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The Continuous Journey

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The Continuous Journey

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Claremont Graduate University

To my family, friends and my students. You have all helped me become the person and teacher I am today. There are not enough words to eloquently describe the special place you all hold in my heart.

Thank you.

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Preface

The following work has compiled over the course of my time spent at Claremont Graduate University. Through my time in the program I have not only developed as an educator but an individual as well. My journey began simply by looking at myself and who I am. I thought I knew who I was, but as I continued with my courses, spent more time in the classroom, and engaged in professional relationships I began to wonder. Throughout this ethnography, I will share my experiences and journey through this roller coaster year. However, as I reflect now, I can begin to appreciate the journey I have been on and look forward to what lies ahead.

I began my journey fresh out of my undergrad program ready to begin my teaching career. Coming into this program I felt ready to take on anything they threw at me because, obviously, I was prepared. My work through this ethnography has shown me that although my past experiences did provide a great foundation, there was much more to learn and experience. As I spent the second portion of this writing getting to know my focus students, I realized that I had spent so much time in my own world that I needed to step back and observe and appreciate all that was around me. This idea lent itself to the third section of my ethnography. Here I was at a school seven minutes from my home and I had never seen it. There was this whole world down the street that I had never experienced, but my students lived every single day.

My work this past year has been a reflection of my growth as a teacher, a person, and a student. The adage "You learn something new everyday" has never been more prevalent than on my journey through the Claremont Graduate University, Teacher Education program. However trying and overwhelming it all was, I still had my family, my friends, and my students to keep my head above water

and keep me going. I dedicate this ethnography to them all because without their love and support through this tumultuous journey, I would not be walking away the educator I am today.

Where I Need to Be

Am I where I need to be? This is a question I ask myself daily, whether it be trying to navigate myself through the streets or wondering if I am where I need to be in life. I have gone from wanting to be a singer, professional soccer player, Oprah, and now teacher; but have I made the right decision? The answer, hopefully weaved through and miraculously found at the end of this narrative, is yes. I have never felt a stronger pull to be someone or do something more than I have when deciding to be a teacher. The glory of being a teacher is that the title does not simply end there; I am so much more. The experiences and studies I will participate in allow me to dive deeper into all of my titles and even discover new hats I had no idea I wore. I will actively be participating in a school setting where I get to know my students, community, and myself. The beginning of this journey begins with me, and how I ended up where I need to be.

The Mold

Growing up there was nobody who looked like me other than my brother. I was black. And white. For many people, they had a hard time wrapping their minds around that fact, “what are you” they would ask. I am me. These questions persisted and unknowingly had an affect on me. I did not want to have curly hair or look different, I just wanted to blend in with everyone else. Unlike many children, I had a supportive family who never let me forget that I am me and that is the best thing to be.

I am the first college graduate in my family. From the time I began school, I was drilled with the idea that I needed to get a higher education. Every night my parents would sit down and help me with my homework no matter how tired they were from the work day. Even when I would break down with frustration, staring at the textbook in front of me, I was reminded that all of this was for a reason. They

were instilling a desire for greatness in me before I could even decide what I wanted out of life. My mother and father both emphasized the importance of creating a successful and independent life for myself. My father, above all, constantly reminded me that I am a strong, independent woman who can be whatever I want. I am one of the lucky ones, one of the rare few who have that support from their families. My parents encouraged me to not only demand greatness, but aspire for greatness within myself, guiding me to establish a better life. Without the never-ending support of my parents I would not be where I am.

Having college as the light at the end of the tunnel meant school always came first. From first to fifth grade I received my education at a traditional, private Catholic school. Although I was a hard worker and determined to do my best, I faced daily struggles with my teachers. In the fifth grade I was placed in a special math class where myself and a handful of my peers who were struggling would leave the room and go spend an hour with one of the nuns learning math. That was the worst year of my educational career, but a pivotal moment in my journey to becoming a teacher. I dreaded leaving the classroom because I knew the instant I stepped into the nun's den I was on pins and needles. I was worried to give the wrong answer, so I chose not to speak, but not speaking only made my time more difficult. Every day I left her class with drooped shoulders plagued by the weight of defeat and fearful for what tomorrow would bring. Even though it was just 180 days, my time with her will continue to be a vivid memory and a driving factor in my journey to be the best teacher I can be.

Anyone who stepped in to that classroom would see how it was not inviting, or supportive, but rather a hostile and unwelcoming environment. According to Bucholz and Sheffler (2009) "the type of classroom environment that a teacher creates and encourages can either increase or decrease a student's ability to learn and feel comfortable as a member of the class" (para. 1). My belief is that in order for students to learn, the environment must be conducive and promote the utmost opportunity for success. Incorporating this idea into my classroom could be as simple as greeting students at the door, building

rapport through conversation, and decorating the walls with bright colors and inviting phrases. As a teacher I need to support the learner as a whole, and that begins by establishing an environment that is centered around supporting and engaging students. The more comfortable students feel in my classroom, the better the experience is for everyone.

Strengths and Limitations

Academically, I have always struggled in the same areas. Throughout my entire education, math and science have been my greatest challenges. The few good teachers I have had made the experience enjoyable, but there was always something that did not click. I can remember many nights staring at a problem set through tear-filled eyes wondering what was wrong with me, and after many years of struggle I finally reached a simple revelation; that just is not the way I learn. Mathematics involves logical learning, and thanks to Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory I have deduced that I am not a logical learner. As stated by Gardner in his video with Edutopia about the Multiple Intelligences theory, "all human beings have different intellectual strengths and these strengths are pertinent to how we learn, represent things in our minds, and how we use these strengths to show what we have comprehended". I always struggled with what I could not learn, but finally knowing how I learn has been one of my greatest strengths in my education. I am a naturalist, musical, kinesthetic, existential learner. Knowing how I learn not only helps me understand myself better, but also opens my mind to all the different ways our brains work. My desire is to establish a learning environment where all of my students have an opportunity to thrive, and where individuality is valued, not suppressed.

Due to my personal drive and motivation I have always been rather successful in my endeavors, but it was not always a smooth road. The biggest limitation I face involves my hardest critic... me. There is no one quicker to criticize an error or minimize my success. This problem often reaches into my educational and professional life. If I do poorly on a test or a I am teaching a lesson and it did not go as planned or there were bumps in the road, I am quick to dwell on the negatives without taking a moment to

look and appreciate the positive aspects; I may not have done well on the whole test, but I remembered that difficult equation, or that one struggling student was really engaged and making connections.

Focusing on the positive points and reassuring myself that I am doing well, and it is okay if things are not going as planned, is something I continue to work on daily and what to emphasize to my students. I know how it feels to get stuck in your own head and not want to see the positive side of something, and rather than focus on the bad, I want to encourage my students to relish in the positives of school and life. I want them to feel comfort in knowing they made a mistake and there is always tomorrow to try better. No one is perfect and we all make mistakes, and I want the students in my classroom to feel that I am their biggest cheerleader and will be there to pick them up when they are unable to do it on their own.

Following my biggest limitation is also my greatest strength. Although I am hard on myself, I am quick to help someone else. If someone is feeling down I am right there to give them a smile and listen. My experience in the classroom has taught me that I am a motivator and a lover. I never want to see a child hurting and stand to the side hoping someone else will handle it. I want to be there, right by their side through every step of the way supporting and cheering them on. Students need to feel safe and be involved in a positive environment in order to efficiently learn. LaTerra Wilson-Fleming and Dylinda Wilson-Younger state that a “positive classroom environment helps to enhance, promote, and encourage students’ learning in all academic settings” (2012). In order to create a positive environment, I must become a reliable source for all of my students, and the best way for me to establish this is to foster supportive relationships and build a strong rapport with each individual. The classroom environment stems from the teacher and I want mine to be effective, conducive, and supportive for all learners. The first step to setting that foundation is with a smile; I believe a smile is the quickest way to make someone’s day and all it takes is a second.

A Look Behind the Why

The number one question I am asked when I tell people what I am going to school for is why? Why would you choose a career that does not make a lot of money? Why do you want to work with children? My responses always lead back to the same thing; I want to make a difference. Working with children and being a positive influence in their lives when they may not have one gives me an overwhelming feeling of pride. I have spent a great deal of time thinking about what level I want to teach at. I have jumped from wondering if I want to work with elementary students to debating the pros and cons of becoming a high school English teacher, and where I feel I could make the biggest impact. After years of pondering I reached a decision; I want to work with elementary students.

Looking back at my years in elementary is what truly helped me decide. Unbeknownst to me, those were some of my most impactful years of life and education. At a time when I was developing rapidly at a physical, emotional and cognitive rate, there were needs not being met and areas of growth that suffered. Chip Wood describes it best in *Yardsticks* when he writes, “the whole child goes to school; therefore, decisions about physical activity, food policies, and the development of social and emotional skills are as important as curriculum choices and test results” (2006). Unfortunately my primary years focused more on the content, so rather than helping me grow both emotionally and socially, I was reprimanded for acting my age and simply being a kid. Outdated ideals like this create harsh classroom environments where students are stunted, and rather than enjoy their learning process, they begin to hate it. I do not want to just teach the content to my students, I want to engage them in their learning, teach them life skills, and provide a classroom environment where they can thrive in their social and emotional development.

Another daunting question always on people’s minds when I tell them I want to be a teacher is what grade level I hope to teach. The reason I find this to be such a difficult question is because I find every level interesting. No two grades are alike and there is something about every grade level I appreciate. In the elementary setting, children’s minds are still developing and at every stage there is

something new and exciting. I have had experience in almost every level, kindergarten through eighth and with each experience I have found something to adore. In the lower primary years, children are still developing and figuring out school, but in upper elementary there is an amazing social aspect taking place. Every level has something to appreciate and so my answer to all the people with the same question is this; I do not care. I will be put wherever I am meant to be, and I will find something new to love.

