to the decision to focus on him, and I began to look through his records to find where Michael could fit into my ethnography. The roster showed me he was an English Only student, and he was marked neither as Special Education, or GATE. Still, knowing the largely working class, immigrant demographics of Monte Vista, I continued to believe Michael could fit as my student with exceptional life experiences.

In all honesty, part of what drew me to Michael was the ways he reminded me of myself. In a classroom with students from my own community, I did feel a bit out of place, unsure of how to use my own insulated experience at Monte Vista High School as a student to build a relationship with students who generally lacked the tools and interest in honors and AP classes. In Michael I saw a way to bridge the gap, through his enthusiasm, and over eagerness of have the best grade in the class. However, I also knew this connection would not be enough to justify my selection of Michael as a focus student. We clicked instantly, and my master teacher, Aimee, made it clear to me that the ease with which Michael and I connected was worth investing in, whether he would become my focus student or not.

One day while Michael attended after-school tutoring in my room he mentioned a need to leave early to make it to his credit recovery class. The alarms went off in my head. Michael, my overeager, 110% student who currently had an A+ in all classes except math, an understandably difficult subject, was in credit recovery? I looked deeper into his transcripts and discipline records and saw a student that did not match the student I saw in my class every day. The questions I had after looking through his record solidified my decision to focus on Michael, however my reasoning for this decision was much different than it originally was. This was no longer about focusing on a student I felt I could understand, whose behavior in class felt familiar, but a student whose motivations and actions I was completely confused by, and who seemed to be going through a significant maturation.

My first discussion with Michael about his life occurred as he was cleaning the desks of my classroom one day after-school. He came to class a few minutes late that morning and begged me not to mark him late. "My parents will go crazy if I'm late. Please, like, can I come clean your desks or something?" I agree, telling him I expect to see him at the end of the day. True to his word, Michael showed up after school and thanked me, picking up the disinfectant wipes from the corner of the room and getting to work.

As he made his way from desk to desk I built up the nerve to ask him to be my focus student. Michael was the first student I asked, my test run on how to pose the question. His response? "That's sketchy, Ms. Fregoso." I was not off to a great start. I stumbled a bit through my explanation, trying to reassure him he was not in any trouble, that this was a reflection of how well he was doing in the class, and my curiosity on his shift in grades and attitude from last year to this year. He understood, but was still unsure, "but then you'll like, know who my parents are." I laughed. Yes, yes, I would. The more we talked he warmed up to the idea, promising me

he would ask his parents about it that night. Sure enough, the next day he came in and informed me his parents said yes, I thanked him for keeping his word, and he begrudgingly nodded his head.

Michael is incredibly bright, with concepts seeming to come easy to him, but what has been Michael's struggle is making the decision to use his skills to do well in school, and life in general. A quick glance at his GPA will present an overly simplistic image of Michael. Currently sitting at a 3.52 GPA, it is reasonable to conclude Michael is an overall solid student, never facing much of a struggle in school. This first glance, along with his current grades and the way he presented himself in class – eager, determined – led me to make that incorrect conclusion. The 3.52 GPA masks a long and difficult road for Michael, born out of complicated life circumstances, and a long inner struggle. It does not tell of his place in a drawn-out custody battle, his mother's methamphetamine addiction, his expulsion from middle school, and his issues with drugs, depression and suicidal thoughts. And because it does not show the struggle, it ultimately fails to show Michael's determination, his maturity, and his growth in how he has turned his life around. In short, his GPA says nothing about who Michael truly is, and what makes him so exceptional.

Though Michael and I are very different, as the semester progressed, and I gained further insight into Michael's life, I began to see the resemblances between us again. In the ways we lacked self-esteem, and how much of that lack of self-worth was controlled by our performance in school. The notion that a student should not be defined by their GPA is one heard often, part of a movement to acknowledge the whole student, rather than simply give them value through their grades. However, this phrase seems too often be used for students who are struggling in school, not for a student like Michael. But Michael needs to be acknowledged for more than his

GPA, as impressive as it may be, to ensure the development of his confidence, of his acceptance of his past and the steps he has taken, and is still taking, to shift the trajectory of his life.

Exceptional life experiences.

“He’s had a hard life,” Lily Diaz said to me before turning to her step-son, “but one day, your story is going to make a difference. One day your story is gonna help someone and you’re never gonna know who it is. Your story is gonna change someone’s life” (personal interview).

Michael was born in the summer of 2003 to young parents. His mother just fourteen when Michael was born, and his father eighteen. The young age of his parents immediately made Michael’s life difficult, but this was heightened by his young mother’s methamphetamine addiction. By the age of three, when Michael’s father met his future step-mother, Lily, Michael found himself bouncing between his parent’s homes. As Lily ingratiated herself into the Diaz family and Michael began calling her “mom,” the custody battle became more contentious.

The way Michael explains it, there was a sharp contrast between life with his birth mother and life with his father. Where his father’s household was one based on structure and rules, his mother’s was a free for all, “she let me do whatever I wanted. She always told me to think of her as my friend, not my mom” (personal interview). This difference began to effect Michael’s behavior in school, as by second grade his father and step-mother began receiving calls from Michael’s teacher, explaining that from week to week Michael acted like a completely different student. This split in Michael’s behavior would continue into high school, as his Lily explained that when Michael would come back from staying with his mother, rules and boundaries had to be reset, describing it as “a whole retraining thing for him” from week to week and household to household.

Middle school was the critical point of Michael's life, where his action began to have greater consequences. In seventh grade Michael was caught selling vape pens at school. While in trouble with the school, Michael also found himself in physical danger as well, as he competed with other students for sales, and was eventually threatened by the older siblings of one of his competitors. Michael's reasoning for his involvement in selling the pens is vague, an uncomfortable topic for him to discuss, as his response was a quiet shrug.

Though the selling of vape pens marked him as a problem student in middle school, what was the last straw for his parents was when Michael was caught cheating on a test. For his parents, who believed Michael was very bright, this was unacceptable, and he was pulled out of traditional school and placed in the Options for Youth program. In this homeschooling program Michael began to get himself back on track, in part because of the isolation, but also due to a new custody agreement between his parents.

In 2015, while Michael was in middle school, his father reached out to his mom, asking her to agree to allow Michael to stay full time with his father and step-mother. Michael's mother agreed. "As his parents, it's our job to get in his way [of getting into trouble]" (personal interview) Lily told me, believing that Michael's birth mother was not doing this for her son. And so, Lily and her husband did all they could to get in Michael's way, eventually moving away from the friends and community that contributed to Michael's behavior in middle school. In this new community of Monte Vista, where they currently live, they hoped it would offer Michael a fresh start.

After the start of what would be Michael's eighth grade year, Lily and her husband rewarded Michael's improved behavior by enrolling him back into a traditional school. The day Michael came into my room to clean the desks I talked to him about this time in middle school.

As I am from Monte Vista, I asked Michael why he attended the middle school he did, rather than the one closer to his home. “I tried to go there, but they said they didn’t want a kid like me at their school” (personal interview). Michael tells me this with a shrug, continuing to wipe down the desks. As I learned more about him, I realized that the way my former middle school described Michael was the way he began to define himself – a problem.

Once back in a traditional school setting, Michael began to struggle again. Between the behavior and careless attitude he brought to class, Michael was forced to repeat the eighth grade. As he repeated eighth grade, Michael became increasingly angry, at his situation, and at his parents. This anger manifested itself in incredibly low self-esteem, and Michael developed depression, even beginning to have thoughts of suicide. Once the severity of Michael’s mental state became apparent to his father and step-mother, they placed in him therapy.

Michael attended therapy weekly, and additionally met with a separate behavioral therapist. In therapy Michael began to open up about the resentment he had built up towards his parents, particularly his father and step-mother, who he believed were too harsh on him. Lily shared that occasionally she and her husband would join Michael in his therapy sessions, allowing the family to develop a more open and healthy relationship with each other. After six months in therapy, his therapist felt it was time to release Michael.

When Michael was in therapy, his birth mother came back into his life. Over the next year, as Michael finished his second year of eighth grade and began his ninth-grade year at Monte Vista High School, the drastic difference between time with his mother and father continued. Lily and her husband discovered Michael was smoking marijuana, and his first semester of ninth-grade, Michael’s grades were made up of Cs, Ds, and Fs. With this, Michael’s father reached a breaking point with his son, wanting to give up full custody. This decision did

not come easily, but it was one Michael's father felt he needed to make both for himself, and his other children with Lily. "I love my son with all my heart, but I couldn't do it anymore. I didn't want to witness him throw his life away. And I have three other children I had to look after. It was hard for us as parents because it was like, do we save one or do we save three?" (personal interview).

December of 2017 is a difficult time for the Diaz family to discuss, when the years of frustration and resentment came to a head with Michael running away from home to go see his mother. The end of this fourteen-year long custody battle came the following February when Lily and her husband found evidence of Michael smoking marijuana at his mother's home. Though his father had considered giving up on Michael, this was the proof he needed to finally gain full legal custody of his son. Michael's mother was immediately barred from contact with her son and they have not spoken since.

Lily understands that Michael is grieving the loss of his mother. She has developed a level of patience for Michael, wanting the best for him, but holding true to the belief that Michael needs structure and rules. But through this whole ordeal, Lily and her husband have also seen their need to encourage their son and ensure they celebrate his victories. When Michael picked up his grades his second semester of ninth grade from five Fs to mostly Bs and Cs, he was rewarded with a trip to Utah over the summer with Lily's mom. "I believe in my heart [the trip] helped him out a lot. He came back so different" (personal interview). Lily believes the chance for Michael to get away from this life in Monte Vista gave him the space he needed to put himself back on track.

Michael has stayed on track so far, with almost straight As this year, and no discipline issues. The expectation for his grades, and behavior were clearly set by Lily and her husband, as

the assured Michael that this was his last chance, any more mistakes and he would be placed back into homeschooling. When talking about the change she has seen in Michael, Lily attributes his motivation to Michael. “I think [the threat of being home schooled] use to be his little push... but now I think he’s his own motivation. He sees himself doing good” (personal interview). Though I am also of the mind Michael has developed a level of intrinsic motivation to do well, the threat of messing up that looms over him cannot be overlooked.

Academic standing.

Michael’s strength comes from his eagerness to do well. Michael wants to succeed and wants to earn the best grade he can. Michael has the comprehension and study skills needed to do well in school. When looking through his interactive notebook, I often find helpful notes on his papers about especially important facts, and explanations of key vocabulary terms. Evidence of these skills can be seen in his annotations on a comparison of two poems we read in class, “The White Man’s Burden,” and “The Brown Man’s Burden.” Though his first reading of the poem showed a common tactic of simply highlighting (Appendix C1), Michael developed the ability to do more thoughtful analysis in the reading of the second poem, after I guided students through how to analyze the text. It is his ability to pick up strategies quickly that makes Michael such a strong student, as he does not feel he is already an expert, but understands he is still growing as a scholar.

In my class, Michael does not struggle with any particular area, though there are certainly areas of growth for him, particularly in writing. Michael is a fine writer, understanding the grammatical structure and spelling of English beyond many of his classmates. Michael does not struggle with the organization of his writing, but rather with the depth of his analysis. As Michael can grasp concepts easily in class, he is able to present his content knowledge with ease

in this writing. However, when it comes time for Michael to take a stance, and argue a point, he falters. In much of his written work Michael provides evidence to back up his claims but making the explicit connection between the evidence and his argument is lacking. For example, in his essay on the impact of the Industrial Revolution (Appendix C2) Michael makes vague reference to the “economic effects” of the time, knowing about poor labor conditions and the development of unions, but the connection he attempts to make between economic effects and unions is weak and unclear.

In part, some of the Michael’s struggle with making deeper connections between content and arguments is his lack of understanding of vocabulary terms, and how to use them authentically in his writing. Michael knows what the vocabulary words mean, as he has earned full points on each vocabulary quiz this semester but has not been provided the tools to use the vocabulary in meaningful ways. Recognizing this as an area of growth for all my students, not simply Michael, in our last unit about imperialism I pushed the use of vocabulary frequently, providing students with sentence frames and guiding questions to develop their understanding of the vocabulary in the context of what we were learning, rather than as singular words with no connections to larger ideas.

While I do not have a copy of Michael’s final written assessment on imperialism, he improved greatly on the authentic use of academic vocabulary, yet still had room for growth in his analysis. Michael made note of this himself, when he came to see me on the last day of school, stating he felt his last paragraph, which focused on his stance of whether imperialism was justified or not, was the weakest part of his paper. I reassured him that he did well, but that I agreed we could push him to a deeper level of analysis, and a greater challenge in what my class has to offer him.

While Michael pushes himself to do well, he does not challenge himself. The truth is that as my class currently stands, it is too simple for him. He understands the content easily, and accepts what is told to him, rarely taking the opportunities I give him to engage in deeper thinking. When asked to argue a point, Michael picks the clearest route, meeting the base requirements for what I ask of him. I believe this is not due to Michael's lack of effort, but rather due to a lack of confidence, and his desire to be right. Ultimately, the area I would like to see Michael focus on this upcoming semester is his willingness to push himself beyond his comfort level, and to feel safe taking academic risks in my class.

Socio-emotional development & social identity.

Michael is popular among his peers, a "cool kid" by all accounts, with a likeable nature and easy-going personality. In Monte Vista, however, the status of "cool kid" does not often pair with straight As, and friendly relationships with teachers, leaving Michael in a precarious position, needing to reconcile his identity as a student, and a member of the Monte Vista community. In his current taking of a credit recovery course, stylish clothing and script, which resembles common graffiti styles of writing, Michael is able to hide his strong performance in school, maintaining his status among his peers.

While Michael can be more discreet outside of the classroom, I have witnessed Michael's struggle to toe the line with me in class. Though limited to one occasion, Michael and I found ourselves in a position where he had to make a choice to challenge me or accept my request for him to get to work. For Michael, the work was easy, and so he knew he could start late and still complete the assignment, so he began to talk with his friends. When I asked the group to get to work Michael quietly refused, and when I asked why he was not working, he looked at me, then his classmates and told me not to worry about him, he would get the work done. Not the most

disrespectful response he could have given me, but still a challenge to my authority. After he said it, I gave Michael a hard stare and he looked down and began to work quietly. Once the bell rang he came up to me, alone, and apologized. I accepted his apology but reminded him of the need to be respectful in class, and Michael nodded.

A look at Michael's behavior records paints the image of a student who is much more defiant than the behavior I saw from Michael this day. While still figuring out the persona he wants to present to his teacher and his peers, Michael has grown in the last year. Though still prone to toeing the line, Michael does not snap at teacher, cursing them out as he did last year. In allowing Michael the space to challenge me in his small way, but ensuring he ultimately did what was asked of him, I hoped to show him he could make mistakes in my class, as long as he was able to recognize the mistake and fix it, which he did.

Part of my intention in creating a space for Michael to take positive risks in class is to counteract his tendency to take negative risks outside of my classroom. Michael is a fifteen-year-old boy living in a community with easy access to marijuana, and he takes advantage of this. A habit that began in middle school, Michael continues to use marijuana as a social tool and way to build camaraderie with his peers.

The last week of school, right before finals I noticed Michael was missing in class, and was surprised, as Michael had not missed a single day of school this semester. Later in the day, while looking through my email I found one from Michael, informing me that he had been suspended for three days, but would be back in time to take his final. My immediate reaction was shock, then disappointment, but in the end, I found myself frustrated with Michael.

Michael had been open with me about his previous smoking habits but assured me he no longer partook in the drug. When asked if his smoking was related to any sense of peer pressure,

Michael was quick to shut the suggestion down. “Hell no! I don’t let my friends make me do stupid stuff. Like they want to ditch, I say no. And I’d never be dumb enough to smoke on campus. I know better than that” (personal interview). And yet, Michael was caught smoking on campus after-school.

Michael has made tremendous progress in his grades and building relationships with his teachers, and his dangerous risk-taking put all his hard work in jeopardy. As explained, Michael does not live in a home that feels like there is space for risks and mistakes anymore. Risk-taking, positive and negative, is critical to adolescent development, and the process of creating a sense of individuality and personal comfort (Nakkula & Toshalis, 2006), and with the pressure from his parents to be *perfect*, every decision Michael makes is unfairly incredibly high-risk. It is these tendencies in Michael to push the limits of his parent’s control and his own well-being that contribute to my desire to develop a safe environment for positive risk-taking in my class to build Michael’s confidence.

Funds of knowledge.

I met with Michael and his step-mother, Lily, after several weeks of finding a date and time that worked for Lily, who works from home as a hairdresser. I was welcomed into the home by Lily, and quickly offered a place to sit. As I took a seat in their living room, Michael nervously said hello to me as he completed his homework at the kitchen table. Sitting beside me on the couch was one of Michael’s younger siblings, Matthew, age four. Matthew distractedly said hi to me when prompted by this mother, as he kept his eyes glued to the television, watching *Larvae Island*. After a few minutes of awkward introductions and thanking Lily for the invitation into her home she asked Matthew to watch television in the other room. He refused at first, but when offered a candy for listening, he hopped off the couch and ran out the room. As Lily turned

back to me, Matthew sprinted back into the room, “Wait, can I get my candy *now*?” We laughed, Matthew got his candy, and the discomfort of the situation dissipated.