Hopes, Dreams, and Fears

The anticipation for a first-year teacher is a feeling difficult to describe. What my classroom will look like, the type of students I will have, and what grade-level I will be teaching are all thoughts that cross my mind daily. I am overcome with excitement thinking about my very first class, but also overwhelmed with fear. Taking on the role of teacher involves a multitude of hats and I do not want to leave a hat lying on the floor getting dusty. I want to be able to be my students' cheerleader, coach, leader, guide, and any other person they need me to be. My fear also stems into content; I want to be able to teach the students well and I worry about getting the information across to them. Many of the struggles I faced in school centered around not understanding the content and the way it was being taught to me, and I do not want my students to feel lost and confused like I did. The sum of my fears, however, do not compare to my hopes and dreams for my classroom.

My dream is to create a structured, purposeful classroom for students' learning to flourish. Rather than rest on my hopes to guide me—my hopes that I teach good lessons and my hopes to establish a productive environment—I plan to establish a purposeful classroom where expectations are clear (for both students and myself) and every child understands the purpose behind what they are learning (Fisher & Frey, 2011). Focusing on the establishment of this ideal, purposeful classroom does not take away my hopes, but rather refines and allows them to thrive. I not only hope for the content to reach all of my students, but also for my teaching to reach deeper, for students to truly learn more than just the content.

Whether that underlying learning is on a grand scale or not, creating a purposeful classroom environment is establishing a foundation for any further hopes and dreams for my students to grow.

Even though I have not had my own classroom and am fully aware of all that entails, there are still potential roadblocks for me to think about when focusing on helping my students. Two potential roadblocks are students who have a language barrier, and students with special needs. My first step in helping these students would be obtaining outside help. Whether it be a resource teacher, the special education coordinator, or my administration, I would establish an open line of communication so that we are all on board with helping the student succeed. For students who may have a language barrier, I need to make sure that I am meeting them at their level and providing personalized opportunities to practice English. Helping a student with special needs would be along the same lines as helping a student with a language barrier. If they already have a plan in place I would want to make sure that I am following the layout of their plan, and providing activities and lessons tailored to their learning abilities. However, if a student did not have a plan already in place I would go back to that open line of communication, making sure that I am monitoring and recording information on the student and working through the proper channels to give them extra help if necessary. Although there are many potential roadblocks, each student and situation are different, and the one constant is me. I need to make sure that I am there supporting my students and their families in order to ensure optimum success. Teaching is considered to be such a difficult career because we are working with human beings, their emotions, thoughts, and daily changes, but in order to be successful we must meet them at whatever level they are at.

Social Justice

The term social justice encompasses the idea of fairness of the distribution of wealth, privileges, and opportunities. As teachers we are the facilitators of social justice. Rather than continue the trend of putting people in boxes, we must be examples and lead our students to breaking down those four walls. In my classroom, and community, I am accountable for providing an environment for students where

there are no barriers, only opportunities. I have experienced an educational system where there were not many opportunities for me to excel with the content, but instead placed barriers around me and hindered my growth. Learning in the 21st century should allow students to thrive in all aspects, encouraging them to become the best versions of themselves and that starts inside the classroom. In a world that is constantly trying to push them down, students need to know that there is someone out there who will never give up and encourages them to be the best they can possibly be. Students need a great teacher.

The social justice mission for Claremont Graduate University states that a socially just nation should educate all its citizenry through networks of effective and accountable organizations that interact responsibly with families and communities. One of the reasons I decided to attend CGU is because of this belief. I have seen students fall through the cracks because no one took the time to help them. Recently, I was in a second-grade classroom where there was a student who spoke English as a third language and had a possible learning disability. He was slipping through the cracks. As a school community, communication was established and plans were implemented with his family. Although he is still struggling, the growth that I was able to witness was profound. He was talking more, interacting with classmates, and making connections with his learning. When I started in the beginning there was an uncertainty he had about me, but through dedication and daily interaction, we were able to develop a relationship in which we were both heartbroken when I had to leave. Without knowing, I made an impact on him not only academically but emotionally as well, and I believe that is what it means to be socially just. Rather than just brushing struggling learners aside, we need to take them as a whole child and work through effective and accountable means to educate them. In a time where there are opportunities for everyone, barriers need to be ripped down and action needs to be taken.

I believe in contributing more than just content learning in order to educate the whole child. The number one contribution I want to make is providing life skills. A lot of the generations before me, and part of my own, were rule followers rather than thinkers. The current job market does not just want a rule

follower; they require critical thinkers, problem solvers, and collaborators. Students at all levels need to know how to think critically; they need to be able to look at data and analyze it with the mindset that they will not give up. Students also need to be able to look at a problem, and use their skills to solve it, understanding that there are multiple ways it can be done. Finally, students should take that understanding of multiple ways and respect the differences that their peers and co-workers have to offer. As collaborators, students should be able to work with people of all intelligences to reach a desirable outcome. These are skills that cannot be developed overnight, but with years of practice in the classroom with meaningful and authentic activities, students can develop these skills and be prepared for the world awaiting them.

Preparing students to become active global citizens is another contribution I hope to bestow upon my classes. Many of the lifelong skills lend themselves to students becoming active citizens, however, students need to be able to look at the whole world and not just where they live. We are lucky enough to live in a melting pot of a country where thousands of cultures coexist, but for many students they do not see that, they only see the small area around them. One small way to prepare students to become active global citizens is exposing them to the different cultures in their own community. In a school with hundreds or thousands, there are a variety of cultures among the population, and students should be informed and learn to appreciate the differences of their peers. Another opportunity to prepare students is to show them more of the world. Technology is accessible in almost every classroom and can be used to not only tour the Great Wall of China or the Pyramids, but to communicate with another classroom thousands of miles away. Creating opportunities like an exchange program where students get to converse with another class their same age five time zones away allows them to see the world from a different perspective. Breaking down the barriers of their own world opens them to new opportunities they may have never thought about.

Another underrated but great contribution I hope to make is a lifelong love for learning. The impact teachers have on whether students enjoy learning or despise it is profound and should not be taken lightly. I will have the opportunity to model daily what it means to be a lifelong learner and to share my love for learning. Whether you learn a new word in the classroom or are taught a new game, you are learning. There are daily opportunities to learn something new and I hope that I instill in my students a desire to seek those learning experiences and seize them every chance they get.

I have big goals for myself, but I also have the drive to obtain these goals not only for myself but for my students. I set a goal to get into college and receive my Bachelors, and I achieved it. I had the goal of going to the school I had driven by all my life and admired and hoped to attend and I am making it happen right now. I have the goal of being the best teacher I can be, and I will succeed. Goals are not meant to be easy, but they are worth trying for. Rita Pierson (1951-2013) put the responsibilities of a teacher best; “every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection, and insists they become the best they can possibly be”. I am lucky enough to have an amazing support system, but for those students who may have nothing, it is my duty to be their champion.

Getting to Know my Students

The focus of this part of the Ethnography was to become extremely familiar with three students in my classroom. Although I did not begin the year with these students, in the past three months I feel like I have developed a deep connection with each one. Focusing on three students, I will be looking at their work they have completed so far this year, observing their behaviors inside and outside of the classroom, taking notes of their social interactions, and conducting home visits. The home visits, specifically, will allow me to meet other family members and ask a series of questions about each students' background, likes/dislikes, and their families' perceptions of them. My goal for the end of Part B is to develop a deeper understanding of who my students are both in and out of the classroom. I want to not only see the student but understand who the individual person is.

Focus Student 1

Demographic Information

The past five weeks I have had the pleasure of getting to know my first focus student. Throughout this writing he will be referred to as Juan. Juan is a nine-year old Mexican-American boy who loves soccer, karate, watching YouTube videos, and playing Fortnite. In the eyes of an outside observer, he is just like any other boy his age, but beneath the surface is a unique, caring, and bright individual. Juan was chosen as one of my focus students because upon my first time speaking with him I had no idea he was an English Learner. This year in the classroom there is a cluster of EL students, but Juan stood out to me and I felt that we had a connection almost instantly. He was not afraid to speak to

me and was one of the first to welcome me into the classroom. After spending time reviewing his work and seeing his areas of strengths and struggles, I realized that I wanted to foster our connection and find out more about Juan to help him further.

There are many strengths that Juan possess inside and outside of the classroom that I have been able to witness in our brief time together. One major strength that I have observed is his desire to learn, especially when it comes to math. He recently moved from the structured and guided math group, to the more independent group and has been thriving. Other strengths of Juan are how he cares for his classmates, his focus, his ability to follow directions, his kindness, and the confidence he displays in himself. Starting at the age of nine students begin to be more aware of their bodies and their imperfections, making it hard to be confident, but my hope for Juan is that he is able to take his current confidence with himself and let it grow.

Although Juan possesses many strengths, there are a few areas of growth that I have noticed, one in particular being his reading. Often times he does not want to read or will fiddle around with items delaying the reading. He also chooses books to read that are not as challenging or considered “easy readers”. Juan also struggles with his writing, which has been a difficult obstacle to overcome. Although he has ideas, writing them in complete sentences that have a flow and make sense is a challenge. After having the chance to meet his mother, she shared with me that some areas of growth that she sees and worries about are Juan’s ability to talk about things and his strong personality. Both areas have room for growth because Juan is not open about sharing his deeper feelings, and his strong personality can often lead to conflicts. My goal for this year is that Juan and I will be able to work closely together to not only improve upon his areas of growth, but also further develop his strengths to help him feel more confident and happier with school.