Lily was quick to thank me to choosing to focus on her son. She laughed as she told me the story of Michael coming home after I asked if he and his family would be willing to participate. “Isn’t it weird?” She said, in a tone imitating Michael’s, smiling as she recited her response, “No, *Mijo*, it’s a good thing! It means you’re doing well!” (personal interview) I assured her this was true, and that her son was in fact doing better than anyone else in my class. Michael continued to sit at the kitchen table behind us as we spoke before we convinced him to join us in the living room, where he sat on a seat off to the side of the room, slumped over, as if trying to make himself as small as possible while he continued with his homework.

And so, Lily began to share Michael’s story with me, the story I have laid out above. Throughout the story Lily shared that much of her and her husband’s frustration with Michael came from their belief in Michael’s intellect. Several times during my conversation with Lily she described Michael as “bright,” sharing that in elementary school he was identified as a GATE student, and for a time in middle school, was even placed in honors classes. When talking about Michael’s feelings on school she smiled as she recalled Michael as a young boy, “since he was very little he was like, ‘I can’t wait to go to school, why can’t I go to school?’ He was always so eager to go to school, so we always felt that in our hearts that he was going to be something big” (personal interview). With this memory in mind, the Diaz family had high expectations for their son.

In many ways, the Diaz family follows many traditional Mexican-American views of parenthood. With dreams focused less on degrees and credentials, and more on a life as a respectful, hard-working family man, Lily and her husband focus on values common to the

Mexican culture (Valdes, 1996). Beyond this, as parents they knew their limitations in their ability to support Michael academically, so Lily and her husband took their duty to develop a strong sense of respect, responsibility and moral values very seriously, another trait common among Latinx families (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018). The casual Spanish thrown around in my discussion with Lily, and her focus on family and Michael's strength as a big brother further supported traditional values of familism, common among Mexican-American families. For me, though, one of the biggest indications of culture heritage was the view on education.

Michael's family has clear feelings about school: "All the kids know, schools number one. That's the biggest rule in our house, schools number one. Everything else is after" (personal interview). This dedication to their children doing well in school is partially born out of Lily and her husband's experience in school. Michael's father was homeschooled until he was a freshman in high school. At this point, when he entered high school it was too overwhelming, and he dropped out, though he would eventually earn his GED while serving time in a juvenile detention center. Michael's birth mother was fourteen when she became pregnant with Michael, derailing her education. As for Lily, she tells me she was an honors student in middle and high school, but she threw away her opportunities through poor decisions. She sees her own story as a cautionary tale of unfulfilled potential and does not want this for Michael.

The Diaz family very much sees education as the road to a successful life, as the way for Michael and their other children to live up to the idea of being "something big." As much as Lily and her husband want the best for their son, they make it clear that Michael needs to ultimately do well for himself. "This is what's going to give you your future. Like, you getting through schools not for us, this is for you" (personal interview). And while Lily and her husband have high hopes for Michael, they ultimately do not define success as a college degree, but hard work.

Sure, they would love Michael to attend college, but with the life Michael has already experienced, success for him is defined by stability and responsibility.

I believed Michael being in the room would be good for him, to hear the kind words his step-mother and I had to say about him, but as Lily shared the ins and outs of Michael's history, I felt I was intruding. I felt I learned secrets about Michael he did not want me to learn, so I was careful about how I responded to the revelations Lily shared with me. Through much of my time there I sat quietly while Lily talked, Michael adding his input occasionally, to confirm a story or detail. When Lily was done I sat there for a moment, gathering my thoughts before deciding how to respond.

This response felt heavy, as though this was a moment I could make or break my relationship with Michael. Because of the vulnerability Lily and Michael showed me, I decided to give it back, telling them of my own struggles after college with depression. Careful not to make it sound as though I was trying to turn the attention to myself, I kept it short, getting to the main point quickly: growth. Michael had a hard life, full of difficult situations and decisions he needed to make. Though he made what could be defined as poor decisions throughout his life, he ultimately decided to right his path to be the person and student he is today. Admiration and respect come from perseverance and struggle, and I made it clear to Michael how much I admired his determination. I reassured him that seeing the value of your struggle is something that comes with time, that it, like building faith in oneself, is a continuous process that we must learn to be patient with. Michael avoided eye contact with me for a moment, then looked up and offered me a quiet, "thank you. I appreciate that."

In an attempt to diffuse the seriousness of the moment, I asked him if this was weird, hearing good things about himself. With this question Michael returned to the energized student I know,

shooting up to look at me with a “YES! I’m not used to this!” We all laughed, his step-mother taking the moment to let him know that it was okay to accept the praise and be proud of himself the way she and her husband are proud of him. Michael nodded, admitting it was getting easier with time to internalize the supportive words he heard from others, after so long of only internalizing the negative.

Experiences, interests & developmental considerations.

Michael walks through school with what can only be defined as “swagger,” an ease in his greeting of peers, and charming smile. But beneath this confident image, Michael suffers from low self-esteem, much of it rooted in his past performance in school. The impact of grades and being held back in school can be deep, “[creating] feelings of alienation and low esteem,” with disciplinary issues being a common result (DeRidder, 1990, p. 154). From what Michael has shared with me, this was very much the case for him. Michael was labeled as GATE in elementary school, passing the test with ease, but once in middle school, and placed in honors classes, Michael struggled, and his behavior became increasingly reckless. If the grades were a result of the behavior, or if the behavior was a result of the grades is unclear, but for Michael they were undoubtedly connected. I believe his past failures are what contribute to his lack of willingness to challenge himself in my class, leading to an increased need to create a space for Michael where he feels comfortable taking risks.

I believe Michael could excel in an AP or honors class, and I have shared this belief with him. As I have brought up the fact I will gladly write Michael a recommendation to be placed into AP U.S. History next year, he shared his interest with me, as well as his hesitation. “My worry about taking an AP class is that last time I was in honors classes, I failed” (personal interview). Michael says this with his head down, the swagger he usually carries himself with

gone. After acknowledging his concern, I reminded Michael of all the distractors occurring in his life in middle school, and the growth he has achieved this year. Though not fully willing to buy into himself just yet, Michael could recognize his progress, and left our discussion feeling more capable of taking on the challenge. Seeing Michael's willingness to be vulnerable with me, I knew it was time to debrief my meeting with his step-mother to get his side of the story.

Though Lily gave me a complete story of Michael's history, I was very much aware that this was her version of his life. It was what she saw as the positive and negative impacts on his life, and ultimately it was her opinion on what she believed was the cause for Michael's turnaround in school. It was a beautiful story, a complete hero's journey of sorts, with a trip involved that led to a rebirth for Michael. A few days after my discussion with Lily, I pulled Michael aside to clarify that as much as I appreciate his step-mother sharing so much information with me, I wanted to hear from him.

When I asked Michael to share his version of his life he laughed, noting that while his step-mother didn't lie, she didn't get it all quite right. The first point of clarification I asked for was about the reasoning for his turnaround. I asked if the trip over the most recent summer was as transformational as presented. This question garnered a bigger laugh from Michael. "Nah, Ms. Fregoso, it wasn't that at all." I pushed him to think of the reason why, and he hesitated, unsure or unwilling to share the truth with me. There are questions that I allowed Michael to not respond to, however, this was a question I was not willing to let go unanswered. After a few awkward moments of silence and Michael shifting back and forth on his feet, he looked up and told me, "I just wanna be something. I wanna do something with my life" (personal interview). He enjoyed the trip with his family, he admitted that much, but his reasoning for suddenly going to class every

day, to earning A's in his classes was much deeper than a trip. Michael was realizing how his actions would interfere with his future.

Unfortunately, Michael is still in the process of learning the consequences for his actions. As mentioned, within the last week of school before finals, Michael had been suspended for smoking marijuana on campus. In my discussion with the Assistant Principal of Discipline about Michael's suspension, he noted Michael's grades and the progress Michael has made since last year, and he, like me, was rooting for Michael and hoped he would not allow old habits to derail his growth. Though I do believe in his ability to learn from his mistakes, Michael is a student who I believe will always be torn between his past and his desire to "be something" in the future.

Michael's view of his future is unclear, his desire to be something is not concrete, but his ability to see how his performance in school will impact his future shows he understands the stake of his grades. In truth, there are many factors standing in the way of Michael's possible success. His prior expulsion, recent suspension, and repeated year of eighth-grade puts Michael at an incredibly high risk of dropping out of school (Noltemeyer, Ward, & McLoughlin, 2015). These realities could easily give way to fatalistic views about Michael's future, but knowing these facts, and the student Michael is continuing to develop into, I instead find myself hopeful, and incredibly proud of his determination.

Action plan.

Michael possesses a tremendous amount of potential in his academic ability and personality, and with the proper guidance and support, I believe he is capable of flourishing at a four-year institution. Though only a sophomore in high school, and while I have no intentions of pushing the idea of college on him, a significant part of my action plan for Michael is developing the skills and confidence he will need if he does decide to pursue education after high school.

With this goal in mind, much of my plan focuses on developing deeper analytic skills in Michael, as well as pushing him beyond his academic comfort zone, to take positive risks and challenge himself.

In writing, I feel Michael is ready to move past many of the scaffolds I have set for his peers to guide the structure of their writing. Michael now needs support in developing deeper level thinking. I am unsure how to meet this need, however I feel increased work in inquiry-based learning will be beneficial. Beyond this, I will push Michael to consider the counter-argument in his essays, this will force him to approach the content from another angle, as well as develop his ability to make a stronger argument. These assignments will need to be low-risk, as I develop these skills over a unit, rather than pushing Michael to only challenge himself when the time comes to take an exam.

As we get into increasingly modern history over this next semester, and the impact of history becomes more visible than some of the prior history we have studied, I also want Michael to develop the historical thinking skill of considering the ethical dimension. I believe having Michael write about what he feels is right or wrong will both strengthen his understanding of the content, while serve as a tool for deeper analysis.

With this being said, I have concluded that while I will support Michael's need for a challenge in my class, to best meet his needs I also need to have a plan for his social-emotional development. Much of this plan is influenced by ideas of culturally responsive teaching and considering the development of the whole child. I hope to support in Michael a sense of "perpetual self-discovery, perpetual reshaping to realize [his] best self, to be the person [he] could be," (Gay, 2000, p. 15) and to do this by being understanding of the goals he sets for himself, and of the ways his difficult past have shaped his outlook on life.

The master teacher I am working with, Aimee, also teaches AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) which looks to offer academic as well as social-emotional support to students. In this class, students are given a graphic organizer to create a four-year plan for their high school careers. In doing this, students must consider their interests, the classes they have done well in, and the classes they have struggled in. Planning out their future allows students to see the opportunities they have, and to realize they may have a path to college. I intend to complete a four-year plan with Michael, as I believe this process will be valuable for him, as he needs to be made aware of what his options are, and in this, be aware of what is at risk if he continues to make decisions that negatively impact him.

In my attempts to build his self-esteem and confidence in his identity as a student, I have recommended Michael to join Monte Vista's Academic Decathlon team. While Michael did not show a tremendous enthusiasm when I first broached the topic with him, he was willing to consider it. I shared with him I felt it would offer him the challenge he is missing in his current classes, give him a productive outlet for his time after-school, would further his growth and maturity as a student, and ultimately, would give him an opportunity to get to know the AP U.S. History teacher. As I have agreed to assist with Academic Decathlon this year, I let Michael know I would be there to support him and ease his transition. While I am ultimately unsure if Michael will agree to joining the team, I believe my continued encouragement of his academic development will offer him the boost in his confidence he needs to continue to have a positive outlook for his future.

Concluding Thoughts on Case Studies

In my time working with David, Arthur and Michael this semester, I have been validated in my decision to focus on students who required me to challenge my own sense of comfort and understanding of the students at Monte Vista High School. While I am very happy to be working at my former high school, this experience has served as a reminder of how unique all students are, even if they are from the same community.

I have come to realize that while my shared cultural experience offers me an entry point for building relationships with my students, it is not enough. Developing a level of trust and vulnerability with my students has been a slow process, requiring myself to create a positive learning environment for my students, in which they felt safe being wrong, and asking questions. It was not enough to reassure them that I too was from Monte Vista, I had to set expectations and limits on my students. I needed to create an environment that allowed students freedom, while also providing them the structure to succeed. What this research project has made clear to me in the matter of creating a safe environment for my students, it is that each student has a different understanding of a safe environment, yet in being fair, and understanding, I can build a solid base for each of my students to begin to feel comfortable in.

As each of my focus students has individual views on education, and such diverse academic skills and areas of growth, my research has also forced me to move beyond common instructional practices to try to best meet each of their needs. To do this, I allowed David and Arthur to take vocabulary tests verbally with me. I allowed David to earn points back on a written assessment by sitting with me and discussing imperialism. I found clubs on campus to engage Michael in the challenge he needs. I also came to the conclusion that the slow progress of scaffolding, and skill building does lead to worthwhile results and is worth investing time into.

While I may not be an English teacher, and I may not feel prepared or willing to give up instructional time to teach my students how to write a thesis, it would be unfair of me to expect them to complete a task they have no experience with. And so, it is my duty to teach them the skills I once thought were beyond the limitations of my subject.

When I began my research, my first focus was on students with the lowest grades in my class, as I felt my research and support of students needed to focus solely on their academic success. However, in working with David, Arthur and Michael, I have realized that I will be unable to have a meaningful impact on their academic success if I do not develop their own sense of confidence and motivation to succeed through social emotional learning. It is not enough to create a classroom where students buy into me, I must also work to ensure my students buy into themselves, and see their own lives as worth investing in. I understand this is a goal I have set for students that may be more profound than my time with them will allow, but if I give them even one tool to guide them on the path to self-worth and confidence, I will feel successful.

Ultimately, rather than allow the uniqueness of my three focus students to become a point of anxiety for me, I have found I am capable of meeting the each of their needs, as long as I have the same patience with myself, that I have for my students. This year is a learning year for me. I am not expected to be the perfect teacher. I am meant to make mistakes and through those mistakes, I will become the best teacher I can be.

Part C: *What is happening in my community, school, and classroom?***The City of Monte Vista**

A walk-through Monte Vista will present to you a quiet city, with *paleteros* walking through the neighborhood, and fruit vendors standing at the corners of the city streets. A small city made up of a handful of major cross streets, Monte Vista is home to only one high school, which serves the population of Monte Vista, as well as many students from the neighboring cities. With two close exits on the 10 Freeway, which runs through the city, visitors driving down the freeway could blink and miss Monte Vista. A tower marked with the city's logo, along with the Monte Vista mall and a major car dealership, are the defining characteristics for visitors driving through.

A small city in the metropolitan suburbs of Los Angeles, Monte Vista was once home to small tribe of indigenous people, called the Serrano. Living along what is now a small creek that runs through the city, the Serranos found a home, but as expansion of the United States spread west, the native populations were moved from the area. The next significant population in the region were farmers, with the valley Monte Vista is located in being a center of citrus groves for several decades. Once sprawling groves of lemon and orange trees, Monte Vista and the surrounding cities have transformed into familiar suburban areas, with homes and shopping centers taking the place of trees.

As the city of Monte Vista has developed it has remained small compared to many of the neighboring cities, with an estimated population in 2017 of 39,000 people according to the U.S. Census. Of this population, an estimated 70% identifies as Latinx, additionally, 33% of residents are foreign born. Over the last decade the percentage of foreign-born residents has remained relatively constant with an overall drop from 38% in 2012 to the current estimate of 33%.

Though many immigrants to Monte Vista are from Mexico and Central America, a walk through the city and neighboring communities will give a hint to the considerable population of Vietnamese immigrants as well. Regardless of race and/or ethnicity, 61% of the population of Monte Vista speak a language other than English in their homes. In analyzing the U.S. Census data, the two languages other than English that appear to be most prominently spoken are Spanish and Vietnamese, the two largest non-white races in Monte Vista. As seen from the data, Monte Vista is a city dominated by populations that are traditionally identified as “minorities,” but that is not the case in the city, or as will be seen, in the population of the high school, either.

Monte Vista is located within a scenic valley in the Inland Empire of Southern California. Located approximately thirty miles from a variety of climates and points of interests, from the outside the location of the city seems to present its citizens with a plethora of opportunities. However, as a life-long resident of Monte Vista myself, I know most of the population of the city does not explore far beyond the city limits. An hour from downtown Los Angeles, numerous beaches, the desert and the mountains, most residents have never visited these areas. Either due to a lack of transportation or financial stability, most weekends in Monte Vista are spent at home, at local parks, or at the local mall, the heart of Monte Vista’s commercial district.

The opportunities available to residents of the city are not limited to leisure activities, as Monte Vista is also located just a few miles away from the prestigious Claremont College Consortium. This close proximity, however, feels lightyears away to many of Monte Vista’s residents, as most of the population, particularly of the high school students, have never stepped foot onto the campus of any of the Claremont Colleges. As a current student of the graduate school of the Claremont Consortium, my students are often impressed, offering a “so, you’re like really smart then, huh?” on more than one occasion. For the residents of Monte Vista, the

Claremont Colleges may as well be across the country, as they do not feel like an inviting space for members of the surrounding community to explore. In truth, Monte Vista has a limited population who has earned a college degree, with only 14% of the population having earned a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to the U.S. average of 31% (U.S. Census).

Monte Vista is a working-class community, with a median income of \$54,000, a value below the national average. Within the community there does not appear to be an outward issue with homelessness, however, as of 2018, there was a total of 265 homeless students attending Monte Vista High School. To meet the needs of these students, teachers at the high school started a walk-a-thon to raise money for the school's homeless students, a tradition that began in 2008, and continues to this day. Though started by grassroots action at the high school, the walk has become a tradition of the city, with local government officials coming to speak at the 2019 Miles for Monte Vista Walk-a-thon, and with several local business sponsoring the walk, or donating resources to the participants.