Assets & Needs: Academic Standing

Stated in the above section, I believed that Juan was an English Only (EO) student upon first meeting him, however, I later discovered that he was an English Learner (EL). Juan is currently reading, writing, speaking and listening in English roughly a grade or two below grade level. There has also been some communication with the school's speech pathologist about his pronunciation of the blend "-th". Words like "mother" and "father" sound as if he is saying "moder" and "fader". In Juan's primary language, which is Spanish, he cannot write or read he is only able to listen and speak the language. When speaking with his mother about not writing or reading in Spanish she shared that she only spoke, wrote, and read in Spanish for the first two to three years of her schooling and it was difficult for her to transition to English. With Juan, however, she is concerned about the struggles he has in reading and writing in English considering he is not able to read or write in Spanish.

Within the last few weeks of October, there was a district wide Benchmark exam taken to measure students learning in the first trimester. During the exam, I had the opportunity to take the cluster of EL students to a different classroom to work on their Benchmarks. This was my first experience with Juan taking any test and the experience gave insight into his testing performance. During the time spent taking the Benchmark, I noticed that Juan was always one of the first students to finish. He read through the questions quickly, answered the problem, and moved on to the next. These trends carried over into his other testing as well.

Although he is getting through the assessments fast, he is not necessarily performing well. Looking at his math scores, he is able to make sense of the numbers and accurately solve them around 80% of the time, but with reading and writing it is a different story. In problems where he is rushing through the reading before he answers the question, Juan has trouble grasping what the question is asking and obtaining the appropriate response. Juan also rushes through his writing, hoping that the faster he gets it done the quicker he can move on to something else. This unfortunately leads Juan's writing to

suffer by not establishing a direct thought or flow. Both reading and writing are areas where I want to work with Juan to improve his skills and his confidence.

Even though Juan's performance on assessments is sometimes rushed, he is a great independent worker. When given a task with explicit directions, Juan is able to follow each direction and produce thoughtful work. In most of his classwork, Juan takes his time, follows directions, and aims to produce a product he can be proud of. One area where Juan needs assistance, however, is in group work. He is able to get along with his peers and be productive, but his strong personality can sometimes dominate, and he ends up being a leader and not a listener. Juan is able to problem solve and think about solutions in a creative way, but if he is more focused on his ideas and not the ideas of his peers, they become upset and it leads to friction within the group. Overall Juan is strong with his critical thinking and creativity but could use more practice and encouragement with his communication skills.

An area where Juan is truly excelling is the math standards, specifically numbers and operations. Two areas Juan struggles with, however, are writing and reading standards. At this age in school, students are required to write more narrative, informative and opinion pieces, and they are reading texts to understand and explain them. For many students, not reading at grade-level can feel overwhelming. One reason Juan is struggling with his reading and writing is due to the grade-level at which he is able to read and write. For Juan, his brain is processing Spanish and English words constantly and it takes him longer to process all of the information. I believe this has an impact on his confidence in his English language abilities because he is processing slower and second guessing himself. In many schools, bilingual students', like Juan's, primary language skills are undervalued and often believed to hinder their academic abilities, but Ofelia García and Jo Anne Kleifgen support the opposite ideology. In García and Kleifgen's book *Educating Emergent Bilinguals* they support and highlight the work of researchers around the world who have come to the consensus that "emergent bilinguals' home language practices, and academic development using those practices, is 'positively related to higher long-term academic attainment'"

(Chapter 4, pg. 64). Based on the data, Juan and other students like him, are struggling in school but none of them are being praised or supported in their bilingual capabilities and it is having a negative effect on their learning.

Assets & Needs: Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity

When conducting my home visit for Juan, I was able to speak with his mother about Juan's father. About five years ago Juan's father passed away, and from the age of four until eight he was in therapy. Being his first year without therapy and not having the opportunity to speak with someone outside of his family, Juan's mother is worried that he will begin to bottle things up and not share his feelings or frustrations. Behaviorally and socially, Juan's strengths lie in his ability to get along with his peers, follow expectations, and behave well in class and on the playground. From his mother's perspective, however, she is worried that Juan's needs, or behaviors, before he began therapy (isolation from other children and anger/frustration) will reappear.

After speaking with his mother I wanted to make sure that I was thoughtful about next steps to take with Juan's socio-emotional development. My goal for developing Juan's self-awareness and self-management is for him to be able to realize that he is struggling with something, whether it be school related or emotionally, and be able to use strategies to problem solve, or come to an adult for help. One way to assist Juan in these areas is to help him realize when he is struggling and provide strategies to try on his own such as taking a break, deep breaths, reflecting on what the problem is and why it is upsetting him, and finally sharing his struggles with a teacher/adult.

Another area of Juan's socio-emotional development to work on is his growth mindset. Social media and society have made it impossible for children to feel confident or brave to keep trying something they are not good at. With Juan, I see that a lot with his reading and writing and want to put into practice positive words of affirmation. Even though it feels awkward at first, having a mantra to repeat over and over when feeling like it is time to give up helps boost confidence, and plays with the idea

that you can do what you put your mind to. When working with Juan, I want to model how I use positive words of affirmation to have a growth mindset myself, and work with him to develop his own mantra. Hearing praise from others helps but hearing praise from your own self is detrimental to socio-emotional development. Social awareness is also a region to continue development with. Although Juan is already strong with his social awareness, I want to continue to work with him in practicing how to be aware of his peers' emotions and what he can do to support them.

Finally, I want to specifically focus on Juan's relationship skills. Keeping in mind what his mother said about his therapy and not wanting to talk to his family about his feelings, I want to make sure that I am fostering that line of communication between Juan and myself. I spoke with his mother about setting up a "check in" time where Juan and I meet for a few minutes every other day and check in with each other. I will talk to him about things that may be happening and how he is doing/feeling. It is important to set up a form of trust and openness if I expect Juan to want to participate in these conversations. In *The Evidence Base For How Learning Happens*, Stephanie M. Jones and Jennifer Kahn highlight the importance of creating an environment where students feel safe and engaged with their peers and their teacher. Jones and Kahn state that "...children who feel comfortable with their teachers and peers are more willing to grapple with challenging material and persist at difficult learning tasks" (pg. 20). If Juan is feeling secure and trust me as his teacher, he will be more willing to share his feelings and ultimately be more open and confident in his abilities. My goal for Juan's socio-emotional development is to foster a strong relationship between myself and him, and also help and encourage him to have the confidence to be his best self.

At the age of nine, Juan's self-concept of himself is identified as a young, Mexican-American boy. He is a bilingual English and Spanish speaker, who lives with his single mother, grandparents, and aunt. Juan has strong family values and religious beliefs. He comes from a lower socioeconomic status and lives in a nice, safe neighborhood where he is able to socialize with neighbors

and live close to school. As a teacher in the classroom, I believe in creating an inclusive environment where Juan feels represented through literature read to him and literature he has access to. I also want to encourage Juan to feel that his bilingual abilities are valued not only in school but in the workforce and highlight the value of family support in obtaining his dreams.

Assets & Needs: Funds of Knowledge

Conducting Juan's home visit gave me greater insight into how his family has influenced him to be who he is. Juan lives with his mother, his grandma and grandpa, one of his aunts, and their five dogs. At their home, the primary language that is spoken is Spanish, and a lot of time is spent with family. Almost every weekend, Juan is spending time with his whole family, whether it be at his house or another relatives, they are all close knit and enjoy being with each other. When speaking with Juan's mother, she described him as being a "typical nine-year-old" who enjoys watching YouTube videos and playing Fortnite. Juan's mother said that he also recently developed a passion for soccer and karate and loves participating in those activities weekly. Juan's mother shared that her biggest concern is his strong personality, and that they will sometimes fight like brother and sister rather than mother and son. She is adamant on making sure that his personality does not get him into trouble and that he learns to be more receptive to others.

For Juan's family, education is very important. Juan's mother emphasized that she wants him to go to school but also encourages him to do what he loves and is passionate about. Juan's mother shared that she is happy with the school but wishes that they had more after school enrichment programs for subjects such as reading, writing, and science. As for teachers, Juan is expected to be respectful to the teacher and within their family, the teacher is highly valued.

A tradition Juan's mother shared with me is how the whole family prays before every meal, and every year around the holidays they pray and then share what they are thankful for. Recently Juan and his family participated in this tradition, and when it got to Juan to share what he was thankful

for, he became emotional. When speaking further with Juan's mother about the tradition, she shared that it can get difficult around the holidays for Juan because of his father. One thing that surprised me when conducting the home visit was learning about the fact that Juan had been in therapy for the past five years and that this will be his first year not seeing his therapist. Although his therapist said that he was improving with his social interactions and sharing his feelings, it is a big change for him this year. Not having someone he feels he can talk to can be difficult for him and he might not know how to properly express his feelings or frustrations. It is important for Juan to know that he has someone to turn to when he is feeling overwhelmed, and that is something his mother and I both want to emphasize to him this year.

Assets & Needs: Experiences, Interests & Developmental Considerations

Having the opportunity to sit down with Juan and speak with him outside of the classroom helped me learn more about him as a person and not just a student. Juan loves soccer, right now that is his favorite thing. He plays goalie and loves to slide tackle the ball away from other players any chance he gets. Juan also enjoys karate and learning the different combinations and moves. In the classroom, his favorite subject is math. Juan loves math so much that he has decided he wants to go to school to become a math teacher when he is older.

A major event that has had a big impact on Juan is his father's passing. Although he was young, it still has affected him and his life and is something he will always remember. Since his father passed away it has really just been him, his mom, his grandparents and aunts. Recently however, one aunt moved away to Sacramento for a job. Although his father's death was a difficult time for his mother and him, the most influential person in his life is his mother because of her strength. She has been strong and supportive as a single mom and he always wants to make her proud.

When I spoke with Juan about school, he shared with me that he is not a big fan of school but enjoys coming to see his friends and play with them. Even though he likes math, Juan does not really

enjoy any of the other subjects, especially reading and writing, and wishes he had more time to play with his friends. Juan shared that he does not enjoy school as much because of how hard it is getting, and he does not like all of the reading and writing that he has to do. I followed up with asking Juan about a time he felt like he was most successful in school, and when he felt he was least successful. Juan shared that he has not felt very successful this year in writing and that has been difficult for him. He shared that the writing this year has a lot of steps to it and they spend a lot of time writing about one topic making it boring. A time Juan felt successful this year, however, was when he was able to record himself reading a list of words (Fry's sight words). He read the words once at school then got to go home and practice reading them for a couple weeks so he could record himself again. Juan shared that when he listened to the first recording and then the second recording after practicing he felt really happy and proud of himself.

Juan's background and the way he grew up has helped him see that school is very important. His family has instilled in him the idea that he needs to go to school and get his education so that he can do something he loves. Juan shared that in school, he is the most comfortable out on the playground with his friends, and during P.E. He enjoys doing physical activities and he feels confident about his abilities. One area in school, however, that Juan is not comfortable is in the ELD room he goes to during Team Time. Team Time is a part of the day where students who need RTI and English Learners break out into different rooms with smaller classes, and a few students stay in their home classroom for enrichment. Even though he likes the teacher he has during Team Time, Juan is not comfortable with the idea that he has to leave the room and miss out on the fun things in the classroom. Juan also feels like some of the things they go over during his Team Time are things that he already knows and does not want to spend more time learning about them.

After speaking with Juan and his mother, I discovered how big Juan's support network is. Outside of school, Juan has his mother, grandparents, aunts, and all of his cousins and other family

members. He also has his friends and coaches from his out of school activities. In school, Juan has access to both my master teacher and I, the principal and vice principal, and his teachers for the after-school program he is involved in. Juan has many people that he is able to find support and encouragement from.

Although Juan is a bilingual student and has gone through a serious life experience, Juan's development is typical. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities children, when developing, normally follow a very distinct path for development; they take information from the people around them, process it, and store information into their brains to be used at a later time (Early Identification: Normal and Atypical Development, 2018, <http://www.ldonline.org/article/6047/>). An atypical child however will develop at a different rate than other children and showcase different abilities at various different stages. Reflecting on this information, Juan's development is typical.

Action Plan

Based on the various types of data I have collected I plan to focus on Juan's writing and reading abilities. Specifically focusing on Juan's reading, my first step will be to conduct an informal reading inventory, where I will be asking Juan questions about different genres, interest, and stories he enjoys. From there we will use the information and research books in the library that he would find interesting. Juan and I have already briefly met to create a reading goal of reading two chapter books this next trimester so keeping that in mind, we will decide how many chapters to read and when he will read them by in order to finish his book. After we have gone through the process once we will continue to work together to find more books until Juan is feeling comfortable with discovering books he enjoys on his own. Stemming from Jones and Kahn's quote above, my hope is that if I show an interest in Juan's reading and display for him that I am there to support and encourage him he will be more willing to try things that may have seemed difficult before. Also, for Juan's writing we will work together in small groups during writing time with other students who are at his same level, break down the process, and

participate in more of a guided practice as opposed to independent, slowly weaning away from assistance until everyone is feeling confident.

While discussing the action plan for reading specifically, Juan and his mother both showed an interest. For Juan's mother, she is focused on getting him to read more and stated that she felt as though his feelings toward reading have a lot to do with her. Juan was excited about the idea of working together to find books for him. When I explained that we would be doing a book quiz he was not thrilled, but after elaborating on what the book quiz is for, Juan was more excited. My plans to support Juan in his reading are the book inventory, and also creating a visual timeline together where he can track his progress and measure if he is staying on track, monitoring and adjusting when necessary. Also, if there is a book that may be a higher reading level, but he is interested in, rather than discourage him from reading it we could create a small book club with myself or another student, so Juan is able to have the support of reading with another person. My plans for Juan's writing are to work closely in small groups of other students at his level, where they are sharing ideas with each other and honing their writing skills in a safe space. I would also like to encourage Juan to keep his own notebook where he can jot down any ideas or stories he may have. The goal for this free writing is for Juan to see that not all of his writing has to be graded but rather he can write for the pure enjoyment, encouraging him to see that writing can be fun.

For Juan's socio-emotional development, the main plan is to create an open line of communication. With this being his first year out of therapy, Juan needs to know that he can still share his thoughts and emotions with an adult and he does not have to keep everything bottled up. Other plans for support are to create a personal action plan to help him become more self-aware and be able to self-manage in difficult situations where an adult may not always be present. Also, supporting Juan's growth-mindset with the use of a personal mantra that he can repeat to himself when he is feeling unsuccessful.

In order to continue tracking Juan's progress, I will monitor his writing through small groups and writer's notebook checks. I will also use our weekly library time to check in with him about books he is reading, whether he is enjoying them or needs to find a new book, and finally I will keep notes of any conversations we have that need to be communicated with his mother. In order to keep his mother updated I will provide emails and phone calls, informing her about how Juan is doing and communicating with her any needs she is witnessing at home. Juan is a great student, caring friend, and thoughtful child and I cannot wait to observe and be a part of the successes and growths he will have this year.

Focus Student 2

Demographic Information

During my time at the school, I have gotten the opportunity to work with my focus student two, and throughout this writing she will be referred to as Emma. Emma is a nine-year-old girl who is the oldest of four siblings, loves to read and draw, and has big dreams for herself. Emma also suffers from severe urinary tract infections that often cause her to end up in the hospital and miss large chunks of school at a time. Emma has many strengths both in and outside of the classroom. For example, Emma is a strong reader, enjoys participating in classroom discussions, follows explicit directions, and is helpful to her classmates and the teacher. Emma's helpfulness also carries over into her home life where she helps care for and support her parents with her younger siblings and is also a skilled basketball player. Although she has strong abilities, Emma is having a difficult time this year with math, friendships, and having confidence within herself. I chose Emma to be one of my focus students because I see a lot of myself within her and how her confidence has been shaken and I want to work with her to build herself back up to be the amazing student and person she can be.

Assets & Needs: Academic Standing

Emma is currently on a 504 plan for her urinary tract infections. Within the 504 plan, it states that every two hours Emma must be able to go to the bathroom, waiting to go to the bathroom even for a little can lead to a bad infection. Most recently, Emma was out of school for an entire week because she had a terrible urinary tract infection that caused her to go to the hospital. In instances where she has an infection, Emma's mother feels that it is best to keep her home rather than her trying to go to school and being uncomfortable and having to go the bathroom, frequently.

Emma is currently reading above her grade level and performs well on assessments that require her to read a passage and explain her comprehension. However, Emma struggles with her math assessments and is having a difficult time with the subject. When it comes to taking summative assessments, Emma often becomes tense and visibly frustrated and overwhelmed. On formative assessments, however, the stress of performing well is not as daunting and she becomes more relaxed but will still fixate on a problem and begin to feel frustrated. Independently, Emma works well with some support from the teacher. In situations where she is working in groups, however, Emma tends to struggle a little more. A common theme in group work is Emma standing off to the side, struggling to engage with her group. During a recent activity the students were all put into groups of three and tasked with the job of building a free-standing tower out of pipe cleaners, within the first few minutes Emma came up to me because her group was talking and not including her. Rather than trying to talk to them and inserting herself Emma became more of a bystander, giving feedback and providing ideas here and there, as opposed to being a direct participant. Although Emma struggles with communicating with her peers and group activities, she is always a student who tries her best and puts in all of her effort. Every assignment Emma turns in is her best effort and highlights her abilities to complete tasks as directed by the teacher. Overall, Emma is a creative individual who critically thinks about the world around her but struggles with communicating her thoughts and opinions to the people she is with.

Emma is an exceptionally strong reader and excels in this area. This year, however, Emma is struggling with the math content. After speaking with her mother, she shared that Emma has been having a difficult time this year with her confidence. She began the year feeling strong and confident in her abilities but has unfortunately lost that and it is affecting her all around. I believe Emma also is a student who needs to have things explained multiple times and works better in small groups where she can have more individualized attention. Comparing Emma's work to her assessments, she is understanding the problems when they are worked through in the class, but when there is no support and reinforcement she struggles. Her mother shared that a lot of the time when Emma is working on homework at home she needs help and her mother does not fully understand the steps or how to solve the problem and it becomes frustrating and overwhelming for everyone.

Assets & Needs: Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity

Emma's behavior strengths are her drive to be a good student, following directions, and always doing her best work, making sure to put her best effort forward. An area of growth for Emma is her tendency to become frustrated and close off from her teachers and other adults. Socially, Emma's strengths are her excitement to be involved, her flexibility, and her desire to help others. However, one area of growth for Emma is working on being kind to her peers and using positive language in group and one-on-one conversations. Another area of growth for Emma is developing the confidence to insert herself into group activities, whether they are inside the classroom or out on the playground.