The economic heart of the city is arguably the Monte Vista Plaza, currently being revitalized with a new name, new theater, and new dining options. The mall offers many students at Monte Vista High School with many of their first jobs, but over the past decade the number of stores in the mall has declined, as a walk through the shopping center offers several dark, chained up storefronts. This, along with the construction of new features to attract more customers leaves the mall currently in a state of flux, a place that seems it would be the local hangout spot for high school aged kids, but instead is seen as "lame" by many of my students.

With the mall an unlikely place to see many teenagers spending time at, the local parks have become major centers for students. A park a few blocks away from Monte Vista High School, locally referred to as "Shark Park" due to a large plastic shark for kids to play on, is a

particularly hot spot for students after-school, as the park includes a skate park, which opened in 2005. Built as a joint project between the city of Monte Vista and the Tony Hawk Foundation, the skatepark has remained popular for the youth of Monte Vista, as a drive by the park at any time will show a range of populations using the park, from young children, to teenagers, and even adults.

The skate park is the main gathering center for my students. On any given day there will be at least two or three of my students skating in and out of the bowl of the park. Though skateboards are the primary tools used, there are also a number of students who ride their scooters and bikes through the skatepark. From my discussions with students, skateboards are critical in Monte Vista as a mode of transportation for my students, many of whom are not old enough to drive, or cannot afford a car. As Monte Vista has rather limited bus services, running up and down only three of the major streets, walking or skating is how many teenagers get around the city. An insight into the influx of skateboarding in Monte Vista can be seen in some of the changes to the physical aspects of the school since eight years ago when I was a student. Where bike racks used to line the front of the school, today there are limited bike racks, and these are often empty. Now, along the side of the wall, next to the administrative offices, are skateboard racks. These racks are always full of boards, and I often also have students who will leave their boards in my class due to all the racks being taken. In this working-class community, skateboards are a gateway to freedom for many of Monte Vista's students.

Beyond the freedom it allows, the boards also give students the opportunity to express themselves, as they choose the designs and stickers for the bottom of their boards. Their boards are very much a point of pride for the students, as if I mistakenly say a board belongs to the

wrong student, they become very defensive, making it clear that “my board is way cooler than that.”

Connected to Shark Park is the Civic Center of Monte Vista, including city hall, the city library, a youth center, as well as a senior center. Residents of Monte Vista receive an Activities & Programs guide for the city twice a year, which looks to “create community through people, parks, and programs.” Within this guide is information about the programs offered to residents of the city, ranging from youth programs, youth and adult sports, and senior events. Along with this is information about scholarships to the local community college, and English language development classes for adults.

Monte Vista has seen a significant shift in housing over the last 15 to 20 years. Once a city dominated by apartments, duplexes and small, one-story houses, the development of two-story track housing in any open lot in the city has affected housing. However, many of the students attending Monte Vista High School continue to live in apartments and duplexes, with few living in the newly developed housing.

While the housing described is the most common housing in the city, there is also a small trailer park in the city, where a fair number of students live. As a lifelong resident of Monte Vista, I was aware of this trailer park, but had never been to it, and in the last several months of my time talking to students and teachers at Monte Vista High School, I have learned it is a common place of trouble. There have been several shootings and murders at the trailer park, and it is a meeting place for the older high school students.

Overall, Monte Vista does not feel dangerous. The number of gangs in the neighboring communities and violence seen at the trailer park, however, belie the possible dangers of Monte Vista. In truth, while there is not significant numbers of violent acts in Monte Vista, drug use is

common for both my students, and their families. Over the course of three months, from August to November of 2018, there were eighteen incidents of students violating controlled substance rules on school grounds. Within my own class I have had a number of students suspended this year, both for possession of marijuana, and for possession of alcohol. In discussions with students they see drug use as unproblematic, a common enough occurrence in their lives that they do not understand the risks to their health. As they generally do not see drug use as a problem, they also do not take seriously the school policy against the use of possession of the marijuana.

Marijuana use, and to a lesser extent, vaping, are an open secret at Monte Vista. Upon my arrival to the school I commented on the new bathrooms installed in the history building. I was excited to see the addition, and to note how much nicer they looked than the older restrooms. My comments were met with laughs, as the other history teachers informed me that those bathrooms were the spot for students to smoke in. Sure enough, within a month one of my students was caught smoking marijuana in those same bathrooms. With this knowledge, the bathrooms are routinely checked, but students continue to use them as a space to smoke.

Along with smoking, bathrooms are the most common scene for tagging incidents. At least once a month a school-wide email is sent out to staff informing us that certain bathrooms will be locked as they clean up graffiti, this tactic is also used to better be able to monitor which students are using the bathrooms, to better find the culprit of these incidents. In my time at Monte Vista I have also seen an email sent out with photos of the tagging, asking teachers if they recognize the style or name used.

Tagging is a personal form of artwork. Several of my own students script in a style commonly seen in graffiti. This is a habit I do not push against, but I do inform students that if I

ever see them writing on my desks in these markings, they will be in trouble. Having a student script your name in their style is also seen as a sign of respect, as I have seen several teachers, including my master teacher, Aimee, hand up art students have given them of their last names around their classrooms. In this, teachers at Monte Vista encourage the culturally distinct artistic styles of their students, while also making it clear there is a time and place for such writing, and this line is the difference between art and vandalism.

Community Events & Community Members

Monte Vista's political atmosphere very much represents that of a small city. Citizens are involved, as in the most recent election for mayor in 2018, voter turnout was at roughly 50% of total voters, yet they are wary of change to leading political figures. Up until his death in 2018, the previous mayor of Monte Vista served for 23 years. In speaking with community members, his name is well known, but his policies less so. For citizens of Monte Vista the selection of one mayor for over two decades is less a reflection of their belief in his leadership, and more a fear of what a change in leadership could mean for the city. Yet, over the past two decades the city has seen considerable change, with the development of a new police station on the edge of the city, the revitalization of the major shopping center, as well as an influx of new housing developments in many of the previously empty lots of the city. Many of these changes are seen by the community as a waste of money, with no immediate benefits to the citizens apparent, leading to a resentment of the spending of their tax dollars.

The community members I spoke to about the city were mostly neighbors and parents of students at Monte Vista High School. The people I spoke to reflect the demographics of the city, largely Latinx, several of whom did not speak much English, and so felt disconnected from the political undertakings of the city. Though invested in the city and happy to live here, there was

no real sense among the community members I spoke to that they had much of a voice in the politics of the city.

While there may be a disconnect between the city and citizens in the realm of politics, in general city life and culture, the connection is much stronger. Monte Vista has a yearly summer festival, as well as live entertainment and movie screenings over the summer every few weeks. The music genres range to reflect the demographics of the community, with oldie rock bands, Chicano rock, and mariachis performing in the local park near city hall, Shark Park. Having previously attended these concerts in the past, there is a considerable gathering of citizens, with word of these concerts spreading to people beyond the city limits. At these concerts one will see a range of food vendors, with families taking the time to spend a warm evening outside with their community.

As the only high school in the city, there is a tremendous amount of buy-in from the community, with opportunities given to our students. Among these opportunities is the Monte Vista to College program done with one of the local community colleges. Through this program, students who attend Monte Vista High School all four years and live within city boundaries will be given a scholarship covering the cost of classes and textbooks for two years at the local community college. Beginning in 1998, the program has shifted over time from only being available to students who attended school in Monte Vista since elementary school. As stated on their official website, however, “the program has proven to be so successful that City of [Monte Vista] officials and representatives have chosen to expand the scholarship and services to serve additional students in the [city].” The development and expansion of the program to serve newer residents of Monte Vista show a commitment from the community to ensure all members of the

community are provided with opportunities to explore higher education, no matter their financial situation.

The investment between the school and community is reciprocal, with students at Monte Vista High School required to complete 20 hours of community service in order to graduate. Along with this requirement for seniors, all students in the Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program are required to complete three hours of community service every semester. Once the hours are complete, students must also write reflections on how they helped the community, and why they feel their involvement is important. To ensure students are aware of the ways they can help in Monte Vista and throughout the surrounding community, posters are taped to the walls of the AVID classroom, with a dozen or so suggestions of where and how students can offer their time to organizations and schools in the area. It is this equal commitment between the city and school that allows for the creation of programs such as Monte Vista to College, and the belief students in the city are worth investing in.

School Site Research

“They’re proud of their school. They’re proud to be here. They’re proud to be a Cavalier.”

Monte Vista High School just completed their visit from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) this February, their first formal visit since earning a six-year accreditation in 2013. I was on-site as this visit occurred and was able to see the school’s response to the visit, as well as attend the final Report to Staff and Stakeholders presentation by the visiting committee, where they gave an overview of their findings, highlighting Monte Vista’s strengths, as well as areas of growth. Overall the committee was impressed with the use of technology in the classroom and opportunities provided for students to enter life after high

school as college and career ready. However, the largest point of focus for the visiting committee was the culture of the school. The quote above is from a member of the committee who wanted to ensure all stakeholders at the presentation were aware of the feeling that radiated from the students on campus.

I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to interview the principal of Monte Vista High School, Nicole Alvarado. In meeting with me we discussed her view of the relationship between the school and the community, and also the relationship between staff and students. Much of our discussion focused around the WASC visit and report, which had finished the day before our meeting.

For Nicole, the answer to what made Monte Vista High School different from other schools was simple yet complex: magic. There is a level of care and concern that she has not seen as any other site she has worked at. Principal Alvarado worked as a teacher and as an administrator at several schools, some with very similar demographics to Monte Vista, and others with very different demographics. No matter the school, Alvarado noted that the teachers at Monte Vista go above and beyond in their commitment to supporting students. “Our staff notices when a student’s habits change – when they suddenly stop doing work, when their attitude changes in class, when they stop talking to other students, and we don’t just observe this behavior, we comment on it to let students know we see it” (personal interview).

During the WASC visit that occurred this year, Principal Alvarado presented a challenge to the visiting committee: ask any student if they feel cared for at this school, they will all say yes. After their three days on campus, the committee was happy to admit that they took up this challenge, and Principal Alvarado was right, each student asked not only said yes, but could give a specific example of what a member of the staff has done for them.

A quick example of how seriously Principal Alvarado takes her responsibility to build a genuine connection with students: a new student recently transferred to Monte Vista High School, and Principal Alvarado was able to identify him easily, as she did not recognize the student. As his first week at Monte Vista went by, Principal Alvarado along with other members of the staff noticed the student wearing the same clothes for three straight days. When they broached the subject with the student, they learned he was homeless, and were quick to provide him with the support and contact information of organizations in the city that could help him.

While the focus on the social-emotional development of students at Monte Vista High School is admirable, there is still room for growth. A critical area of focus identified both by the school administration and WASC was the expansion of mental health support services. There are currently six guidance counselors on campus to serve the almost 3,000 students, whose jobs range from academic counseling as well as general mental health counseling. Beyond the school there are counselors that work for the district that work move from school site to school site. While there are ways for students to get help, ultimately the demands of the students are higher than can be met by the limited staff available on campus on a day-to-day basis.

With a high student population and limited counselors on campus, the staff largely takes responsibility for fostering the growth and development of the students in regard to college readiness. While arguably all staff are committed to supporting the students in this area, the AVID department takes the bulk of the responsibility for ensuring students are aware of the path to college. Monte Vista High School is an AVID demonstration school, with many AVID strategies implemented across disciplines. With the current student enrollment in AVID at about 500 students across all grade levels, AVID makes a considerable impact across the school,

targeting students who generally lack the intrinsic motivation and awareness of the fact college is a possibility for them.

Each year students in the AVID program fundraise to attend trips to visit colleges throughout California, including private and public institutions. With a trip to San Diego and a trip to Central and Northern California, Monte Vista students are able to visit colleges they likely would never have the means to visit on their own. In speaking with students who have attended these trips, it is clear they have a significant impact on the students. Both in the chance to be away from home for a few days, and for the opportunity to feel out the type of college atmosphere best suited for themselves, these trips are a draw for students who join AVID at Monte Vista.

Along with trips and time in class spent discussing the requirements for college and the development of general study habits and skills, AVID also dedicates itself to changing the culture of the school. At least once a week, students on campus go out to lunch to find various military recruiters on the quad. While these recruiters are a constant on campus, there are no college recruiters to be found. In an attempt to combat the belief in many of the students of Monte Vista that military service is the only road to college for them, AVID sophomores host a student-run college fair every year. With poster boards created by students who have spent over a month researching a particular college, the students serve as recruiters, telling their peers about the characteristics of their school. In this research students become aware of financial aid opportunities, and how college can be affordable to students from Monte Vista's working-class community.

Through the work of AVID and staff across campus, students are encouraged to attend any form of college, from community colleges, to Cal States and Ucs, with a focus on local

private colleges as well. Though the presence of AVID on campus, as well as programs such as Monte Vista to College and agreements for guaranteed acceptance with qualifying grades to local California State colleges, students at Monte Vista are attending college at higher rates than previously seen. And while college is not a goal for every student, the shift in the expectation among students, and the culture of the school to see college as reasonable are seen as part of why students have reached a graduation rate of over 90%, according to staff on campus.

With AVID, there are also student run programs that look to promote the academic success and pride of students at Monte Vista High School. Programs such as Renaissance and Link Crew work to celebrate academic growth and success, with posters, rallies, and recognition of students through food deliveries and pancake breakfasts. In these student led groups, there is an investment in academic achievement, and these groups truly focus on a growth mindset. No longer is acknowledgement of academics solely for students with straight A's, but students are now recognized for reducing the number of classes they are failing. While dropping from failing four classes to two classes may not be a goal other schools look to celebrate, at Monte Vista the intention is for all students to feel success academically, no matter how small.

School Mission & Demographics

The demographics of Monte Vista High School very much serve as a microcosm of the larger community. With a student population currently at 2,899 students, 87.4% Latinx of who are Latinx, Monte Vista does not have a particularly diverse student population. Among this Latinx population however there is diversity, with students coming mainly from Mexico and Central America, some as first-generation immigrants, and many others who were born here in the United States. The current number of undocumented students attending Monte Vista High

School is not publicly shared, but from my discussions with teachers and administration, there are at least a handful of students who are undocumented.

As a school-wide Title I school, Monte Vista serves a heavily working-class community, with 91% of its students qualifying for free and reduced lunch. In staff meetings this number is not hidden, but rather celebrated to ensure all staff are aware of the needs of our student population. Monte Vista High School prides itself on meeting the needs of these students, with student and teacher led events such as the annual Walk-a-Thon, clothing and food drives, and collecting prom dresses and tuxedos to donate to students who cannot afford to buy or rent their own.

With the high number of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch, the school is able to offer all reduced prices for tests such as the PSAT, SAT, and AP tests. With this, Monte Vista pushes all students to take advantages of these tests, particularly the PSAT, with all sophomores required to take the test, along with all freshman students enrolled in the AVID program.

Among the biggest points of pride for Principal Alvarado is the graduation rate at Monte Vista High School. In my meeting with her she lit up as she explained the school has a graduation rate of over 90%, a number she explains is unheard of for the student population the school serves. A look at statistics gathered by the state show the graduation rate for Monte Vista High School in 2018 was actually 91.8%, which is higher than both the district rate of 89.3%, and the overall rate of graduation in the state of California, which in 2018 was at 83%.

Along with a high graduation rate, another positive area for the school is the focus on ensuring our students are A-G eligible. A-G refers to the general requirements students need to be offered acceptance at California state colleges and universities. Within these requirements are the number of classes each student should pass within seven different subject areas. Ranging

from core classes such as English, mathematics, science and history, to electives and fine arts classes, the state of California has easily laid out for students the base requirements for acceptance into the California public college and university system.

A walk through any class at Monte Vista High School will have at least one poster hanging up explaining what the A-G requirements are, with the phrase commonly understood among the student population. In the most recent WASC report offered verbally to the staff at Monte Vista, the prevalence of A-G throughout the school and the high level of student understanding of the requirements was highlighted as one of the areas the school is excelling in, as we are ensuring students are aware of the opportunities available to them. According to Monte Vista High School's California School Dashboard report, the number of students in 2018 identified as prepared for college/career was 54%, an overall increase of 6.3% from the previous year. These numbers are based off a collection of data, from students who have completed the Career Technical Education (CTE) program, students who have performed at a Level 3 or higher on both sections of the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments (SBAC), students who have earned a score of 3 or higher on two Advanced Placement (AP) tests, students who have earned a C- or better in their A-G coursework, as well as students who have completed at least two years of Leadership/Military service. With a wide range of ways for students to be identified as college/career ready, Monte Vista is able to offer students a variety of classes and opportunities for them to feel ready for life after high school, whatever that may look like for each student.

Over the past decade Monte Vista High School has shifted in their goals for students, and within the last three years those changes have been cemented with the creation of new Schoolwide Learning Outcomes (SLOs). The branding of the SLOs has been a deliberate process, as Principal Alvarado shared with me, the goal to make them measurable but also

memorable to students and staff. Promoted as the “ABCs” of the school, the objectives are summarized in four main goals: adopt a growth mindset, be college and career ready, communicate effectively, and finally, to serve, support and synergize.

Posted in every classroom, the SLOs are the goals of the school, created to fulfill their overall vision statement: “All students will graduate ready for college and careers.” Where the focus was once on readiness of college, the administration now calls for the preparation of students in career development as well. These goals are also very much adopted by the staff, with the belief in continued professional development and growth as a team, as well as setting meaningful examples of responsibility and communication with parents and the community. With these goals in mind, Monte Vista High School has set high expectations for themselves, however administration is still in the process of developing a way to measure the outcomes and effectiveness of these objectives. The development of a way to measure these objectives were designated as a critical area of focus both by the school, and the visiting WASC team. With a growth mindset permeating the school, administration is determined they will develop a system to meaningfully analyze the effectiveness of these newly developed SLOs.