Having the opportunity to speak with Emma and her mom, I was able to learn how important confidence is to Emma, and how difficult it has been this year having that confidence shattered. Knowing this information, I want to really work with her on her socio-emotional development, encouraging Emma to be confident in herself and appreciate the opportunities and peers around her. Focusing on Emma's self-awareness and self-management will be the first steps in building her back up. In Chip Wood's novel *Yardsticks*, he emphasizes how critical nine-year-olds are of themselves, stressing the point that "an ounce

of criticism is magnified by a nine-year-old” (*Nine-Year-Olds*, pg. 109). Although it is detrimental at this age for teachers to be light-hearted, it will benefit Emma tremendously if she begins to become aware of how her mentality and her outlook holds power over the way she feels, not others. Extending into her self-management, I want to practice with and encourage Emma to realize when she is beginning to feel tense and overwhelmed with an activity. A habit that I have been noticing with Emma is her twisting of hair and putting it in between her lips. Wood states that when they become very tense, nine-year-olds often resort to twisting hair, biting nails, or pursing lips in order to receive tension” (*Yardsticks, Nin-Year-Olds*, pg. 110). Emma’s twisting of her hair and placing it in between her lips is a sign that she is tense, and I want to work with her to recognize the sign, reflect on what is making her feel overwhelmed, and manage the problem whether that be taking a brief break or asking for help. Helping Emma to be aware of herself and the power she has to control her feelings will help her tremendously in the classroom.

Another area of socio-emotional development to work on with Emma is her growth mindset. Referencing Wood’s statement above, nine-year-olds are extremely critical of themselves, and that is why it is important to model and instill in them a strong growth mindset. At this moment in time Emma’s biggest hurdle in the classroom is math, and in her mind, she is not able to do it and that is what leads her to become tense and feel overwhelmed. While working with Emma I want to focus on the power of yet and implementing positive words of affirmation. Focusing on the power of yet, I want to model to Emma using it when working. For example, if we are working on a problem and she begins to say she cannot do it, stopping her and changing the phrasing to “I do not understand this YET, but I know I can do it”. I also want to model and encourage Emma to create her own positive words of affirmation mantra. It is important for students to see that their teachers are people who struggle just like them and modeling my own mantra that encourages me will help her see the power of positivity.

A third area of socio-emotional development to work with Emma on is her social awareness. Being socially aware means that you recognize and understand how you react to different social situations and in turn modify your interactions with others to achieve ultimate success. Emma's self-awareness goes hand in hand with her social-awareness, meaning that if she is not aware of herself and her feelings or emotions, she cannot be aware of how the world around her impacts those feelings. Two practices to put into place with Emma, are 1) realizing what situations make her uncomfortable, and 2) becoming aware of behaviors of others that cause her to react negatively. Implementing these two practices will not only help Emma be aware of her own feelings but will also help her be aware of situations and behaviors that cause her to become tense and feel overwhelmed. By being aware of these instances, Emma and I will be able to work together to develop an action plan to help her feel successful in times of distress and ultimately improve her confidence in herself and her ability to handle difficult situations.

The final, and most important, area of socio-emotional development I want to work on with Emma is her relationship skills. A lot of Emma's hesitation to join her peers and participate in groups stems from not feeling safe in the environment. Stephanie M. Jones and Jennifer Kahn emphasize how intertwined social, emotional, and cognitive growth are and the importance of keeping the two as one rather than trying to meet the needs of all separately. Jones and Kahn highlight the role of the teacher in ensuring all students social, emotional and cognitive needs are being met, emphasize that "classrooms characterized by warm and engaging student-teacher relationships promote deeper learning among students" (The Evidence Base For How Learning Happens, pg. 20, 2017-2018). If Emma is not feeling a warm and engaging connection between herself and her peers or herself and her teachers, how will she be willing to put herself out there and truly engage with her learning? The first step to helping Emma with her relationship skills is to foster the connection between myself and her through daily check ins that are encouraging and help her feel safe. Once the connection between Emma and myself is strong, we can work together to build a strong relationship with one of her peers. As long as Emma feels that she has

someone to connect to in the classroom, she will become more comfortable with herself and the idea of engaging in social relationships.

Emma's social identity rests in the community of her family. Emma is a nine-year-old Mexican-American female. Emma is an English only student; however, her family does speak Spanish. She comes from a working-class household with both a mother and father. Emma used to live with her grandmother but has recently moved into a new home further away from the school. In order to create an inclusive environment for Emma where she feels secure with her self-concept, I will create opportunities for her to feel heard and represented, through activities that include literature of characters of the same ethnicity and race. I also want to create opportunities for Emma to share her voice and feel successful being independent. In Emma's family she plays an important role in helping with her siblings and following what her parents and elders say, but I also want to allow Emma the opportunity to express herself and voice her personal thoughts and feelings.

Assets & Needs: Funds of Knowledge

Having the opportunity to conduct the home visit, I was able to see how tight knit Emma's family is. Quality time with her immediate family is valuable, and almost every weekend Emma and her extended family get together. When speaking with Emma's mother, she described her as helpful, athletic, and she loves to read and draw. Emma's mother also shared that she thrives from having consistency but is very slow to warm to change and often struggles if there is a big shift in the norm.

For Emma's family, school and education are highly valued. Emma's mother and father both went to college and have instilled in her the importance of receiving her education so that she is able to do whatever she wants. Emma's mother shared that the number one quality she looks for in a teacher is communication. She believes that the role of the teacher is to not only teach the content but also establish a relationship with the students and their families. Ultimately, Emma's mother believes with technology

being so accessible, the teacher should be in constant communication with parents about their child and how they are performing in the classroom.

When speaking with Emma and her family, the one thing that surprised me the most was Emma's comfort level in the classroom and her decline of confidence. Emma's mother stressed that in the past Emma has been successful and enjoyed her schooling, but this year has been extremely difficult for her. When I was around Emma's age I had the same difficulties in the classroom; I did not feel confident or safe to try and it caused me to feel tense and overwhelmed, and for a child those are big feelings. Right now Emma is struggling in a space where she spends seven hours of her day and that can have a negative impact on her views of school for the rest of her career. It is important to both her mother and I that that does not happen and rather Emma can build from the experience a strong resilience and belief in herself.

Assets & Needs: Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations

Emma is a bright, young girl who dreams of working at N.A.S.A just like her father. Emma has had multiple opportunities to go to work with her dad and although she is not sure what exactly she wants to be yet, she has set her sights on being able to work there too. Her family is a major motivator for her to continue her schooling so that she will be able to fulfill her dreams. When I asked Emma who the most influential person in her life was, she thought for a moment and stated that it was her father. After seeing the work her father does and sharing those experiences, Emma explained that he is her inspiration and she wants to be just like him when she grows up.

The biggest event that Emma has been through that has shaped her is her struggles with urinary tract infections. Emma shared that when she gets sick and has to miss a lot of school it is hard for her to come back. Being gone for so many days makes Emma feel like she has missed out on a lot of things and makes it more difficult to try and interact with her peers. Emma and I spent a lot of time talking about how she feels about school and a lot of her thoughts were mixed feelings. Emma has always enjoyed school and has loved going to school to be with friends and her teachers, but this year she is feeling

different. This year Emma does not feel like she is as close with the other girls because she wants to play sports and they want to talk about girly things. However, she doesn't feel like she can play with the boys because a lot of them are mean and say rude things when she tries to play with them. The schoolwork is also harder for Emma this year and she has a hard time admitting when she is struggling and needs to ask for help.

I spoke with Emma about times where she felt the most successful in school, and times where she was feeling like she was having a really difficult time with school. Emma explained that last year in third grade she felt the most successful because she got along with her classmates and loved her teacher and it made school feel a lot better, even if she was struggling with something. Emma continued to explain that this year she always feels the least successful in math. She explained that in the beginning of the year it was not so bad, and she was understanding the math, but the past couple of months have been difficult. When I asked Emma what the most challenging thing was with math, she shared that it is really hard when the teacher asks if everyone understands and a few people say yes, overpowering her voice. When some of her classmates are understanding the math but she is not she feels as if something is wrong with her and it makes her feel overwhelmed with everything. I also wanted to know where Emma felt the most comfortable in school and where she feels uncomfortable. Emma stated that she always feels comfortable during P.E. because she knows that she is able to participate in the activities and doing well always makes her feel good. When I prompted Emma to share where she felt the least comfortable she hesitated and then continued to share that she did not feel comfortable in the classroom. Emma explained that she does not always like who she sits next to and has a hard time feeling focusing. She also shared that she does not always feel safe to share her responses because she is worried she will be wrong, and her classmates will laugh at her or think she is dumb.

Although Emma is having a difficult time in school this year, she is still strongly encouraged and influenced by her parents and their beliefs about the importance of school. She is working with her

mother to feel more confident with herself and understand that not every year is going to be easy, but it is still important to always do your best. Emma has a strong home support with her immediate and extended family, and she is working towards discovering who and where she can find support in school as well.

Although Emma is currently dealing with severe urinary tract infections and socio-emotional development, she is still developing typically. The National Center for Learning Disabilities identifies typical child development as a process that involves going through various stages at critical ages, processing the world of information around you, and storing it inside your brain to later use (Early Identification: Normal and Atypical Development, 2018, <http://www.ldonline.org/article/6047/>). The National Center for Learning Disabilities focuses on the differing stages and processes a child would go through if they were developing atypically and works to help them utilize their abilities at every stage. After discussing Emma's childhood with her mom, observing her development in the classroom, and researching both types of development, I have concluded that Emma is developing at a typical rate.