Along with the school vision statement, Monte Vista High School also boasts a thoughtful mission statement:

“Our mission at Monte Vista High School is to foster intellectual, emotional, and physical development of all students in a safe school environment. We strive to empower students as self-confident and self-directed learners who will make positive contributions to society locally and globally.”

The mission statement of the school reflects the whole-child approach teachers and staff take towards education. The belief in developing students into confident, motivated young adults

permeates through the school and the focus on college/career readiness. In my meeting with Principal Alvarado a significant part of our discussion focused on ensuring teachers and students understood that many college skills are career skills, and more generally, are skills to being a responsible, respectful adult. We agreed it is our duty as educators to make the purpose of our teaching as explicit as possible, to ensure students understand how what they are learning can help in their futures. In providing students a safe space to make mistakes and take risks, Monte Vista is supporting the development of self-confidence and self-efficacy in their students, to ensure they see themselves as valuable members of the community who have ideas and talents to contribute.

The last critical area of focus identified both by Monte Vista administration and the WASC committee, was the continued development of parent involvement. Currently Monte Vista reaches out to parents in a variety of ways. Among these are Back to School Night, booster clubs for parents, Coffee with the Principal, as well as Coffee with the AVID Coordinators, which all take place in the Parent Center. Most recently the math department at Monte Vista has created a family math night, where students are encouraged to bring their families to campus after-school for a variety of math-based games and activities. While these actions are taken to make parents feel welcome on campus, there is still work to be done. Looking through the Twitter accounts of the Monte Vista administration will show pictures of these events, and while there are parents and family who attend these events, the turnout is often low.

The disconnect between schools and parents in heavily Latinx communities is well documented (Valdes, 1996). While this is not a problem exclusive to Monte Vista, there are steps being taken to remedy the separation between families and school. For parents who are not comfortable visiting campus, efforts have been made to make teachers and staff more accessible

to parents through the use of websites such as SchoolLoop. SchoolLoop offers parents a way to email teachers, and staff, as well as a way to check their children's grades, as all grading at Monte Vista is done through the SchoolLoop website. These efforts make the work done in the classroom more transparent to families and are seen as a meaningful step to beginning to create a comfortable relationship with parents. Principal Alvarado made it clear to me that while parents will always be encouraged to visit campus, teacher availability through phone calls and emails continues to be the most commonly used form of parent engagement.

Classroom Explorations

As a student teacher I am currently sharing a classroom with my master teacher, Aimee. As a teacher for twelve years, Aimee takes a lot of pride in the classroom she has created, with posters, art and school banners hanging around the room. As an AVID teacher as well, pennants from dozens of schools hang around the classroom, proving to be a point of interest for many students, who ask about where the different schools are located. Along with college pennants and posters of Monte Vista's SLOs and the A-G requirements, much of the room is taken up with whiteboards. The whiteboards in the class are used to clearly demonstrate the agenda, objective, and homework for the day to the students.

Beyond the academic based posters and maps, there are also signs of the cultural heritage of Aimee and me, a culture that reflects that of our heavily Latinx, and more specifically, Mexican, students. With *papeles* hanging in the front of the classroom, pictures of Frida Kahlo behind our desks, and a quote from Benito Juarez on the wall, students gain a view into our culture, along with their own.

Across all classes my students are majority Latinx, which most being of Mexican descent, but a fair number being from Central America. Of these students, a handful are first

generation immigrants themselves, some currently identified as English Language Learners, while other immigrant students have been reclassified. As most students speak English and Spanish, both languages are used in our class. Spanish is often used as a tool in the class to relate to students, to make a joke, or clarify a point that is unclear. Spanish is never the first tool used in teaching, but rather is used as a supplement when needed.

As a social studies teacher, I am able to draw on students' personal experiences and beliefs to explain a point. When explaining defensive alliances to my students I drew from their relationships with friends, and the need to protect each other to make the reasoning for alliances clear. Recently in trying to understand why the entrance of the United States in World War I made such a powerful impact, I created a soccer analogy, an idea that my students could easily comprehend, as many play or watch soccer, a popular sport among the Latinx population. While this has proved helpful in explaining some concepts, it has also led to tension as well.

Teaching history in a working-class, Latinx community means my students have opinions on the current presidential administration. I have found myself in a careful balancing act of encouraging the development of my students' critical consciousness, while also refraining from making my own views feel like they should be the norm in class. As developing citizens, I feel it is my duty to teach my students to be thoughtful, and to question what is given to them as fact, yet I also must ensure they are educated in their opinions, which at fifteen, much of their opinions are based solely on what is heard from their parents, teachers, or friends. However, my teaching philosophy is that my classroom at times needs to be uncomfortable, and a space for debate, so I continue to ask my students to think of examples of dangerous rhetoric in our government, and question what we commonly see as positive or negative, fair or unfair in our government system. I believe that asking my students these questions and giving them space to

not have a clear answer is my way of treating them as young adults, worthy of the time to develop their own opinions, rather than space to insert my own ideas into.

There are no rules posted in our classroom, instead there is a social contract created between each class and the teacher. With this social contract Aimee and I are able to teach them an important historical term, as well as set the standard of reciprocal respect between teachers and students in the classroom. The social contract is made as a group, with students and teacher both giving suggestions of what should be a part of our agreement, and ensuring the agreement remains balanced and reasonable. Because the social contract lays out expectations for Aimee and me as teacher, as well as of the students, when the students feel we are not holding up our part of the agreement they feel empowered to make suggestions for the classroom based on the rights they have been given in our social contract. With this document serving as our class rules rather than more traditional rules that are only based on student actions, all our classes feel they have a voice in the class to share their ideas and concerns.

Within this contract are ideas that are in fact rules commonly seen in classrooms – be on time, no music when the teacher is talking, keep phones away, work hard – it is the shared expectation that Aimee and I remain respectful, fun and patient that leads the students to be more invested in the norms of the classroom. This view of teachers and students being accountable to each other is the key to my teaching philosophy. Created at the start of this teacher education program, my teaching philosophy was separated into my commitments to my students, and the commitments I expect from my students in return. Through the creation of the social contract with my students, I have been able to put my philosophy into actual practice in a meaningful, productive way. Much of my philosophy to treat my students as young adults, capable of their own thought and worthy of equal respect is rooted in the ideas of Freire and the development of a

critical consciousness in my students. In this I hope the education and environment I provide to my students is empowering, a tool to question the authority of others, rather than a tool of control or indoctrination of my own beliefs.

Though the classroom in Aimee's, I have been able to add my own personality and teaching ideas into the classroom. These additions range from small to large. The first small addition I made was the placement of a Los Angeles Dodgers artifact on my desk. While a small, single item in the classroom, my students were quick to notice the addition and ask me about my interest in baseball. And so, it was through this addition that I was able to begin to build a relationship with my students upon my arrival at Monte Vista High School, a month into the school year.

To the bigger changes I have made in the class, I changed the seating from a traditional row setting to desk groups of four students. This shift was a major adjustment for myself as well as the students, though the change has been generally positive. Students are learning collaboration skills, as well as how to hold each other accountable. With these groupings students are encouraged to share their ideas more often, and are developing more meaningful and comfortable relationships with their peers.

While the groups are successful for two of my class periods, they present a problem for one of my class periods. Each period of the day has a distinct feel to it, not only because of the difference in students and personalities in the class, but also because of the differing times of the day I see these students. Where first period is commonly peaceful, with student engagement building over the hour we have together, my second period class comes in full of energy, talkative about many topics, yet quiet when it comes time to have class discussions.

Finally, my last world history class is seventh period, the last of the day, and the class who I see experience the most extreme of mood swings from day to day. From noticeably tired and quiet, to bursting with energy and unwilling to focus, seventh period is the class that struggles the most with our current groups and presents the largest challenge for me as their current groups serve more as a distraction than a support.

Overall my students are respectful, generally any behavioral issues are due to a lack of self-awareness and restraint rather than intentional defiance. Knowing this about my students, my steps to intervention begin and usually end with me asking students to stop talking and get back on track. There has only been one incident where I have needed to move beyond asking my students to stop a certain behavior, and in this instance, I asked a student to go outside.

As a female high school teacher there are comments I expect to hear from my students over my career, among them is being called a “bitch.” This occurred for me last month, when a student who I have developed a strong relationship with, Laura, appeared to direct the word towards me. Though said quietly under her breath, once the word was out I turned to her and quickly asked her to step outside. Not wanting to let the moment become bigger than it was, I quickly continued with the point I was making to my students, to refocus their attention on the lesson, rather than the incident. Once I had a moment to have students work independently on their notes I stepped outside to see if Laura had waited for me.

I was aware when I sent her out of the classroom there was a strong possibility she would simply walk away from class, having no intention of waiting for me to speak with her. When I saw the student waiting for me outside I was relieved and explained my reasoning to her. She was apologetic, and understanding of why I had to send her out of class, and in a moment I feared would ruin my relationship with her, she was calm, and respectful. She came back into

class and there were no further issues, and the next day she was back to eagerly asking me questions about what we were studying and sharing her recent historical discoveries with me.

In truth, Laura, who I felt I had to send out of class, has been labeled a behavioral problem in other classes. Brash, and quick to anger, she lacks self-control, and does not hold back her thoughts. Knowing how volatile Laura is, and reflecting on the calm discussion we were able to have about her choice of words to me, I felt I had accomplished a small victory.

Laura is brilliant, with a clear interest in history, a characteristic that separates her from many of her classmates. Laura stood out quickly because of her interest in history as well as her considerable knowledge of the subject. Over the months that I have had her as a student I have pushed Laura to look beyond the facts she knows to consider alternate perspective and encouraged her questions in class. Though outwardly appearing tough and confident, when I offer her compliments and praise, Laura becomes visibly shy, twisting her foot and putting her head down, clearly not use to hearing praise, and clearly not as confident as she works to appear to others.

This is an incident with one student, however for me it is clear recognition that I am developing meaningful relationships with my students. Laura is uniquely herself, but her tough outer demeanor, the inexperience with compliments about her academic achievement and curiosity, and her being previously labeled as a “problem” makes Laura very much like many of my other students. Yes, while Monte Vista High School boasts a high graduation rate and percentage of students who are designated at college/career ready, few have had moments of recognition for their individual academic success.

All comments from students in my classroom are met with a thank you and an affirmation, to ensure students continue to feel comfortable sharing their thoughts in front of

others. Even if the comment is off track, I gently redirect the student, asking them to further explain themselves to see if their thinking is correct, or ask another student to share if they have a different answer. For many of my students speaking up in front of their peers is high risk, and in my reassurance, I am ensuring they feel comfortable taking that risk. Feeling free take risks, big or small, are critical to the healthy development of teenagers (Nakkula, 2006), so I believe it is vitally important to create a safe environment for students to do this in.

Ultimately, I believe the biggest tool I have in creating a safe environment for my students is my ability to allow myself to be vulnerable in front of them. This vulnerability began with my introduction to students, where I shared my personal history with my students, embarrassing childhood photos and all. In my honesty about being a student at Monte Vista High School and my own struggles in college, I have been able to show my students that failure is a step in everyone's development. And while I believe introducing myself to students with this presentation was a helpful way for me to start to build a relationship, I feel that every day I continue to create a safe space to be yourself by being comfortable making a fool out of myself in front of my students.

I feel safe in front of my students, comfortable being dramatic, and singing and dancing for them. I'm willing to allow them to laugh at me, to admit when I make a mistake, to show my love and passion for history, and to show when I am touched by the content we are learning. I will cheer students on in their thinking and get excited when they provide me with thoughtful questions and comments, and in this I see student's confidence build in being their own goofy selves.

Recently, I asked each of my world history classes for a volunteer to stand up in front of the class and walk us through the Russian Revolution, as the teacher. I was surprised to see

students willing to volunteer and stand before the class. Across my three class periods when I first arrived students were hesitant to speak up, and now I have students willing to stand up and unabashedly be the center of all their peers' attention. When the volunteer teachers we uncertain of a point they were making, their classmates did not laugh at them, but rather whispered the answers to help their brave peer. Though every day I can see my students become more and more comfortable with each other and themselves, it was fulfilling to, in a single moment, see their progress through the work of three of my students.

While I work to develop the confidence in my students, there are areas where I do not feel I have the tools or skills to support them as needed. Through my three classes of world history, I have only four students who are identified as GATE, so I struggle finding meaningful ways to challenge them while trying to ensure I am also creating lessons that are accessible to their peers. Along with the GATE students, there are no more than 10 of my students of the over 90 I have over three classes that have IEPs. For all of the students with IEPs, most of the accommodations are specifically for English and math classes, and with the caveat that students must ask for their accommodations to be granted. While I try to let students know they can have extra time when needed, many of the students are unaware of what their IEP grants them, and do not feel comfortable taking the extra time. I do not feel as though I need a para-educator in the class with me, but I do wish I had more training with differentiating for small populations of students such as my GATE and IEP students. As they are largely quiet about their difficulties or ease in completing tasks, I find it all too easy to overlook their needs to meet the needs of my other students. This, I believe, is the largest area of growth I need to focus on with my students.

One way I feel I could better differentiate for my students is with the use of technology. While my class has one-to-one access to Chromebooks, students have little experience using

them, and are still learning how to use the computers as tools for learning, rather than way to play games or watch videos for entertainment. The continued integration of technology in the class will likely mean some additions to the social contract so both myself and the students are aware of the expectations for responsible, yet enjoyable and meaningful technology use.

Overall, I believe Aimee and I have created a classroom environment that draws from the goals set by Monte Vista High School, while also respecting the cultural identities and interests of our students. In creating an environment where vulnerability is accepted and modeled by the teachers, I feel the students have benefited and felt comfortable taking educational risks in their answering and asking of questions. Though I know there are areas of growth for the continued support of all students in my class, I can appreciate the impact I am having by recalling what a student said upon receiving a written assessment back: “Oh man, I’m actually smart!” Through an assessment that focused on his ideas rather than testing recall of information, I have seen this student and many others develop a confidence in discussing history and asking opinion-based questions to get to a higher level of thinking about what is presented to them as fact. This confidence in students to engage fully and critically are ultimately the root of my teaching philosophy, and I look forward to further crafting my goals into meaningful, measurable actions.

Part D: *Analysis of Teacher Effectiveness*

The Whole Class Perspective

An examination of student's overall grades from first to second semester will show an increase in their performance. I attribute this growth to a number of factors, ranging from students understanding of expectations, to student's learning from the mistakes of first semester, as well as new opportunities for students to support their grade through in-class participation and activities.

One area students have experienced an increase in, is their understanding of vocabulary over the course of the year, with the average vocabulary quiz score in the low 70s percentile when I first arrived in the class, to the current average on the last few quizzes sitting at 80%. One possible explanation for this increase in test scores has been the continued integration of vocabulary into students everyday learning and activities. While students have always been required to complete a vocabulary chart with their given words, definitions, representative images, and the word used in a sentence, there was much less of a focus on my part to ensure that students noted when vocabulary was used in both my lectures, and student's work and activities. This lack of focus on vocabulary meant that many of the students could recite the words and their definitions but were unable to use the words in proper context or see the word's connection to the larger themes of the unit.

The lack of explicit connections between vocabulary and the work done in class became most clear to me during our unit on the Industrial Revolution. This vocabulary test resulted in the lowest class average of any quiz, at 69%. This, along with the student's improper use of vocabulary in their written assessments, made it apparent to me that there was a need for more time to be spent making the vocabulary more apparent to students, both in their meaning, and

how they words can be used. The next unit, imperialism, I made an effort to have students highlight vocabulary at any given chance, and made my use of the words very clear, frequently asking students to give me examples of the word, or to consider situations that required the use of the relevant academic terms. Examples of the focus on vocabulary in notes and lectures can be seen in Appendix D3 and D4.

This explicit integration of the vocabulary into every lesson, along with activities such as Quizlet have led to an overall increase in student's performance on their vocabulary quizzes, as well as in their use of vocabulary in any written assessments. Both in short answer, and essay-based assessments, students are asked to include at least three vocabulary words in their responses, and their use has become more fluid, showing a clear understanding of what the word means, and how it can be used meaningfully. As students have practiced their use of vocabulary in a meaningful way more often in class, the results have been clear.

While there is research on the importance of practice, I was of the opinion that simply interacting with the words through their vocabulary charts would provide them with enough familiarity with the words, however I have come to understand that the practice students do must be directly related to what I am expecting students to do in their assessments. While one part of their assessments is a simply recall of the definitions, I could not expect them to use the words in context in essays if they only knew the words as singular terms, with no point of reference to the larger relation to the unit.

To the matter of practice, this semester I also took the plunge into homework, providing my students with a scheduled reading assignment, due every Thursday. While this was met with groaning, students have developed the skills necessary to making textbook reading meaningful. The tool students currently use to assess their reading is a storyboard (Appendix D2), where

students are required to answer an objective for each assignment, as well as write a short summary of each section in the assigned chapter, with a question, and an image representing the main ideas of the text. While the general structure of answering the objective and explaining the ideas of each section are set in stone for the students, I also encourage them to get creative with their images, letting students know that for those who prefer to draw, rather than write, they are free to focus more on the images than the summary.

In truth, the images students create based on their reading has given me the most insight into their understanding of the reading. Often, I feel that student's written responses to the objectives have been largely based on finding a line from the text they can easily paraphrase, without giving much thought to the actual meaning. However, with the images I am able to see a more honest portrayal of how students have comprehended the material. As the storyboards are ultimately meant as a tool to support the student, I try not to limit their creativity, leading to some interesting images of stick figures angrily demeaning Stalin, only to face dire consequences for their actions. Though the images range from thoughtful metaphorical drawings to stick figures explaining their ideas in caption bubbles, I truly feel they have supported student's understanding of the content.

The benefit of their reading is seen not only in the storyboards students turn in, but also in the references made to the readings during our time together in class. While I debate with myself whether the reading should front-load the content or serve as a supplement after students have learned the ideas in class, students bring ideas and questions in directly from their reading.

Ultimately, the storyboards have provided a wonderful means of differentiation for my students. Those who need additional explanation of key concepts are able to delve into the text for additional examples and information, and for students who excel beyond the limits of my

class, they are able to explore challenging images and primary sources to deepen their understanding of each topic we discuss.

A major factor in my decision to have students engage with their textbook was my awareness of the use of textbooks in most, if not all, of the junior year U.S. History classrooms. In my discussions with the teachers my students will have next year, it became clear to me that I would be doing my students a disservice if I did not provide them with a way to practice reading from the text, as well as the tools to make that reading meaningful, and productive. After spending several days at the start of the semester training students how to create storyboards, this tool has been used for their reading.

The installation of homework into the class has been met with mixed results. While the students have shared they appreciate having the storyboard as a way to guide their reading and give it purpose, the number of students who turn in the assignment has fluctuated. The first couple storyboards were turned in at about an 80% rate, and as the semester has proceeded, the rate has dropped to roughly 60% of students turning in their assignments.

The reason for this has been attributed to a variety of reasons according to the students, from not having the textbook at home, to not being aware of the objective. And while the turn-in rate is not where I wish it would be, students have been provided with several tools to turn in their assignments, as well as to check what the assignment is, and space to complete the assignment. From tutoring every Tuesday, to reminders in class about their homework, as well as the assignment being posted on the google classroom, students have a variety of ways to take action to ask for help or get clarification on the assignment expectations.

Another major factor for the drop in completion among students has been their becoming bored with the repetitive nature of completing a similar assignment each week. The original

intention when introducing reading assignments was to present students with multiple ways to take notes based on the reading, not just the storyboard. However, as the semester went on, taking the time to teach students a new tool did not seem feasible, so the plan was abandoned, but not the homework. This, along with the realization that not completing their homework would not significantly drop their grade, led to the students' willingness to complete the assignments decreasing.

To address this next year, I plan to make homework a part of the culture of the classroom. The expectation that work must be done in class will be clear, as students will be required to clearly relate their homework to what we do in class through small group discussions. In this, students will be held accountable not only to me, but to their peers in their need to come to class prepared or risk the possibility of embarrassment. Along with this, I will need to offer variety to my students in their homework. This could either be in a choice on how to take notes, or in the ability to decide between multiple assignments, such as reading, analysis of an image or text, or even a reflection on a current event. This choice will allow students to feel they have control over their homework, and will allow students to complete an activity they have the most interest in. Though getting all of my students to complete their homework may never be possible, I want to ensure my students do not feel as if the homework is meaningless and develop their level of responsibility in completing work that is assigned to them, as this will be expected of my students in both college, and their careers.

Personal responsibility is an area of growth I have seen develop over my year with the students. When I first came to the class there were few students who attended tutoring when offered. Though Aimee and I stay after-school every Tuesday, students would not take advantage of the chance to make up work, or to get one-on-one support. As we made it clear to students that

tutoring was a resource they needed to take advantage of, and their participation would have an immediate effect on their grades, more students began to attend. Students came to make up missed assessments, to complete assignments they fell behind on, or to speak with me as an alternative form of assessment, allowing the students to display their learning verbally, rather than through traditional vocabulary quizzes or essays. Once students began to see the effects on their grades, these students continued to attend tutoring, and over time, began to invite their friends to come along to receive help as well.

Along with the increased attendance during tutoring, over the year there has been an increased number of students requesting to attend our third period study hall to make up work or missed exams. For students who are not able to remain after school, this study period provides them the opportunity to catch up in class. The same few students have consistently made use of this period to get extra support, with their grades seeing an increase over the course of the year.

Perhaps the most significant change I have made over this year has been the shift from students sitting in rows, to now sitting in table groups. Originally, I was hesitant to accept this idea, as I felt the classroom management aspect of groups would be too difficult for me to maintain, and I worried about the logistics of creating a classroom environment where all students could see the board, without having to turn around in their desks. When I originally made the switch to groups I felt it was more of a detriment, than a benefit to the class, and the students were not pleased with the move. While the students were happy to be able to speak with each other in their new seat arrangements, the students did not know how to work with each other.

Any activity that was established as a group activity would lead to silence, with the class unfamiliar with how to work cooperatively. Finding strategies to develop student's ability to

work productively in groups have returned mixed results. From numbering desks and providing roles to each number, starting talking in partners, then sharing with their group, exchanging papers with each other to discuss their responses, to activities that require teamwork to fully complete, the students have at times rose to the occasion, and at other times continued to work as individuals, choosing to simply copy their classmates work, rather than discuss their findings with each other. I still find myself looking for strategies to encourage, and even force, group collaboration, but have yet to find the key to successful groups.

With work still to be done to make the most of the current group arrangements, I have seen benefits in the development of a community in the class over the year. Though difficult to quantify, I have witnessed students begin to come out of their shells, to develop new friendships, and an ease in being vulnerable in front of each other when asking questions or sharing uncertain responses to questions.

When I first arrived in the classroom, a culture had already been created, and while it was a positive environment, it was easy for students to isolate themselves, never having to interact with more than one other student in the class. Though think-pair-share exercises were common, interactions rarely went beyond two students, and this led to many students never speaking with each other. Students are still developing the skills to work with each other, but overall, they have developed friendly relationships among their groups. Though occasionally this can rise to be a classroom management issue, I find the bond developed among the students as a positive, and perhaps even a necessary step to the development of meaningful collaboration.

Along with learning independently, students have also developed skills in active focused note-taking. This has been a goal of mine over the course of the year, to move students from copying information on the PowerPoint, to taking notes simply based on what they hear in my

lectures. After months of scaffolding and making my expectations of them clear with various forms of cloze notes and graphic organizers, the class overall has seen an improvement on picking up the most important ideas, and the stories that make the lesson most understandable to them. Though I still find myself giving the students a quick “hint-hint, nudge-nudge” they have made progress in picking up what is important without me needing to be so explicit. This was most evident as students took notes during my lecture on World War II, where almost all slides consisted of picture, with no text, yet students were able to recognize the main ideas and take extensive notes on the course of the war.

With growth still needed, students have overall developed to be more independent, with more time given to student led learning and activities. Though always scaffolded and supported in the process, the last several units have led to students doing more analysis of primary sources and making use of technological devices to learn the content. This most recent unit on the Cold War has required students to work in groups to complete online research on an assigned “Hot Spot,” needing students to depend on their ability to collaborate, read primary and secondary sources, use online databases, and identify the most important information from a text, image or video. As an assignment at the conclusion of the school year, this serves as a strong culminating activity of the skills students have developed over our year together. At the time of this ethnography, the assignment has yet to be completed, but I have witnessed student progress through various graphic organizers and oral summaries they have presented to the class of their Hot Spot’s history during the Cold War.

As a whole, my class has developed considerable skills in the integration of vocabulary, as well as their ability to collaborate. This has been a learning process for both the students and I,

as I needed to adjust my strategies to meet their needs, and I needed to be willing to take risks and admit when a plan was unsuccessful.

The Individual Student Perspective

Case study 1.

My first focus student, David, has seen improvement in a number of areas, most clearly in his punctuality and his sense of personal responsibility in turning in his work and coming to tutoring.

Every morning when I arrive to school I see David and another student of mine at the front of the school, talking with their friends. For most of the school year David would see me, wave, then show up late to my class. While only a minute or so late, and often with the excuse of getting breakfast before class, David nevertheless had made it a routine to not make it to class on time. As several other students arrive to first period late, David did not see this as an issue, even though he arrived at school almost an hour early every day. I had several discussions with him about getting breakfast early, and when I would see him in the morning I would offer a hello along with a quick, “go get your breakfast now!” that would embarrass David in front of his friends. When this did not work, I began to mark David late, giving him one last warning before making it clear this would lead to detention.

Still, David came to class, breakfast in hand and a smile on his face, often coming to my desk to speak with me, as if he was not entering my class after the bell. The change in his behavior came after an IEP meeting Aimee attended, along with David’s parents. Though I was unable to attend the meeting, Aimee asked me what I would like to ensure was brought up at the meeting, and David’s tardiness was near the top of my list.

The day after his IEP meeting, David arrived in class before the bell rang, and when I commented on how happy I was to see him there on time, he laughed and told me his father was not happy to hear about his constant tardiness, especially considering David's father was who dropped him off early to school each morning. I ensured he knew I was glad to hear he would be arriving to class on time, and since that day, David has continued to arrive to class on time, sometimes even early. Even while the classmate he talks with before school continues to come to class late, David has been on time and enjoys coming to speak with me at my desk or stand with me by the door before class begins.

For me the biggest lesson in watching David grow is seeing the importance of communication with parents. Though I did not only want to share the areas David needed to grow in with his parents, ultimately, I feel this kept me from addressing serious issues with his parents earlier than I did. After my discussions with David about arriving on time were only marginally successful, I was cautious to call home and inform his parents of his behavior. This fear largely came from me being unable to control the potential consequences David could face at home if I made his parents aware of his behavior. Even after meeting his parents, and seeing their interest in David succeeding, I was uncomfortable with what I viewed as essentially getting David in trouble. This concern has been an issue not just in my interactions with David, but with other students as well.

This is a major area I need to continue to work on in my development as a teacher. Both to show my students that I will keep my word in terms of my discipline steps, but also to ensure that parents feel what occurs in my class is transparent, and they are aware of how their child is doing in my class – the good and the bad. While I am unsure of just how angry David's parents were with him, there was a change in my classroom, and my relationship with David was in no

way negatively affected, so I am of the belief there was no need to be concerned with how his parents would react. Still, while I know that speaking with parents is expected of me, especially when a student has chronic behavior issues, I remain cautious of when and how to go about this, not wanting to create issues for my students at home, regardless of how much I feel their behavior inside my classroom may need to change.

While the matter of his tardiness was alleviated with assistance from his father, David's decision to be more responsible with his work was made all on his own. As noted in my earlier discussion of David, first semester he was very apathetic about his grade. As long as he was passing, he was happy. This semester I have seen David proudly come into class and inform me has completed his homework, letting me know he should get an A on his work, and turning in each assessment we take with a smile and a "that's 100 percent right there." David has yet to earn a perfect score on an exam, but overall his improvement has been significant.

In completing his work on time, David has maintained a B in class, and due to his increasing engagement with the material, he has developed a stronger understanding of the content. When I ask a question to the class, David is often among the first to answer, delighted to show his knowledge of vocabulary words, and major events in our latest units of study of the World Wars and the Rise of Totalitarianism.

I attribute David's improved investment in my class in part to the relationship I have developed with him. David often offers me song suggestions, as has played rap songs with political messages he wants me to hear. In doing this, I feel David understands I am willing to spend time listening to what is important to him, and that I will not judge his views, both in terms of music, or political leanings. Though at fifteen, David does not see himself as a political teenager, there have been moments in class where his feelings have been made clear. This has

been in our individual interactions, as well as in classwork. This became most obvious during an activity where I explained the significance of protest and resistance, and I prompted my students to consider what they felt was worth fighting for, with the question of “What would you stand in front of a tank for?” which was a reference to the brave protester at Tiananmen Square. David’s response to this question can be seen in Appendix A3, as he shows his feelings on immigration. This is very much a reflection of this family’s history as immigrants. Though David did not provide much detail in his response, beyond his view of race and immigration being connected, he allowed me to read his response over his shoulder, and when I asked about his response he responded with a comment about the lack of compassion from President Trump. David did not share his response with his class but was willing to engage with me on the matter and has done so in the past. While turning in homework may not have an explicit connection to our conversations about music and politics, they underlie the sense of trust and comfort David has with me. As commonly stated, students do work for their teachers, and his may very well be the case with David and I.

Yet, there are aspects of my plan for David that I have yet to accomplish, as some of the issues mentioned in my initial discussion of David have continued throughout the year. The main issue that has remained is the discrepancy between David’s verbal performance in class, and his performance on written exams and vocabulary quizzes. Often David can explain historical events to me with little prompting, giving me the entire history of the causes and course of WWI with me simply asking which nations were in which alliances. David also often goes beyond simple recall, giving his feelings about matters as he shares the facts, and explaining why events happen and how they are connected to the larger historical context. To hear David in my class would, it would be reasonable to assume that he did in fact earn 100 percent on his exams.

A look at David's assessments results in my class will show this his skills during class continue to not translate when it is time to put the answers to paper. In each of his vocabulary quizzes this semester David has earned just above a 50 percent, and on his multiple choice and short answer assessments, David earned roughly 65 percent. In examining his vocabulary quizzes, it seems David does not have the skills needed to navigate his way through the questions. Often his responses seem to be random, with a lack of strategies to make educated guesses to the responses. This can be seen in his recent quiz about totalitarianism, where David used the names of people in response to definitions that described events, or places. I am happy to meet with David after the exam and go through the words with him to improve his grade on the test, allowing him to verbally give me his understanding of the words, yet there is still a need that I am not meeting in reading comprehension ability. Though I will give David alternative ways to show his understanding in my class, I also want to provide him with the tools necessary to succeed in classes where he will not be given opportunities to showcase his understanding verbally.

As mentioned in my action plan for David, I also aimed to improve his writing skills, in terms of the structure and strength of essays and arguments. David's historical knowledge has grown significantly, and his ability to use this as evidence to support his analysis can be seen in a more recent assessment David completed, in Appendix A4. Here, David is able to explain the historical context of imperialism, and the main motivating factors behind the actions of European powers. Still, his analysis has room for growth, as he is not able to explicitly state his feelings on imperialism, instead addressing the assessment as a show of his knowledge, rather than a reflection on the justifications of imperialism, which is part of the critical thinking skills needed to make the study of history meaningful.

Also of note here, is also the fact that David has written considerably more than in his previous assessment, however this took place over the course of two days, and David needed much prodding to focus his attention and return to writing his ideas down on the paper. When asked, he could explain his thoughts, but still needed support and encouragement to put in the effort to put his ideas to the paper.

As I struggled identifying the root of the issue with David's disconnect between what I hear from him in my class, and what I read from him, a possible answer was given during a seminar. When discussing specific learning disabilities in our students, I was introduced to the term dysgraphia. The concept was completely foreign to me, but as I heard it described both by the instructor, and my peers, David came to mind. As noted, and seen in Appendix A2, his handwriting lacks proper spacing, accurate spelling, and does not look like that of a tenth-grade student.

A look at the research into dysgraphia posits that the issue is related to cognitive and fine motor skills issues. For most students, letter formation is learned at an early age, and then becomes automatic, allowing students to "concentrate on spelling, grammar, sentence structure, and other aspects of written language. However, for many students with dysgraphia, letter formation is a cognitive task which leaves little mental capacity to devote to these other aspects," leading to trouble with multiple aspects of writing (Crouch & Jakubecy, 2007, p. 4). If this is truly an issue that David is facing, this means that when David is asked to write, especially for a formal assessment, he is not simply tasked with expressing his historical knowledge and analysis onto paper, but with forming letters, considering spacing, questioning his spelling, and finding a comfortable way to hold his writing tool, on top of what is being asked of the other students in class. As this is a recent revelation on my part, I have not been able to follow up with his case

carrier on campus. Whether this is a diagnosed disorder for David or not, am I considering the strategies I could use to support his needs. With only a few weeks remaining with David as my student, the most reasonable option for me is to allow him to write any formal assessments on a Chromebook, to allow him to focus on his ideas, rather than the act of writing.

Overall, I feel I created an environment for David where he felt comfortable and engaged. Where his voice was always welcome, and where he was forced to consider ethical issues that were relevant to his life. As David moves on to eleventh grade U.S. History I hope his teachers continues to push David to develop his critical consciousness, as his ability to analyze situations is among one of his greatest strengths. However, I would also make it clear to the teacher they must be willing to listen to David express himself, as the written work they will receive from David will not do justice to his content knowledge, or historical thinking skills. This expression must come not only in speaking about academic issues, but allowing him to dance and sing, to share his song recommendations, as well as his exhaustion from a lack of sleep. David is a student who is use to being accepted as lacking motivation, and his future teachers need to be able to challenge this identity that David has become comfortable accepting for himself.

Case study 2.

Over the course of the year my second focus student, Arthur, left the traditional classroom setting to pursue his education through an online district program. Arthur was honest with me about this transition, as I was aware of the possibility during the first semester of the school year, but I was under the impression he would split time between online and in-class schooling. Once we returned from winter break he clarified that the transition would be complete, with all work done online, and we spoke about his decision to follow through with the switch. As mentioned in my earlier section on Arthur, his mother was opposed to the idea of

removing him from a traditional school setting. Arthur shared with me that his mother did not agree with the move but was no longer willing to argue with him over the issue.