Action Plan

Based on the data I have collected, my plan for Emma will be to improve her confidence in her math skills. For Emma, much of her action plan will revolve around her academic and socio-emotional growth. The major action I discussed with Emma and her mother was creating a time where Emma and I could meet every other day and discuss how she is feeling, if she is having any problems, and how she is doing with her schoolwork. I wanted to establish this form of communication so that Emma could practice her relationship skills in a safe space. Both Emma and her mom were excited about the idea, and Emma immediately wanted to plan when we could have our conversations. My goal is that as these conversations begin to help Emma feel more comfortable, that comfort level will transition to inside the classroom, specifically in math. When working with math, I want to encourage Emma to share her struggles, whether it be by raising a hand or waiting to talk to the teacher privately. I

also want to work with Emma being self-aware of when she is beginning to feel tense and monitor her behavior, taking action steps to solve the problem either by asking a peer for help or utilizing the teacher. I also hope to utilize Emma's funds of knowledge. Students bring a wide array of experiences and outlooks inside the classroom, and if Emma can practice utilizing those experiences to recognize her struggles and communicate effectively with adults and peers, she will become more successful and confident both inside and outside of the classroom (Bondy & Hambacher, *Let Care Shine Through*, 2016, pg. 51).

Much of the data I collect on Emma's growth will be from notes and records of conversations and observations both in and out of the classroom. I will also be observing her growth in math, looking for any changes the more comfortable she becomes. My goal is to stay in contact with Emma's mother through email, Remind 101, and phone calls to check in on Emma and see if she is sharing anything with her mother that she may not be sharing at school. It is important that we not only look at Emma's growth in math, but her socio-emotional development with her peers, and the connection she has with school. My goal for Emma is that she begins to regain the confidence she had in the beginning of the year and is able to grow into a strong young woman that uses her voice to express herself and is secure and confident in her abilities.

Focus Student 3

Demographic Information

Focus Student 3 is a unique, intelligent, and caring individual, and throughout this writing he will be referred to as Hector. I chose Hector for Focus Student 3 because I wanted to get to know more about him and see who he is as an individual person, apart from his surroundings. Inside the classroom, Hector is one of the brightest students; he has been a part of the GATE program for the past two years. Hector is also eager to follow directions and help the teacher in any way possible. One major area of growth for Hector is not talking during instruction. Outside of the classroom, Hector shows strong strengths in his

communication with peers and adults, successful participation in team-oriented physical activities, and the desire to help any person who needs assistance. An area of growth that I have witnessed, and was discussed with his mother, is Hector's tendency to fixate on the bad. For example, if there were an incident on the playground with two older boys, Hector would take that few minutes of frustration, internalize it, and allow it to impede his entire day. He struggles greatly with moving past difficult situations and it affects him negatively.

Assets & Needs: Academic Standing

Hector is a Jehovah's Witness and within his religious beliefs there is a large list of things he is not allowed to participate in, including certain academic activities. This often proves difficult for Hector because he is trying to follow the guidelines of his religion, but also participate in activities with his peers. These specific rules have resulted in Hector being unsure of what is allowed and what is not, and ultimately him opting out of participating in activities.

Previously mentioned, Hector is involved in the GATE program and he is very bright and has a great awareness of the world around him. On all testing (formative, summative, and standardized) Hector performs well. Although Hector has a great strength in communicating with peers, when working in group settings he tends to become dominant and want things to be done his way. This often leads to other students feeling unheard but unwilling to express their feelings because they consider him to be "the smart one" who they should listen to. Independently, Hector works very well. Hector is self-sufficient, meaning he can start tasks right away without teacher direction and remains focused on the task until it is complete. Hector is the type of student who will receive instructions from the teacher, follow them accurately, and complete the task as directed. Most of the time Hector's work is thoughtful and complete, however, if he feels that he already knows what to do he will rush through the work and have to redo a majority of it due to careless mistakes. Overall, Hector shows great vigor with his critical thinking and

communication skills. He is also a very creative individual who has an imagination that permits him to think up unique characters and stories.

Hector has prior academic knowledge with sentence structure, primary grammar skills, and experience with various styles of writing. Hector's greatest struggle lies with his writing. Although he understands the numerous styles of writing and can identify them, he often struggles with implementing the appropriate tools into his own work. One reason Hector may struggle with this is because he has not had much exposure with drafting and completing his own writing. Even though he has had a vast experience with different writing styles, he has not actually put them into his own practice. I also believe he struggles with his writing because he does not want to write about something his religion would deem inappropriate. Hector is very cautious and wants to always make sure that he is doing the right thing and being a good boy, and if an any activity will divert his ability to be good then he will avoid it at all costs. Observing his writing from the first trimester, Hector struggled with understanding the concept and expectations. He also did not grasp the narrative part of it; rather than writing a story about one thing, he wrote a list of everything he did. The academic standard Hector is excelling in, is math. He enjoys working with the numbers and feels a sense of security in the consistency of it all. There is no possibility of Hector being in a difficult situation with math because he is just working with numbers and solving problems.

Assets & Needs: Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity

Hector possesses strong communication skills. He has had a multitude of exposure with peers, younger children, and adults, and this has allowed him to develop his communication skills. Hector's abilities allow him to do well socially. He has a small group of close friends, but he communicates well with everyone. Hector also displays strong behavior skills, always trying to be his best, exhibiting his finest character, and it shows.

Hector's area of need lies below the surface, it is not so easily seen. Hector's greatest need lies in the pressure he is constantly placing on himself. Having high expectations of oneself is important, but Hector's expectations often lead to him being distraught when they are not met. Although he is only nine-years-old, Hector shows a great awareness of the world around him and the people that inhabit his close circles. He is beginning to reach an age where he is not just following the guidelines set by his religion but is starting to be intrigued with other possibilities around him. Hector places so much pressure on himself to be a good boy and follow his religious beliefs that he makes himself feel guilty for wanting or doing something that is not deemed appropriate. Wood states in *Yardsticks* that nine-year-olds are ending their childhood and making the transition to young adults and they begin to place more pressure on themselves (2015). Students at this stage of development need a supporter who is there to comfort them and lighten situations, so the pressure does not feel so daunting.

At this stage of his life, much of Hector's social identity surrounds his religion. Although he has friends at school, the people he is with the most outside of the classroom are either his family, or friends he has made from church. All out of school activities he participates in are related to the church or his family. Within his circle he identifies himself as a young, emerging bilingual, Hispanic male with strong religious values.

In the classroom, it is important for Hector to not feel that he is being singled out because of his religion. This year has been a lot of trial and error with what he can and cannot do. He is very aware of the guidelines but struggles with not understanding the explicit details of his participation limits. The most important part of creating an inclusive environment for Hector is making sure he feels his voice is being heard. If there is ever a situation where he does not feel comfortable participating, he understands that he can approach either my master teacher or myself to express his concerns. Many of the activities this year have also been designed or tweaked for Hector to ensure that he can participate and not feel cut off from the classroom fun because of his religious beliefs. Although it is a continuous trial and

error, creating an inclusive classroom where Hector feels affirmed rather than shamed in his self-concept is what is most important. Success in implementing this revolves around constant communication between Hector and the teachers, and the communication between the teachers and Hector's mom.

Assets & Needs: Funds of Knowledge

Hector has an abundant resource of funds of knowledge. At home Hector's primary language spoken is English, however, his mother shared that within the past few years she has been using Spanish in the home more so Hector and his younger sister can become bilingual. Hector will also speak Spanish at the Spanish church services his family attends. At home, Hector takes care of his younger sister and sick grandmother. He plays a big role in helping his mother and father around the house and was described by his mother as a strong helper who always goes above and beyond to take care of those around him.

Respecting elders has been a large part of Hector's upbringing. All adults are seen as a model to respect and listen to. When speaking with Hector's mother, she shared that school is very important to herself, her husband, and Hector. She is always encouraging him to do the right thing and be a good, respectful boy, especially to his teachers. Although there are certain activities in school that Hector does not participate in, his mother understands that much of the schooling he takes part in is necessary and important for him to learn.

Hector and his family attend the Spanish services at his church two times a week. At these services, when they are asking for prayers, Hector is encouraged to speak up and share with the congregation in Spanish. After services on Saturdays, Hector and his family walk around various neighborhoods to share their religion with others. When speaking with homeowners, Hector is urged to initiate conversation and share the readings with them. As part of the Jehovah's Witness religion, they do not celebrate holidays or birthdays (<https://www.jw.org/en/>). Hector's mom shared that although they do

not celebrate holidays and birthdays, her husband and her enjoy rewarding their children's good behavior with toys and taking a family trip together every year.

One thing I learned from the home visit that surprised me was how involved Hector and his family are with their church. When speaking with his mother, she shared that a lot of their time on weekends is spent with family, but also that many of their friends are also a part of their church. I was also surprised to hear how much time they spend either at church or participating in church related activities. Hector and his family not only attend church two times a week, but on Saturdays, most of their day is spent at their service followed by church related activities.

I was born and raised a Catholic and I find comfort in my religious beliefs. As a human being I know that my beliefs are my own and I cannot force or expect everyone in the world to think the way I do. I believe learning about other religions and belief systems is fascinating and allows myself, and others, to open up to other ideas and develop a deeper sense of respect and understanding. As a teacher I know that my students are all coming in with different beliefs and ideas and it is my job to absorb their views, not force them to see something else. My philosophy as a 21st century teacher entails guiding my students towards the path of being open-minded, loving, and respectful human beings of a world-wide community.

Assets & Needs: Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations

Hector is a bright young boy, whose interests include dinosaurs, YouTube videos, reading, and math. He is currently reading a book series titled *The Last Kids on Earth* and cannot put it down; he loves that he is able to listen to the book online and follow along, it makes reading a lot more fun. Hector shared that his favorite subject in school right now is math; he enjoys being able to work with numbers and problem solve. When asked what he wanted to be when he grew up, Hector paused for a moment and with a big smile on his face said he wanted to research dinosaurs. Hector takes pleasure in learning about the different types of dinosaurs and all of the unique characteristics each one possesses.

A few years ago Hector's grandmother got really sick and had to come live with his family (she had a stroke). Since then she has not been able to talk much and will only say his name. Hector shared that he likes helping his grandmother and doing things for her. Helping around the house and with his grandma has taught him a lot about taking care of himself and how important it is to care for family. Hector shared that the most influential person in his life is his mother. He sees how much she does to take care of him and his sister and grandma. Although he does not always tell her, Hector is thankful for everything his mom does and he always wants to do his best so that he can make her proud.

As opposed to other students his age, Hector enjoys coming to school. He likes that he gets to learn about different things, especially math and science. However, his favorite part about school is getting to see his friends. I asked Hector if he remembered a time when he felt really successful in school, and a time where he might not have felt as good. He shared that he has always felt pretty successful with school. There have not been many things that are difficult for him and he always tries to do his best. The more he thought about it, Hector recalled the beginning of this year when he submitted his first writing assignment. The week before it was due Hector was on a trip with his family. He had the directions for what the writing was supposed to be about, what type (narrative), and the components that needed to be included. He thought he did everything well writing about each day of his trip, but when he turned it in he was told that he was only meant to choose one activity or day and focus on that. That was the first time he did not do well on an assignment and it was really difficult for him. His mother shared that he beat himself up over it for a few days and had a difficult time getting past it.

As we continued to talk about Hector's feelings towards school, I asked him if there was any place he felt the most and least comfortable at school. He stated that his favorite place at school is the library. Hector loves being in the library with all the books and computers, and he likes that on days like Halloween he gets to spend time a lot of time there. *For students who have specific religious beliefs like Hector they are allowed to spend the morning of Halloween in the library during the costume parade. The

place where Hector feels the least uncomfortable is on the playground during recess. He shared that a lot of the older students are mean, and they do not like sharing the balls, so they refuse to let anyone they do not like play with them. At school Hector has a support network including his teachers, the librarian, and the teachers from the after-school program. Outside of school, Hector has a strong support system within his immediate family, his extended family (including aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents), and a strong network of support that involves his church. There are many people Hector feels comfortable seeking advice and support from.

Hector's background has had a major influence on his outlook on school and the future. His mother has instilled in him from a very young age the importance of always doing your best and being a good person. Hector's mother shared that she has explained that even though she is not always around God is always watching him and it is important for Hector to always be his best for God. As part of the Jehovah's Witnesses' teachings, they are described a time where there will be a resurrection of all the good and faithful people. Hector is aware of these teachings and wants to make sure that he is always being good and faithful so that he will be a part of this resurrection. Relating to school, Hector wants to be able to work hard and be his best so that he can be successful and happy with whatever it is he ends up doing with his life, hopefully researching dinosaurs.

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, a child's development is considered typical when the child is obtaining cognitive and motor abilities at a "normal" age. This concept of "normal" age is based on the collective data of children's development across the board. At specific stages in a child's life, they develop certain abilities. Children take this knowledge, and the knowledge gained from those around them, store it in their brains, and utilize it later on at another developmental stage. The ability to absorb this information, store it, and recall it is considered to be typical development. Based on this information, Hector is considered to be going through typical child

development. He has developed cognitive and motor abilities at the proper stages of his life and continues to develop appropriately.

Action Plan

In the book *Yardsticks*, Wood explains the interest students begin to develop in science and math (2015). He goes on to state that students at this age are more analytical, wanting to know the why behind everything, and are also becoming less imaginative than their prior years. With this in mind and the data collected on Hector, I want to focus on further developing his writing abilities. With narrative writing there was much more imagination involved and Hector struggled with the structure of it. However, for the next part of writing, Hector will be working on informational writing. I believe this will be easier for Hector to understand and execute. Part of the writing will involve choosing a topic to write about. I want to work with Hector to choose something he has an interest in but might not have had the chance to explore much yet. Rather than just choosing something he knows, I want Hector to have the opportunity to explore topics outside his realm and enjoy the chance to learn something new. Having Hector start with something he does not already know about will help him understand that it is okay to not be good at everything and it is more important to work hard to understand new ideas.

After sharing the idea with Hector and his mom they were both excited. Although Hector had already thought about dinosaurs, he liked the idea of finding something new to become an expert on. Hector's mother shared that she enjoyed the idea because she hoped it would help Hector understand that it is okay to not always be good at something. Hector wanted to know how he would find something he did not know about that would align with his beliefs. I shared with him that the library is always a great resource, but we also have access to many online books through the websites the school provides. I stated that we could first make a list of different topics that he is interested in and feels comfortable exploring. After we have a list created of four or five topics we can start looking up different books online and in the library. Following, we will work together to decide if Hector is interested in the topic or not through a

rating of the books on a scale of 3-2-1. Three means the book/topic was extremely interesting and he wants to know more; a two rating indicates the book was interesting, but he is not sure he wants to keep learning yet; a book rated one means that Hector did not like the topic at all and is ready to focus on something else. Hector responded positively to this idea and is ready to start looking up topics and corresponding books to learn about.

After choosing a topic, the main area of focus will be writing. Part of the struggle Hector faces with writing is collecting and organizing his ideas. He does well with developing ideas but faces difficulty with how to organize them into something that makes sense. Once the topic Hector chooses to write about is chosen, we will create an outline of areas he wants to focus on within the topic. As we continue to narrow down the topic he will be able to focus more on specific areas rather than pressuring himself to learn about everything. The writing process for informative writing will be broken down into numerous stages. After the initial teaching of a step in the process, I will check in with Hector to measure his grasp on the concept and work with him to realize how he can apply the step to his reading and writing. As the writing progresses I will continue to check in and measure. If there is an area where he needs more support I will provide a brief reteach of the concept.

Focusing on Hector's socio-emotional development, I want to practice moving past difficult situations. Whether he gets in trouble, receives a bad grade, or is dealing with mean kids, Hector has a hard time letting go of the situation after it has happened. The first step I want to take is talking to Hector about why he thinks he gets so upset. I then want to try implementing some breathing techniques, such as 4-7-8 (breathe in 4 seconds, hold for 7, breathe out for 8), to help relax his mind and body. I also want to follow up with creating a positive mantra, explaining that Hector is choosing a word or phrase he can repeat to himself that will help trigger his mind to think positive thoughts. Ultimately, I want to work with Hector on lightening his expectations of himself. I would like to share with Hector that we are all our own worst critic, but we need to work on being our best champion. We hold the power to determine

our thoughts and mood, no one else, and it is our job to fill our minds with positive thoughts, not negative ones.

In order to assess Hector's progress, I will collect data on his writing by checking his writing and reader's notebook. In these, I will be looking for entries he is completing and observing whether or not he is understanding the concepts being presented to him. Weekly check ins will help me collect information on how Hector is doing socio-emotionally. With these check ins I will be asking him how it is going at recess, if he is practicing the breathing technique and positive mantra and discussing his feelings. Phone calls home and messages on the Remind 101 app to his mother will help convey Hector's progress. In these brief conversations I will share how he is doing and whether progress is being made or not. Hector is a smart, caring, loving child and I believe that with the right amount of support he will not only excel academically but socially and emotionally as well.

Conclusion

Conducting the home visits for each of the focus students has helped me understand how unique each life is in the classroom. Each student has their own situations and struggles that they deal with at home, and it is important as their teacher to help them cope with all of it. The amount of stress and anxiety children deal with at younger ages has taken a toll on their socio-emotional development. The idea of establishing a safe and positive learning environment is needed now more than ever. Students need to feel that they have an outlet from their lives; they need a person who makes them feel safe and open enough to share what they are going through rather than bottling it up inside.

Each student's visit has also helped me see the importance of social and emotional supports. Many children are unaware of how to handle difficult situations and are often left feeling alone and confused. As a 21st century teacher, I feel not only tasked with the responsibility of teaching content but the opportunity to help students develop a positive growth mindset that will help them tackle any situation that comes their way. If students are able to practice these strategies in a safe and positive environment,

they will feel more readily able to handle situations outside of the classroom. I will not be able to be there for my students all the time, but I will feel much better knowing they were given the proper tools to handle their difficult circumstances.

Living in this modern world has opened numerous doors for educators to provide access to all learners. There are hundreds of resources readily available to provide teachers with the tools to support learners' access to content at every stage. Students also need to be provided with the skills to search and advocate for their own resources to support themselves. Helping students take ownership in their learning will increase the positive experiences that take place in the classroom and decrease the negative outlooks of school. Getting to know these three focus students and their families better has made me appreciate the uniqueness of each student and made me realize that I have the power to influence these children's idea of learning, so why not make it positive?

The World Around Me

At this point, we have hit close to home, literally. My school is exactly 3.0 miles from my home, roughly a nine minute drive (depending on the day and the time), and a brisk 30-45 minute walk down-hill, but because of a large cross street I am considered to be a different neighborhood. The community my students are surrounded by is far different than the community I have grown up in. My first day walking on to the campus was my first time ever experiencing the school. I have grown up in the neighborhood but had no idea it even existed. The large cross street seems to be a barrier. A defining line meant to divide not only schools' boundaries, but the city. Above the street life seems "easier", but below people face vastly different struggles such as poverty and gangs. Why do these lines define the community? Why do these lines define my students? I grapple with this questions as I look at the community surrounding my students, and I use this question to spark a fire under myself to encourage my students to blur the lines.