Knowing this move was still a point of contention for him and his mother, I talked with Arthur about his thought process in wanting to graduate early and try the online school route, and he remained steadfast in his desire to work independently, without the overbearing guidance of adults. Having a complicated past with many teachers and administrators on campus, Arthur did not feel he could be successful with the reputation he had garnered over his year and a half at Monte Vista High School. He felt he had matured significantly, and part of that maturity was the ability to recognize how he could best be successful. Arthur took the reins on this decision, and in this way had become the ultimate self-advocate that is desired for our special education students. Though his decision was not appreciated by all the adults in his life, the decision was his to make, and he was unwilling to step down. As noted earlier, Arthur can clearly articulate the value of an education, but not the value of school. In order for him to continue to see the importance of an education, he needed to step away from school. With his mind made, I wished him luck, and reassured him that I was proud of his decision to take control over his life, and that I would cheer him on from the sidelines.

Since leaving my class a month into the second semester, Arthur has dropped by after-school to speak with me. When Arthur spoke to me the last day of class he asked if I needed him to remain in contact with me, and while I knew that losing track of him may hurt my ability to complete this ethnography, I was unwilling to hold him back to an environment that he did not feel comfortable in. With this, I reassured Arthur that I appreciated his concern, but not to worry about me. If I needed to, I would reach out through another student, or contact his mother. This made his visit that much more surprising.

As I closed out the lesson on the last class of the period, with a minute or so left, I turned to see a figure in the open doorway and was elated to see Arthur, smiling and offering me a small wave. As the bell rang and my students left, many stopped to greet Arthur with their traditional handshakes and fist bumps. Several students were excited to see him, and for his part Arthur did not appear overwhelmed by the attention. Once the remaining students left, Arthur admitted he had been standing outside my class for the last ten minutes or so. Debating whether to come in or not, he decided to stay outside, not wanting to disrupt the class. As he waited, he listened to my lecture, and shared that he missed the class. This was a significant moment for me in reflecting on my effectiveness as Arthur's teacher.

I cannot give you traditional data on Arthur's progress over a year in my class. Though he shared with me that he was quickly running through the online coursework offered to him, and he would in fact graduate at least a semester early, if not a full year, I cannot explain the growth in his writing ability, in his content knowledge, or critical thinking skills. I cannot trace the trajectory of Arthur's comfort bringing his thoughtful ideas into class discussions, or his ability to make connections across historical events to see the impact in the world today. For this I am perhaps unsuccessful in the expectations of this ethnography, but what I can confidently share with you is anecdotal evidence of a student who appeared to be thriving. A student who took control of his education, in light of a history where the course of his schooling was taken away at an early age, by the selfishness of his father. A student with a robust sense of self, and the strength to stand by his ability to identify his needs.

Arthur was working at the local mall, earning money and learning the skills to be financially independent for the time he is able to leave his mother's home. Arthur was smiling, exuding a confidence unfamiliar to me when he was my student. He appeared to stand taller,

looking up as he spoke, free from the hood that in the past was constantly over his head, a sense of security Arthur was willing to be removed from class to be able to maintain. Before me stood a young man who, while still young, was invigorated by the ability to feel as if he was an adult.

Arthur was a student who prided himself on his independence, and his lack of trust in adults at school. Yet, he came by to see me. He stood outside my class, listening to the lesson, not wanting to disrupt what I was sharing with my students and spoke with me one-on-one for ten minutes. He was eager to share his progress with me, and to ask how I was doing, and what I was doing with my students.

Arthur was a student whose name elicited a visceral response from several teachers. A troublemaker. Disrespectful. Lazy. The negative associations ran deep, yet those descriptors never crossed my mind in my time as his teacher. Through his own maturation, and my hopeful view of each of my students at first meeting, we formed a comfortable trust between each other. When Arthur shared with me his commitment to leaving, I will admit I wondered what more I could have done to support him in my class. I questioned my pushing him to work with others, and if I appropriately acknowledged the needs set out in his IEP. I wondered if I made it clear enough to Arthur that I was on his side, willing to support him, as long as he communicated his needs with me.

Seeing Arthur's ease in sharing his success with me answered those questions. The reality is I may not have met all of Arthur's needs. I perhaps did push him beyond the limits of what he was comfortable with and overlooked his discomfort or disengagement for the sake of the rest of the class. However, Arthur did know I was on his side, and most importantly, Arthur trusted that my commitment to him was genuine. Though unable to explain if Arthur's integration of vocabulary has improved, or if he has sharpened his writing skills, I would argue that ultimately,

I was an effective teacher for Arthur. He would stay after class to speak with me about history, followed through when I encouraged him to open up to his think-pair-share partner, he opened his family wounds to me, and as he left my class the day he came to visit, he hugged me, and thanked me. Arguably, the most significant piece of evidence I have of my effectiveness as Arthur's teacher is our hug, from a student disillusioned by traditional schooling and his teachers.

Case study 3.

My final focus student, Michael, has struggled the second semester of our year together to maintain the trust with his parents, and his motivation. While the semester has not been easy for Michael, in the end I feel he has been successful, as the struggles have led to the learning of valuable lessons for Michael about embracing the strong student he is.

Every few weeks I will check in with Michael to see how life at home has been, and the best indication of the current state of his relationship with his parents is answered a single question: "do you have your phone?" A "yes" indicates Michael has met the expectations of his parents, while a "no" is indicative of a strain on the trust between Michael and his parents. More often than not, when this question was asked, the response was a "no." When asked why this was the case, Michael often did not have a reason, either unwilling to own up to his actions, or unable to understand the rationale of his parents.

Michael's relationship with his parents is much like other teens, but due to his history of expulsions and custody battles, small disagreements can feel like the threat of something larger to Michael. With little room for mistakes at home, Michael feels he is facing a losing battle, where he must be perfect. Knowing the pressure he faces at home, I find myself needing to ensure he understands he has the right in my class to make a mistake. In order for Michael to feel he can take positive risks, he needs to know he has support, and this semester as we have worked

on developing his writing and critical analysis skills, I have provided him that support. Michael is free to ask me questions after class and is not afraid to ask for clarification on difficult concepts.

This willingness to take risks became apparent to me as Michael attempted a strategy in his Imperialism assessment, Appendix C4, that only a couple of his fellow peers attempted: to include a counterargument. In his mention of missionaries helping to end slavery in Africa, Michael considers what may be seen as a justification for imperialism but notes that this improvement does not counter the other negative effects of imperialism on colonized nations. While this is not the most thoroughly explained counterargument, it is still a skill that many of my students are not prepared for. Though mentioned in class as a tool to strengthen ones analysis, by showing their understanding of other perspectives, Michael did not receive much by way of scaffolding in this area from me, so his decision to include this in his essay was a risk. When I celebrated his inclusion of this quick sentence in his paper, Michael beamed with pride, happy to have taken on a challenge many of his peers did not, and to feel that this risk ended up having a positive response.

As this encouragement to take risks continues, this also takes on the form of me encouraging Michael to be vulnerable and honest. When asked to consider what he would “stand in front of a tank for,” meaning what he would be willing to defend, he provided an incredibly thoughtful response, considering his own history, while connecting it to the content we learned in class. As his peers worked, Michael called me over and asked me to read his response, seen in Appendix C3, wondering if it made sense. Michael would stand in front of a tank for treatment for people addicted to hard drugs. Knowing his history, I understood the connection to his mother, yet Michael played it off as an idea rooted in the Opium Wars between Great Britain and

China. I assured him I thought it was a wonderful idea and complemented his ability to connect a modern issue in our country to a historical event. Still needing reassurance of his work, Michael needed to know he could be vulnerable in my class, without it being seen as a sign of weakness, or a mistake.

Because a significant part of my action plan for Michael centered on his continued academic success, and development of his identity as a student, I often check Michael's grades in his other classes. When I check, I am often met with an array of As, and a possible B. Yet, in my most recent check on Michael's grades, I was shocked to see a C in his English class and pulled Michael aside to ask about this. This of course meant I had to admit to him that I occasionally checked his grades to see if he was falling behind in any classes. This admission was a bit uncomfortable for us both, but after taking a moment, Michael looked up at me and quietly asked, "wait... you check how I'm doing?" I nodded my head and quickly redirected back to why his grade had fallen, but Michael needed another moment to internalize what I had shared, he gave me a quick "thank you" before informing me he had not been fully completing his assignments. Why not? They were boring. Michael's response was not helpful in finding a way to improve his grade.

In truth, while what goes on in Michael's English class is unknown to me, the assignments he had not been completing were familiar to me, as several of my other students routinely complain of the lack of purpose of the assignment. Their homework was to complete vocabulary practice through an online resource, which timed how long they worked. Students are expected to practice their vocabulary on the website for a specified amount of time, which can be tracked by their teacher. Several students have found hacks to avoid needing to complete the work, and several others simply do not bother to do their homework at all. The website is most

often referred to as a “waste of time” by students. Though the assignment does not affect my class in anyway, I feel Michael’s experience with it has helped teach me a lesson on the matter of integrating technology into my students’ learning.

Not all technology is effective for learning. There are plenty of website and activities that can be found online that merely replace traditional busywork and handouts seen in classrooms. Simply because the students are required to use the internet or their Chromebooks, does not mean the learning experience is being enhanced. Throughout my first year teaching I have often felt as though I was not doing enough to integrate technology into the classroom. As a new teacher, I know the use of technology is expected of me, and yet I often found myself resisting the use of technology in the classroom, as I did not feel I had found a tool that would significantly enhance the learning that was being done.

As technology should be used as a tool to reach a learning objective, not the objective itself, I struggled to find lessons where technology served as a meaningful addition, rather than purely a replacement. My introduction to the SAMR Model legitimized my concerns and helped me sort through technological resources that moved beyond the level of substitution or augmentation. By doing this, students will be able to interact with the content in innovative and engaging ways, rather than doing the work of a handout on the Chromebook. This discovery of tools relevant to social studies is something I am looking forward to as I continue in my career as a teacher.

Ultimately, for a student like Michael, the nature of his English assignments did not present a challenge for him, and so he did not feel it was worth his time to complete. He needs to be challenged, and as his classes currently stand, this is not the case. When the time for registering for classes arrived, I met with Michael to create the four-year plan mentioned in my

action plan for him. Together we worked out a possible schedule for the last two years of high school, which included taking A.P. U.S. History next year. Michael was hesitant to commit, but I reassured him he had all the tools to succeed in an advanced placement class, he would, however, need to maintain his drive to thrive in such a challenging course.

It is Michael's drive that is my biggest concern as we approach the end of our year together. In truth, for several weeks during the second semester, Michael came into class missing his usual spark. He shared with me that he had been sick and did not have the energy to complete the homework for my class. As he had such a high grade in my class, I was willing to give him the time he needed to recover and turn in his work. As days turned into weeks, Michael continued to appear sluggish in class. In speaking with Michael, he shared his frustration with his illness, and in a moment of honesty, Michael shared that he felt he was falling behind in all his classes, and did not feel he would be able to catch back up. I asked Michael to consider the impression he made on his teachers, and to use his hardworking nature as evidence that he could be trusted to make up any missed work in his classes. Michael did not feel he had strong relationships with his other teachers, yet after we spoke and laid out a plan to improve his grades, he took my advice and was pleasantly surprised to see how many of his teachers were willing to work with him because of time he had put into their classes throughout the year.

This moment was significant for Michael. He still very much sees himself as a student who is labeled as a problem, due to his past suspensions and expulsions from school. Though Michael and I had built a relationship due to the nature of this ethnography, Michael did not feel trusted by his other teachers, and could not believe they viewed him as a valuable student. As Michael moves into his junior year and enters increasingly difficult classes with teachers who commonly are unwilling to hold their students' hands to success, the revelation of the new

reputation Michael had made for himself has been powerful. No longer does Michael need to feel that school is unfair, and that teachers are out to get him, he is able to see the rewards of hard work and determination, and while this was a journey Michael took on his own this year, I believe my selection of him as a focus student for my ethnography served as the first moment the door to this new identity as a student was opened.

In order to be successful in his last two years of high school, and to feel that college is a reasonable goal, Michael will need the continued support of his teachers. Whether this is me, Aimee, or his future teachers, vital to his success is adults who see his potential for success, and do not hold his past against him. Michael needs to continue to be challenged in honors and AP classes, but also needs to be supported, to avoid the feeling of being a failure that derailed him from taking academic risks before. He thrives on being challenged, and once Michael is truly challenged in a meaningful way, I believe he will begin to see his own potential as well, but this must be done in an environment that allows for mistakes. If Michael is expected to be perfect, the result will be disappointing for everyone involved.

The Developing Professional Perspective

In examining my development as a teacher through the focus of the TPEs, I am able to judge the areas I feel I excel in, and the areas that I feel continue to need to grow. The areas I feel most strongly about are TPE 4 and 5, the planning of lessons, and the assessment of student learning.

I entered the classroom a historian. My content knowledge surpassed what was necessary for a high school level survey class, and I believed this would be a strength. As much as this familiarity with the content did ease the transition from historian to teacher, it also presented a problem. I struggled with making lessons that were appropriate for my students, that cut out the

minutiae and got to the main themes relevant and understandable to students. For me, this transition meant the need to cut facts that I felt strongly about, for the sake of my student's ability to grasp the content and bigger picture I was presenting to them.

As the year progressed, I became better able to identify key terms and ideas to center my lessons around. In establishing what I needed the students to know by the end of class, I was able to guide students through the details, to the themes outlined in the standards and the framework. Embracing the creation of objectives for each lesson helped steer my way through a tremendous amount of content.

Though there was content to be overlooked, my knowledge also allowed me to identify when I had placed too much of a gap in my lessons. At times students seemed to be missing a key idea that rounded out their thinking of a particular theme, and I became able to identify the most important information to fill that gap, and more significantly, the best way to present information that would clarify a point for students. I have become aware when a video best suits the needs of my students, when they need more factual information, versus when they need an emotional piece to understand significance.

A recent lesson where this became clear was in my teaching of Communism in China during the Cold War. When speaking specifically about the Cultural Revolution, students could identify the details of the event, but could not grasp the motivation of those involved. In my explanation, and a short video explaining the goals of the Cultural Revolution, the students were not grasping the full impact of the event, and so I was in need of an emotional element to make the importance of the Cultural Revolution clear to students. After searching, I found a video with a surviving participant of the revolution sharing his story of turning his mother in to the police. As the man shared his story, and the song commonly sung by young people in Mao's China,

“Mother and Father are Dear, but Mao is Dearer,” it clicked for my students. The brainwashing, the motivation, the fear, it all made sense to my students as they were confronted by a man who chose state over family.

I consider this an example of my transition from a historian first, to a teacher first. I understand that my job is not to display my knowledge, but to support the development of my student’s knowledge, and do to this requires me to be a teacher before a historian. In embracing the difference, I have developed into an effective lesson planner, who is able to make learning accessible, but also rooted in deep historical context to explain the intricacies of the complex decisions we study in the course.

While I am proud of my development in terms of TPE 4, and area I feel I need to continue to grow in is my ability to assess students, TPE 5. I feel I have made significant growth in this area, however I am also of the mind there is always room for improvement.

I feel my improvement needs to come in a few specific areas, such as meaningful closure of a lesson, as well as whole class checking for understanding. In the spirit of working bell-to-bell, I often find myself not establishing a clear end point in a lesson for each day, as I fear the possibility of students sitting around after they complete any sort of exit ticket or closing activity. It is this concern that often leaves me unaware of what my students have learned as they walk out of my class. I do however, begin every class with a Do Now activity that allows me to check their understanding from the previous day, but in checking their understanding the day they learn, I would be better able to adjust the lesson based off their familiarity with the content.

Inherently linked to this issue of a meaningful closure is the matter of pacing. I do not feel time is wasted in my class, however it could arguably be used more effectively through a more structured pacing schedule. This would allow me to set time for an explicit closure, as well

as keep me accountable to reaching a set objective at the end of each lesson. The inclusion of a personal timer would assist in the development of this skill, and I have already practiced integrating the use of self-timers on my phone to guide my learning, until the timing becomes more natural to me.

Another way the development of my assessment of students can be supported is in the establishment of clear expectations of what students are to do with any time at the end of class, when they finish any possible closing activity. I do not need to fear students packing up early or pulling their phones out if I make working to the bell a part of the classroom culture. As students work with interactive notebooks, there is always work to be done in terms of vocabulary, annotating notes, or summarizing their learning, and this needs to be an expectation clearly set at the beginning of the year, and enforced throughout the year.

To the point of the student's use of interactive notebooks, I view them as a valuable resource to keep students organized, however I feel to hold students more accountable to completing the work in their notebooks, and to keep students on track with the work done in class, they need to be checked more frequently than the once-a-unit model I currently use. In implementing more frequent checks of the notebook, students will not be overwhelmed by catching up with any work they may not have completed and will not feel so inclined to not try to keep up, due to how far behind they may be. This check, however, would not be able to be done by myself, due to the time-consuming nature of checking notebooks. This would require either a self-assessment, or peer-review completed by the students to make it a reasonable expectation to be met throughout the year.

This will require clear expectations in what students are looking for, as well as a form of accountability to ensure students are being honest in their assessments. Possible solutions to this

include identifying a random page I will cross reference between what students said was completed, and what is actually completed in their notebooks. The random nature of this will encourage students to be honest in their assessments, because if a page is marked completed, when it is not, students will lose points in their check-in assignment.

This is a specific form of assessment I feel would better support both my students, and myself. While I have developed my ability to assess students through a variety of styles throughout the year, there are still areas I need to grow in, to ensure I am best meeting the needs of my students. With an exploration of the more technical aspects of teaching complete, the matter of my development as a caring professional is my next area of focus.

Entering the class a month into the school year presented a few challenges for me, such as needing to spend time observing the set culture and norms of the class, as well as feeling beholden to expectations established in that first month. While these challenges were solved through honest communication between myself and my master teacher, there was a larger issue that was a major point of concern. Being placed with Aimee, a former teacher of mine, I knew the energy she brought to class, and the strong bond she is able to build with her students. I felt my students would resent me for coming in and disrupting their ability to spend a year with such an engaging, compassionate, and inspiring teacher. I entered the class with a feeling that I was intruding upon a welcoming environment, and found myself hesitating to speak with students, for fear that would see it as me attempting to force a connection where there was none.

The first few lessons that I taught my students were riddled with self-doubt. I feared I was boring. Aimee ran around class with a flashlight, gracing students with the Enlightenment, and I provided a dull lecture on Thomas Hobbes. She held student's attention with a story of her long love for John Locke, and I guided them through the steps needed to write a meaningful

historical argument. The dynamic felt very much like that of a two-parent household, with a fun parent, and the parent who required the child to complete their chores. I was confident about which parent the students viewed me as.

My students surprised me many times throughout the year, in their creativity, their thoughtfulness, and sincerity, as well as their curiosity and willingness to engage with uncomfortable topics and questions. The biggest surprise, however, came in their willingness to accept me as their teacher.

Within a matter of a few weeks the students embraced me fully. They trusted my knowledge and welcomed my teaching as a change of pace to what they usually experienced with Aimee. As my comfort grew, my personality came out, and while Aimee and I are quite similar, students also seemed to appreciate the differences between what excited each of us, how each of us reacted to their participation and behavior, and what type of help each of us were able to give. The students did not see us as better or worse than each other, but rather as double the resources they would have in a more traditional class setting.

With this internal hurdle of my own making out of the way, and my own confidence building, I began to develop meaningful relationships with my students. I attribute the development of these relationships to this ethnography, and the need to select both a focus class, and particular students from that class. When my first period heard they would be the focus of my schoolwork, there was a buzz in the class. “So, we’re your favorite, right?” I would smile, not giving my secrets away, making it clear that I loved all my classes equally. They didn’t believe me for a second.

As the year progressed, an ease developed between myself and my students, as we came to understand each other, and how far we could push each other. I recognized their interests and

skills, their moods and dynamics among each other, and they learned of my passion, my humor, and my willingness to listen. Perhaps the most helpful piece of advice I received early on in my decision to become a teacher was to limit my sarcasm. When a student has a question, just answer it. When a student is confused, just clarify for them. When a student makes an off-topic comment, redirect them. Now, I am not a robot, so I could not completely shelve my sarcasm, but I came to recognize when it was appropriate, and when it would be harmful. And so, with this knowledge in mind, I became a teacher students were comfortable asking for help, and as the year went on, a teacher that would be willing to listen, without a desire to embarrass them.

While the bond I built with my focus students has been powerful, there are two other students who stand out in my first year of teaching, and whose trust in me I deeply appreciate. The students are incredibly different from each other from the outside perspective, but as I got to know them over the year, I realized they were more similar than they first appeared. The two female students, Laura and Meiyong, were historian at heart, but their presented personalities in my class were markedly different. Along with this, the type of trust they have placed in me is vastly different, from a trust in my historical knowledge, to a trust in sharing personal struggles with me.

Meiyong was born in China and came to the United States at the age of eight. In her six years in the United States she has proved herself to be a hardworking, determined student. Still identified as an English language learner, Meiyong speaks and write fluently, but is incredibly quiet. When I first arrived to Monte Vista High School, she was a student who was easy to overlook. She completed all her work independently, never needing help or to be refocused due to being off task, or on her phone. In a class with several other students needing guidance and support, I allowed Meiyong to comfortably hide in the background.

As the year progressed, I became more comfortable with my students. Allowing my goofy nature to take over in the classroom, as I spoke with passion and dramatic flair. As I welcomed my personality into the class, I feel my students grew more comfortable sharing themselves as well. This included the, up to this point, elusive Meiyong. When the time for new seating arrangements came, I placed Meiyong with a more talkative student, hoping they would balance each other out. I see this decision as one of the best decisions I made this past year of teaching.

Suddenly my class was filled with Meiyong's laughter, and contributions to the class. She encouraged her new table partner, and the two became fast friends. As Meiyong continued to break from her shell, she began to stay after class to ask me follow up questions about the lesson. Several days a week Meiyong would come to me after class, with a question or comment that always blew me away. These were not simply questions for the sake of clarification, but deeper questions, about how racism came to exist, why there is so much hatred in the world, and how the United States and the Soviet Union felt amassing large stock piles of nuclear weapons was a good idea. She was interested in my response, and believed I was wise enough to offer a clarifying response to unanswerable questions. In doing this, Meiyong played a pivotal role in the development of my confidence as a teacher, in more than one area.

Reflecting on why the relationship I developed with Meiyong is so significant to me, I believe there are two reasons. One, I had a fear when I became a teacher that I simply did not know enough information about the content, and that there would be a point where a student asked me a question I would be unable to answer, and I would be exposed as a fraud. I feared that my intellect was not worth being respected by my students. With her questions, Meiyong reassured me I knew more than enough history, but more importantly, that it is acceptable for me

not to have all the answers to my students' questions. That being able to admit that I cannot explain why racism continues to plague our world does not make me a weak teacher, and not knowing every major battle of World War II does not mean I am unqualified. And her decision to come to me, even after I have been unable to answer her questions, has served at the ultimate reminder that my students do not expect me to be perfect, and so I should not expect myself to be perfect.

The second reason my interactions with Meiyong have left such a lasting impression on me is because of the way she reminds me of myself, when I was a student. Mentioned in my exploration of my time as a student was a teacher who has played a significant role in my life. This teacher, my A.P. U.S. History teacher, developed my love for history, encouraged me to expand my ideas about college, and has been an invaluable resource through my time in graduate school, continuing to support me on my journey to becoming a teacher. However, this life changing relationship that I developed with my teacher began with me staying after class, several days a week, to ask him questions. Like Meiyong, the questions shifted from content-based questions, to more thoughtful questions about life. He became a figure I fiercely trusted, and a person I knew I could turn to when I needed guidance. I do not know if my relationship with Meiyong will reach that point, if I will keep in contact with her after she moves on to another year of school. However, the possibility that I could have the effect on a student that my U.S. History teacher had on me, fills me with hope. To know that my students see me as knowledgeable and informed is a feeling that can only be described as encouraging, to consider the long-lasting impact I may have on a student, just by being genuinely passionate and thoughtful in my class. Where Meiyong holds a place in my heart for her trust in my intellect, Laura also trusts my compassion.

Laura is an outspoken Latina, not willing to pull her punches and not afraid to argue and threaten others. Though mentioned in the previous section of this work, my relationship with Laura developed further, and is worth further reflection from a whole year perspective. For my first month or so in the classroom, I very much felt like a member of a special police force, working delicately not to set off a ticking time bomb. One wrong look from a classmate would have Laura cursing and yelling, demanding other to stop looking at her and to “step up” if they had an issue with her. In my class, this aggression was always targeted towards the boys in the class, and never towards the other female students. She had a hair trigger towards her male classmates, who often retreated, always stepping down rather than meeting her challenge. Aimee and I were able to manage Laura by working as a team, often with one of us stepping out with her, while the other remained teaching.

One day, Aimee was not there. As I taught, and the students took notes, I heard Laura yell “Stop looking at me!” The class froze, and all eyes were on her, further setting off her nerves, and I asked her to stop yelling, and to leave the other student alone, explaining that the student was not trying to bother her. She responded with a huff, and as I walked away I heard a quiet, “bitch.” With my backup not in the room, I had to decide what to do in the moment on my own. Without looking at her, I asked Laura to step outside. She quickly stormed out of the room and I continued to teach, not skipping a beat. A few minutes later we reached a lull in the lesson, and the students took time to summarize their learning, while I went outside to see if Laura had waited for me. This very much felt like a make or break moment, where my budding relationship with the student could be torn apart.

There, on the brick planter outside of my classroom sat Laura crying. Not what I expected to greet me outside. She repeatedly apologized, explaining she was referring to the

student, not me with her comment. As she cried I remained stern and made it clear that whether it was directed towards me, or her classmate, that language was unacceptable. More than that, I made it clear to Laura that I could not let the students see me as someone who would allow that type of behavior without comment. As I made this point, I asked her if she understood my reasoning, and she replied in the affirmative. She continued to cry and apologize, and I told her to take a few minutes to herself, and to come back into the class when she was ready.

Since the moment Laura reentered my class that day, there has been a new dynamic between us. She has made an effort to temper her rage towards her peers and has remained respectful to my status as her teacher in the class. Eager to ask questions, and thoroughly interested in history, Laura began to stay after class to ask me questions. Soon this became Laura coming to tutoring after-school, not to make up work, which she did not need to do, but rather to ask about dictatorships in the Dominican Republic, and obscure battles from the Pacific Front during WWII. For all the progress Laura and I made, one tutoring session Laura was asked to quiet down, and she stormed out, angry, leaving to go to the classroom across the quad for tutoring. After a few minutes to cool down, I walked into the other class and simply asked if she was okay. Suffice to say, she was not.

For the next hour I sat with Laura as she told me her life story. The once close and thriving family she had that was torn apart after the tragic death of her brother. The father who left her. The siblings who dropped out of college. The distant mother. The brother with schizophrenia. And the comment that most deeply remained with me: “Everyone pretends to be someone else at school, to look cool or to make friends. Then they get to go home and be themselves. I don’t get to be myself anywhere.”

Laura is not a problem. She's angry. She's experienced a lifetime of tragedy in 15 short years and has not had a moment to breathe and reflect. To consider her pain, to work through the loss of a brother, and the family she once had. Laura is by no means in a dangerous situation, but she does not have a safe space to let down her façade and be herself. I did not have much to say to Laura, no live-changing quote, or revelation about the meaning of life and the purpose of her pain, but I listened. And for this young girl who fights rather than confronts her own pain and uncertainty, I provided a space to be herself, to be honest and acknowledge her struggle.

At the surface level, my job is to teach students historical information. What is divine right? What is the meaning of imperialism? How did the Treaty of Versailles lead to WWII? Why did the Soviet Union collapse? There are standards I need to meet, and a framework with an inquiry-based approach to inclusive history that I must address. I need to assess their knowledge of these facts. I should push them to be critical thinkers, and consider how history occurs, and why it is significant. I love that part of my job. But on a deeper level, my job is to support students in their individual development, as they go through a time of monumental change to discover their personal values, their goals and self-confidence.

Most effectively explained by Lisa Delpit, "many of our children of color don't learn *from* a teacher, as much as *for* a teacher" (p. 86). My responsibility to my students runs deep, and it is only in making my commitment to them extremely clear, that they will buy-in to my belief that they can succeed, however they define that success.

I know the content. I know the standards and the framework. I know the TPEs and the dozen other acronyms relevant to education. These are all crucial to being a successful teacher, but I also know my students. I recognize the slant of their shoulders on a rough day, the subtle looks of confusion on their faces during a moment of independent work, I notice their fidgeting

when they need a moment to take a break, and I celebrate their excitement when their interest in a topic cannot be hidden. I have been lucky enough this year to work with the teachers whose impact on me has been life changing, and with these models not being my colleagues, I am constantly reminded of the weight of my job and my words to my students. Would I consider myself an effective teacher? Yes. Because this year I have been able to admit that as much as I am a teacher, I am also still a student. Learning from my colleagues, and my students, willing to admit my mistakes and take positive risks. I am willing to be vulnerable and honest with my students, and to give them the same hope I would want from my own teachers.

Conclusion

My journey as an educator this past year has required me to identify the way a teacher and student are similar to each other. In order to be the most effective teacher possible, I needed to be open to learning from my peers, instructors, and my master teacher. It was only in this acceptance that being a successful teacher means always being open to change and improvement, that I feel I was able to make the most out of my first full year teaching.

This ethnography was a major point of evidence of my continued status as a student. Not only in the nature of it being an assignment, but in the recognition that I needed to learn from my students to be able to meet their needs. And in the following years of my career, I will constantly need to be a willing learner of my classes, to meet the unique challenges and interests each class will set forth. Teaching is about adaptation, and to effectively adapt, one must have a firm understanding of what is changing. This change will not only be my students, but the expectations of my administration, the development of new common assessments, changes to technology and, as a history teacher, the ever-developing material that my students must know.

I have found my place in the world, with a meaningful job I truly feel I can have an impact in, and understanding the full responsibility of being a teacher, I know that it is now my turn to encourage my students to find their own passions and purpose, however they define it.

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Appendix A: Case Study 1

Name: _____ Period: 1

Industrial Revolution Argument Paragraph

Directions: Using your knowledge about the Industrial Revolution, write a paragraph explaining if the Industrial Revolution ultimately had a greater positive or negative impact.

Be sure to:

- Clearly take a side with a strong thesis statement.
- Provide evidence for your stance using at least three specific examples from what you've learned over the course of this unit.
- Use at least three vocabulary words in your writing. Highlight your vocabulary.

Thesis:

The industrial revolution was bad because very dangerous work in condition for example if the machine broke there was no tools it was your hand going in there and child labor was a thing children were used like machines they were usually getting long hours like 16 hours.

Evidence:

Industrial revolution was bad people will lose times or die and the boss didn't care he could replace you easy. The environment that they were working in was horrible small little workspace and big machine running right next to you. The middle class was the managers the boss wasn't even in that town and the third people were the workers dying. Children were dying because they had to fix the machines.

A1: Scan of David's Industrial Revolution written assessment. Both David's trouble with scripting and spelling can be seen here. Of particular note here is the various ways David spells "machine" within this assessment – as "mactionns," and matcon".

✓

My family is spreaded out throu Mexico. My mom is from Leon and my dad is from TJ. They meet on the border line going on the same river. After a few months went by my mom went to high school in Monabelló and my dad went there as well. In high school they started dating in the 12 grade. When they graduated right away they started to work and build the future for like a house or a car. Then he did the 6 things that will make a woman happy he got on one knee and said Will you marry me and my mom said yes. Then my mom said to my dad "I am pregnant" 10 months later my sister Esmeralda pop out so they had to work twice as hard for that girl because she needed toys and food. A few months went by my big brother pop up and he needed food toys and supplies. My dad decided let's buy a house in Montclair all of a sudden my mom was pregnant again with a angle in her belly and that was me 9 months went by I popped out of my beautiful mother. Somethig went bad that my twin did not make it out of my mom so they decide to get a home near Montclair and they worked and worked to be the best parents they could possible be. One year went by they decided to have another baby wich is Diego the little bratt he got everything he wanted. At the time when my mom started going to work then this is the thing that opened my eyes to the real world my mom got shot twice I just remember seeing her crying I tried to help but I could int but she ended up dying so everthing was normal until that one day of crying and fighting and moving away my parents got divorced so we have to choose difficult choices. Then my dad got remarried having two step kids and my mom having the most Mexican kids ever his name

A2: Scan of David's Personal History Assignment. This piece of writing shows David's struggle with non-academic vocabulary, as well as grants insight into David's life and upbringing.

A3: Scan of David's response to the prompt: "What would you stand in front of a tank for?"
David notes the importance of immigration, a reflection of his family's identity.

Name: _____

Period: | _____

Imperialism Evidence Free Response Question

Directions: Create a three paragraph statement that addresses the following prompt:

Imperialism of the 19th century was experienced differently by the colonizers and the colonized.

- The 5 motives for imperialism were: political, religious, exploratory, economic and ideological. Choose two motivations, explain what they mean, and provide historical examples of these motivations in colonies. (Use at least 2 vocabulary words)
- Explain two effects for those colonized by the imperial European powers. You must use historical examples to explain such conditions. (Use at least 2 vocabulary words)
- Evaluate whether imperialism ultimately helped or harmed the colonizers and the colonized. Using the examples you provided, argue if imperialism was ultimately justified or not. You must use historical examples to back up your argument.

Argument: We are talking about the imperialism were countries were getting colonized and used to their materials.

What are your feelings on imperialism?

Essay: exploratory was a meaning of going to the know to the unknown like when the Europeans went to Africa to see if there were raw materials. And that's when Europe got that they were the colonizers. And Europe would take over colonies for their raw materials. [Deological was a desire to spread religion and Africa, China, India, Asia had a lot of religion that was what they needed. India had that they could not eat meat and the Europeans put meat on these bullets and when the Indians saw this will bit it off they will not eat meat.]

This would be religious motivation

Africa was the first to get taken over by the Europeans because the Europeans need to be saved because they got industrialized and they need to keep the machines running that's why they got into Africa.

A4: Scan of David's Imperialism Assessment. While David's writing and spelling has not improved, his use of vocabulary has, as well as his ability to show historical knowledge.

The other reason they went in Africa, need to be saved by the Europeans because it was the white man's burden. That means they didn't know any better so they need to be like the Europeans. China was affected by Europe because opium was being traded by Europe. And opium was illegal in China. They traded with China. That's why they fought the opium war.

What happened to China because of the opium?

The colonizer was not affected. They all got money by trading with every body. Europe got so much industrialized that they took over countries and that's how they made their money.

Do you think Europe taking over other countries was right?

A4: Though able to support his ideas with historical evidence, David is still working on clearly stating his opinion.

Appendix B: Case Study 2

9
15

Industrial Revolution Quiz Name: Per:

Capitalism, Industrialization, Communism, Laissez Faire, Factors of Production, Republic, Constitutional Monarchy, Urbanization, Union, Karl Marx, Adam Smith, Socialism, Middle Class, economic effects, political effects

1. Middle class A social class of skilled workers, professionals, and business people.
2. factors of production Resources needed to produce goods and industrialize: ideas, land, labor, capital
3. industrialization the development of industry from making goods by hand to making them by machine.
4. constitutional (monarchy) a limited monarchy in which a legislature (representatives), a constitution, or both limit the power of the king.
5. Union an voluntary organization of workers united to negotiate better working conditions.
6. Adam Smith "Father" of Capitalism
7. socialism the migration of people into cities
8. Karl Marx "Father" of Communism
9. political effects understanding how an event, ideas, or a time period impacts trade, jobs, and money.
10. Republic a type of indirect democracy, first created in Rome, where people elect (vote) leaders to serve as representatives and make political decisions for them.
11. _____ an economic system where the factors of production (ideas, land, labor, capital) are controlled by the government (in the name of the public), distributed equally, and there is no private property.
12. _____ an economic system where the factors of production (ideas, land, labor, capital) are owned by individuals or private corporations.
13. Capitalism the capitalistic idea that government should not interfere or regulate business or industry (hands off)
14. Communism an economic system that developed against capitalism. The working class revolts and controls all factors of production resulting in no social classes because all goods and services are shared equally.
15. urbanization understanding how an event, ideas, or a time period impacts the government.

B1: Scan of one of Arthur's vocabulary quizzes. This quiz represents David's typical performance on more traditional exams, including his decision to leave some responses blank.

Name: _____

Period: _____

Industrial Revolution Argument Paragraph

Directions: Using your knowledge about the Industrial Revolution, write a paragraph explaining if the Industrial Revolution ultimately had a greater positive or negative impact.

Be sure to:

- Clearly take a side with a strong thesis statement.
- Provide evidence for your stance using at least three specific examples from what you've learned over the course of this unit.
- Use at least three vocabulary words in your writing. Highlight your vocabulary.

Thesis:

The industrial revolution ultimately had a greater positive effect because it lead to the harsh labor conditions getting fixed then the unfair wage giving to the employees and last the inspection of food produce.

Evidence:

The industrial revolution furthered the way on how people worked in factories with the hours to unsafe equipment the hours would be 12-16 hours of exhausting labor and with equipment being dangerous to the point were fingers were cut off to machines crushing limbs. The unfair wages that employees got were they worked for so many hours through unfair conditions and got pennies. The food would be expired but still served because factory owners were worried about how much profit they would make then the people getting food poisoned those problems were solved after the outcome of the revolution.

B2: Scan of Arthur's Industrial Revolution written assessment. Arthur scored well on this, as he was able to focus on the content he found most memorable. Here Arthur also chose the more difficult side of the prompt to argue, that the Industrial Revolution had a greater positive impact.

Appendix C: Case Study 3

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PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS

Directions: Read & annotate the two poems. Write what you think the author is saying next to each stanza. At the end of the poem write the overall idea of the author. Once you have done this, identify the perspective of each poem. Who is speaking as the colonizer and the colonized? Explain your reasoning.

Colonizer Rudyard Kipling, <i>The White Man's Burden</i> , 1899	Colonized Henry Labouchère, <i>The Brown Man's Burden</i> , 1899
<p>Take up the White Man's burden-- Send forth the best ye breed-- Go bind your sons to exile To serve your captives' need; To wait in heavy harness, On fluttered folk and wild-- Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child.</p> <p>Take up the White Man's burden-- The savage wars of peace-- Fill full the mouth of Famine And bid the sickness cease; And when your goal is nearest The end for others sought, Watch sloth and heathen Folly Bring all your hopes to nought.</p> <p>Take up the White Man's burden-- Ye dare not stoop to less-- Nor call too loud on Freedom To cloke your weariness; By all ye cry or whisper, By all ye leave or do, The silent, sullen peoples Shall weigh your gods and you.</p> <p>Take up the White Man's burden-- Have done with childish days-- The lightly proffered laurel, The easy, ungrudged praise. Comes now, to search your manhood Through all the thankless years Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom, The judgment of your peers!</p> <p><i>Summary: The white people have to "help" other races it's there burden. But they know the races will not appreciate it. But it's ok it's there burden. The days of being free and white are over we must help other races.</i></p>	<p>Pile on the brown man's burden To gratify your greed; Go, clear away the negroes; Who progress would impede; Be very stern, for truly 'Tis useless to be mild With new-caught, sullen peoples, Half devil and half child</p> <p>Pile on the brown man's burden; And, if ye rouse his hate, Meet his old-fashioned reasons With Maxims up to date. With shells and dum-dum bullets A hundred times made plain The brown man's loss must ever Imply the white man's gain.</p> <p>Pile on the brown man's burden, And if his cry be sore, That surely need not irk you-- Ye've driven slaves before. Seize on his ports and pastures, The fields his people tread; Go make from them your living, And mark them with his dead.</p> <p>Pile on the brown man's burden, And through the world proclaim That ye are Freedom's agent-- There's no more paying game! And, should your own past history Straight in your teeth be thrown, Retort that independence Is good for whites alone.</p> <p><i>Summary: The perspective is in the colonized view. They believe the white only had greed not reason they are hypocrites.</i></p>

C1: Copy of a page from Michael's interactive class notebook. This shows the development of Michael's skill in analyzing a complex text. He goes from mostly highlighting, to providing more annotations on the handout.

Name: _____

Period: 1Industrial Revolution Argument Paragraph

Directions: Using your knowledge about the Industrial Revolution, write a paragraph explaining if the Industrial Revolution ultimately had a greater positive or negative impact.

Be sure to:

- Clearly take a side with a strong thesis statement.
- Provide evidence for your stance using at least three specific examples from what you've learned over the course of this unit.
- Use at least three vocabulary words in your writing. Highlight your vocabulary.

Thesis:

The Industrial Revolution had a greater negative side effect because it led to polluted air, death, and had over all bad economic effects.

Evidence:

During the industrial revolution time all people had jobs that were atleast 12-16 hour shift. This meant that working in the factories were very busy, which lead to a very polluted atmosphere. This supports my claim because it wasn't a positive factor for humans to breath smoged air. Saying this shows how it was negative.

The workers who worked there were not just men they were also women and children. The people who were not in the middle class would sometimes face a situation that could possibly lead to death. They could've either been caught in a machine or sick by diseases. One major disease was cholera. This supports my argument because it was not

C2: This, along with the following page are scans of Michael's Industrial Revolutions written assessment. Here you can see Michael wrote much more than his peers, however his last paragraph lacks a clear connection between evidence and argument.

Name: _____

Period: 1

right how people were living at this time.

Finally it lead to an overall economic effect. The economy wasn't in a good place of lifestyle. What they needed was a union. This also supports my claim because it was negative for the econmy to be having major problems.

C3: Michael's response to the prompt: "What would you stand in front of a tank for?" Michael's response draws from his mother's history of methamphetamine addiction, yet he is able to draw a connection to historical information as well.

Name: _____ Period: _____

Imperialism Evidence Free Response Question

Directions: Create a three paragraph statement that addresses the following prompt:

Imperialism of the 19th century was experienced differently by the colonizers and the colonized.

- The 5 motives for imperialism were: political, religious, exploratory, economic and ideological. Choose two motivations, explain what they mean, and provide historical examples of these motivations in colonies. (Use at least 2 vocabulary words)
- Explain two effects for those colonized by the imperial European powers. You must use historical examples to explain such conditions. (Use at least 2 vocabulary words)
- Evaluate whether imperialism ultimately helped or harmed the colonizers and the colonized. Using the examples you provided, argue if imperialism was ultimately justified or not. You must use historical examples to back up your argument.

Argument: I believe that imperialism had a negative effect on both the colonizers & colonized. Imperialism was not justified because it still exist today.

Essay: 2 motives for imperialism is economic & religious. The motive economic was the way the colonizers made money. For example when Europe colonies were sending opium to china they were making alot of money. The other motive religous was the idea of spreading religion. For example they were missionaries who would spread Christianity and want to end Slavery. They would make a system of education for the colonized.

↓ Imperialism wasn't anything good for the colony that was colonized. For example

C4: Michael's Imperialism Assessment. From his last essay on Industrialization, Michael has improved in his use of vocabulary, as well as his ability to explain his argument, as well as bring in a counter-argument to further support his claims.

When Great Britain was sending opium to China it had a really bad economic effect. Most of China was addicted to the drug opium so all their money was being spent on this drug. This led to another negative effect of imperialism, war. China had an army called the boxers who fought to stop this import of opium. Also India fought in war called the Sepoy rebellion to get equal or their natural rights back.

Overall, imperialism was bad for the colonized and colonizers. It was bad because it led to war. Many soldiers lost their lives because of imperialism. Imperialism did also have a positive side. There were missionaries who had education for the colonized. They fought to end slavery. But that alone wasn't enough because till this day imperialism exists. So imperialism was never justified.

good job bringing in a counter argument, then saying why its wrong.

Appendix D: Analysis of Teacher Effectiveness

word	definition	Essential Vocabulary	Words commonly used with	Part 1: Causes of World War I	example sentence	visual picture
1. Militarism	the policy of glorifying military power and keeping a standing army. "Always ready to fight."	army, war, guns, weapons		Militarism increased the want for more weapons and power.		lost on so cool we make a military
2. Alliance	an agreement between friendly countries for protection.	agreement, team		Alliances made tensions grow.		
3. Imperialism	The political, economic or social take-over of another country.	control, competition		Imperialism was not justified at all.		colonized
4. Nationalism	a deep devotion & commitment to one's nation; "I am proud of my nation!"	pride, ignorance		Nationalism can make people ignorant and violent.		colonizer my nation's so cool
5. Great War (World War I)	a world war that took place in Europe from 1914-1918 that was caused by main.	fighting, death		The Great War started when the Archduke, Franz Ferdinand, was assassinated.		allied powers vs. central powers
6. Triple Alliance	the alliance that formed BEFORE WWI Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Italy.	ready to fight		The Triple Alliance fought on Austria-Hungary's side because it was part of the treaty.		Italy, Germany, Hungary
7. Triple Entente	the opposing alliance that formed BEFORE WWI Great Britain, France, and Russia.	back up		The Triple Entente backed up Serbia because of Russia's ties with it (Serbia).		Great Britain, Russia, France

D1: Example of vocabulary chart students complete for key academic terms in each unit. Students are required to include the term, its definition (which is provided to them), words associated with the term, an example sentence, and an image representing the term. With this, students become familiar with the meaning of the term, but this alone was not enough for meaningful practice with the vocabulary in their writing and discussions.

Aggression, Appeasement, and War

Nevoeh Westa 10

Objective: Describe how the rest of the world reacted to aggression from Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. Explain how why they reacted this way, and how this led to World War II.

Answers: The other countries, like Britain and France, had their own ways on reacting Germany, Japan and Soviet Union. Britain and Germany went to war since Germany invaded Poland. Germany took over France. People alive in violence so they could protect their country and people from being attacked by their enemy.

A Pattern of Aggression

Summary: Japan militancy started being more aggressive in China. Mussolini invaded Ethiopia with advanced weapons. France and Britain gave Hitler an appeasement. Germany, Italy, and Japan formed the Axis powers to fight Soviet Communism.

Question: How long will the treaty last?

The Spanish Civil War

Summary: A monarchy ruled by oppressors. People, most people were poor, soon a republic for Spain was formed. The more made other changes. Francisco Franco led the revolt for Spain. Hitler and Mussolini helped the revolt.

Question: Did Mussolini and Germany have an alliance?

Tell: This storyboard goes under the learning section of the tell since we learn about axes being formed and what Germany did.

German Aggression Continues

Summary: Hitler brought German people to Reich. He had military and economic reasons for this and even made a speech from Hamburg place about his rule as a new. He accused France and Britain that he couldn't plan to expand any more.

Question: Why did Hitler accuse France and Britain?

Storyboard images: A stick figure holding a flag with a swastika, two stick figures talking, and a stick figure holding a flag with a swastika.

Summary: Hitler made a pact with Joseph Stalin, that was called the Nazi-Soviet Pact. Germany invaded Poland which started the war of World War II.

Question: How did the pact affect nothing who were in it when it was broken?

Storyboard images: A stick figure holding a flag with a swastika, a stick figure holding a flag with a swastika, and a stick figure holding a flag with a swastika.

D2: Example of student's storyboard assignment. This is their primary homework, where students are required to read from their textbook, and summarize their learning through answering an objective, asking questions, and images.

San Domingue Revolution

Haitian/

Road to a Political Revolution

Citizens Response

What Enlightenment Ideas influenced the Response?

- John Locke
- right to rebel if treated unfairly.
- Declaration of the rights of Independence
- French Revolution

Toussaint L'Ouverture (son of slave)

- John Locke's ideas came to the Haitian's mind
- Freedom and fighting
- slave revolt broke out of the island.
- slaves killed their masters and set fire to plantations
- Toussaint L'Ouverture
- rebellion
- burned sugar plantations

Results of the Revolution

- yes - Haitian independence
- Rename Haiti
- no longer slaves
- Declare Independence from France in 1804

Was the Revolution successful?

What change did it accomplish?

Unfavorable Conditions

and then new ones were... was cheaper. (Lot's of Laborers) were imported. - committed suicide

- slaves were beaten and whipped, - sometimes by white slave owners (Haitian)
- slaves were raped by white slave owners (Haitian)
- Didn't have enough to eat.
- Island → sugar production
- Sugar leaves cut skin
- Ants bite workers

Protected by black code

3 year life expectancy

System of Authority

San Domingue

- belong to King Louis XIV → Colony → Absolute Monarchy
- Made the Black codes
- Absolute Monarchy
- Tyranny - white french owned black African slaves (Haitian) People = Property (no natural rights)
- Black codes - written laws allowed & supported slavery.

TCVLL

This revolution of the slaves would go under the name Section since it shows how the french treated slaves and how slaves stood up for themselves.

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D3: Example of student's notes which show the integration of vocabulary terms into their work. With this, the academic language is placed in context, and in relation to key historical events and concepts. Vocabulary has been highlighted by the student.

What is Totalitarianism? total authority = government

Key Traits (Describe in your own words)	Animal Farm Examples	Russia (Soviet Union) Examples	Germany Examples	Japan Examples
Dictatorship and One-Party Rule Under a Dynamic Leader <u>tyranny</u> One person and one group w/ one point of view rules the government	Napoleon - dictator the pigs - one party	<u>Dynamic leader</u> <u>Joseph Stalin</u> (leader from 1929-1953) -took over after <u>Lenin</u> <u>totalitarianism</u>	<u>Dynamic leader</u> <u>Adolf Hitler</u> <u>nationalism</u> <u>misinformation</u> <u>racism</u> Jewish race was <u>evil</u>	<u>Dynamic leader</u> <u>emperor Meiji</u> control by <u>emperor</u> <u>full control</u>
Ideology The ideas the people in power follow	<u>communism</u> East Max, <u>Vladimir Lenin</u> = animals ideology	<u>communism</u> originally turned into <u>socialism</u> <u>communism</u> <u>USSR</u> <u>command economy</u> <u>govt control</u>	<u>Nazism</u> - an extreme type of <u>fascism</u> - don't be gay - don't be anything but white - don't have physical or mental disabilities	<u>ultra-nationalism</u> - duty to emperor and state <u>Japan is supreme</u>
State Control Over ALL Individuals/ Sectors of Society Doesn't allow resistance, censor bad things that happen in govt and world	Dogs = don't know any better, obey Napoleon Animals = forced long labor, eggs taken away, animals were killed for fighting back	<u>destruction of religion</u> <u>your plans</u> <u>gulag</u> labor camps the plan is the law, long shifts few industrialization	state decides if you're Jewish - censorship: burn books <u>Nuremberg Laws</u> - <u>nazi youth</u>	education <u>education in Japan</u> <u>military training</u> learn how to shoot and fight in school
Propaganda Messages spreading that are <u>pro-govt</u> ideas	The laws are <u>constant</u> <u>repeated</u> four legs good, two legs bad - pigs using the phrase: long live Napoleon pictures everywhere	makes take pictures with Lenin to seem good - making himself look like he's <u>controlling</u> <u>friends w/ Lenin</u> <u>Russian Rev. leader</u> <u>the cream party</u> <u>government police</u> up to 12 million killed <u>NKVD</u> <u>gulags</u> kills people who don't agree w/ state Government <u>anti</u> Stalin is helping	propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels posters showing voting for Hitler & nazism was <u>more</u> like voting Hitler is great, all Germans should look like that "Jews are too much!" schools are full first opens 1933 <u>Kristallnacht</u> "Night of Broken Glass" German people destroy Jewish stores, houses <u>police - Gestapo</u>	<u>propaganda</u> to <u>like</u> <u>other</u> <u>Asian</u> countries → <u>industrialized</u> <u>needed resources</u> <u>nationalism</u> <u>Japan is better</u> <u>Police</u> (thought police) Officers of the state are <u>thin</u> "strong" of the people <u>rape of Nanking</u> send to camps, brainwashed into believing in the govt <u>take over china</u>
Organized Violence targeting certain groups (minorities, opposing political sides) - <u>blame</u> for bad in the nation	police/military: the dogs, <u>brainwashed</u>			

Handwritten notes on the left margin:
makes promises
G3R
verb does not matter

D4: Another example of students' integration of academic vocabulary into their notes. Key terms are circled in purple highlighter.