Micro-Community Research

The city itself is considered to be a suburb, an outlying district of a city. During the mid-nineteenth century wagon trails, stagecoach lines, railroads, and railway lines all brought supplies, men, and women to the barren area (City of RC, 2019). In the late 1970s there was a massive growth spurt in the grapevine, orange grove filled land. Since then, the climb in growth has continued. As of 2016, the population has risen from 129,149 in the year 2000, to 176,540 in 2016. Among those 176,540 citizens 36.9% are Caucasian, 36.5% are Hispanic, 12.3% are Asian, 10.6% African American, 3.0% identify as two or more races, and 0.2% are Native Americans (CityData.com, 2019).

Looking at the school alone, it is beautiful. It has been renovated within the past 8-10 years, the campus is large, there is a gate surrounding the school that is not menacing but provides a sense of comfort and safety, and the halls are filled with student artwork. If you turned around and strolled through the neighborhood, however, you might notice some of the houses need updating. Walking north a few streets you would see the mobile home park and heading south you will see the vast amount of apartments. These apartments are filled with students from the school, many of them containing more than one family. According to the school, any family living with another family in the same residence is considered to be “homeless” because they are sharing a roof. This does not mean that they truly are homeless or they are unable to provide support for their children, but they do receive benefits from the school, such as free or reduced lunch.

To an outsider the community may look uninviting, but the members within are the exact opposite. In the mornings during drop off, many of the parents can be seen walking their children to school with their younger siblings, parents and grandparents dropping off their children and shouting out the window “Have a great day, I love you”. Many of the students have family members that attend the school as well and can often be seen walking or getting dropped off together. There is a deep rooted feeling of community within the members of the school and surrounding area. Each student brings their own unique background that is valued and recognized. Out of all the students, 26.3% are identified as

English Learners (School Accountability Report Card, 2018). These are students who have checked the box when signing up for school that says they speak a language other than English at home. There are many members of the community, however, that speak a wide variety of languages. The most common language spoken in the community is Spanish and has been the top language, but other languages such as Korean, Cantonese, Filipino, and Mandarin have spiked in recent years.

The most common population that can be found in the surrounding community are Hispanic members. Looking specifically at the school demographics, the most influential student group is Hispanic or Latino which makes up 79.6% of the school population, with African American students including 8.0%, Caucasian students 6.9% and Asian, Filipino, and Native American students encompassing the rest of the 5.5% (School Accountability Report Card, 2018). The most common industries that can be found among the community are Manufacturing, Retail, Construction, Health Care, and Educational services. For many students' families, common occupations are jobs such as sales, construction, installation/maintenance repair, office and administrative support, and education training. For many families parents and guardians work a full time job, possibly more than one, and they are working in industries within the community.

Previously stated above, many of the families from the school live in apartments, mobile homes, and some live in houses. In the surrounding area, there are a number of mobile home parks and apartments. As part of the school boundary map, a small portion of the boundary lines extend south into the next city and past the freeway. Many of the students in my classroom live in local apartments. They either walk to school or are close enough for parents to drop them off and head back home or to work. A few months back I discovered that two of the students' families in my classroom are currently living together. The students refer to themselves as cousins and live in their home with their mothers and younger siblings.

In recent years, the school has attempted to expand and get involved more involved with the surrounding community. Part of this involvement stems from a strong relationship with the local police department. The school has fostered a strong bond with the police department and facilitated communication and school wide involvement. This past year the police provided a special training for active shooter situations, supporting the protection of students and helping teachers become aware of appropriate responses. The county also provides resources for the school/district such as United Way, which focuses on education, income, and health for all communities (United Way, 2018). Through United Way, teachers partake in Adopt a Family each Christmas, which works with a family from the school who is in financial need to provide them with food, clothing, and gifts. UNICEF for every child is another resource and service that the students get to participate in. In one of the third grade classrooms specifically, the students wear step trackers and work together to reach 10,000 steps so that a box of food can go to a child in need. The county provides resources such as SELPA, Second Step, and Who is Your Hero for students. SELPA is a counseling service that allows parents and/or teachers to look at the needs of a student, what difficulties they may be having emotionally, and provide them with an opportunity to talk to someone and receive one-on-one support. The Second Step program is school wide, and provides specially scripted lessons that address the social and emotional needs of students with provided online materials for support. Finally, Who is Your Hero is a new program just implemented this past year. It is specifically tailored to the upper elementary girls and provides them with an opportunity to meet with other women, hear encouraging stories, and learn to believe and have confidence in themselves. The hope is that the larger the program becomes the more female students can get involved and the self-love can spread to every grade level.

Although there are many resources available, there could still be more that support a wider array of families and students. When I think about necessary resources, one student in my classroom comes to mind. This student has been having a lot of behavior problems recently where he is getting into trouble

with other students, saying and doing things he knows will get him in trouble, and searching for attention from teachers; his parents are going through a divorce and he has been having a difficult time processing it. Resources for families who are going through difficult times would benefit a lot of the students because it would provide them with an opportunity to share what they are feeling and develop skills on how to handle difficult situations. Earlier this year fourth and fifth grade students had assemblies with the head district nurse about the changes their bodies are or will be going through. Having the assemblies was a good ice breaker for the students, but more resources such as talks, books, or videos that students could access at home would be a great addition. Unfortunately, much of the information students have about their bodies and puberty come from skewed realities on social media or television and they are left with questions and confusion. Parents also have a difficult time knowing how or when to have “the talk” with their children, but if there were resources provided to them that were modern and accessible students and parents might have more success at sharing the appropriate information and answering any confusing questions.

Assets of the community are how involved parents and families are, the number of resources available to families, the racial and language diversity present, and the importance of a school to home connection. There are many opportunities for parents and family members to be involved with the school, and the school works tirelessly to ensure that there is a strong school to home connection and both parents and teachers are working together for the greater good of the child. Although there are many assets to the community, there are great challenges being faced. In the past 10 years there has been a spike in drug and gang issues (Anderson, Precinct Reporter Group, 2010). Students have family members, parents, and siblings that are part of gangs, some students also deal with drug problems in their families as well. Children faced with these challenges do not know how to deal with what is going on, they face neglect and sometimes even abuse. The challenges they face are great, and that in turn affects the community. Their children are being forced to be involved in activities that have profound, lasting effects. Another

challenge facing the community is the rising poverty level. According to City Data, as of 2016 the poverty level of the city was 10.8%, which was about 9% lower than the state average (City Data, 2019). Taking a closer look at the school community, 81.5% of the population is classified as “socioeconomically disadvantaged” (School Accountability Report Card, 2018). Looking at those numbers, there is an epidemic within the community. Students are faced with challenges every day in their lives, the last thing that should be added on to that are challenges at school.

Community Events and Community Members

Family Math Night is an event put on by the school to help families practice the math skills their students are learning with fun and engaging activities that they are able to take home. I had the opportunity to host a table for fourth grade Family Math Night. At the table, I introduced a game to the families that included working with pattern blocks that helped advance students fraction fluency and recognition. Each family was given a set of papers to cut out practice pattern blocks, a set of dice, and a whiteboard (sleeve protector with a paper inside) and dry erase markers to take home. The game was a hit with the families because they were able to understand the dynamic of the game and play with all members. Students from other grade-levels also joined the table and were able to understand and engage with the activity. After the event I had time to speak with the principal about Family Math Night and other events the school hosts. The principal stated that a big reason for putting on these events is the hope that families will come to learn what their child is doing in school in a safe learning environment. She stated that a large population of the community does not speak English or may not have continued their education and so school seems daunting and they often are unable to help their child at home. Events like Family Math Night offer an opportunity for families to learn about their child’s work in a safe and engaging environment. They leave feeling comfortable with a new game or activity and are able to continue working with their child in a fun and academic way.

Other key community events involve Open House, Digital Media Festival, and Coffee With the Principal. Open House is a time when all families are welcomed to tour their children's classrooms and observe the work they have been doing all year. The Digital Media Festival allows individual students or classes to design a media presentation with technology and display it for anyone to see. The entire district is part of the festival and many people enjoy coming and observing the talent that students display. Coffee With the Principal allows parents and family members to come chat with the principal. In this hour, the principal share new curriculum information, school memos, and answers any questions. The coffee aspect allows the environment to feel more relaxed and comfortable for parents and families, strengthening to school to home connection.

Many of the teachers at the school use a well-known organization called Donors Choose, where they set up projects (fundraisers) for materials in the classroom. Donors Choose is designed as a connection between business and interested parties to support schools. Local business often contribute to the projects and will often match donations contributed. In my classroom we recently used Donors Choose to fund a project for Chibitronics (LED lights, copper tape, Chibi chips, and connectors) to code. The Smarties company heard about the project and agreed to match every donation that was given. In a few short weeks we were able to purchase all of the materials and the students wrote letters to Smarties, thanking them for their generosity. Donors Choose has a strong connection with many of the teachers because it allows the students to connect with local businesses and receive generous donations for supplies that would normally be impossible to obtain.

School Site Research

Looking at the surrounding community and the boundary map, the school is located at the northwest edge of the community. The campus itself has been renovated within the past 10 years and will be renovated once more in the next five years. Although the school is surrounded by a gate, it does not portray a locked in feeling but rather more safety. The closed campus allows parents to drop their

children off and feel a sense of security. After being greeted in the office, there are doors you walk through, and as soon as you enter you are immediately greeted by beautiful and inspirational artwork from all of the students.

The school campus rests on a large plot of land that allows for a massive space for children to eat lunch, play on the basketball courts, and run around the grass field or play on the equipment. Having such a large space allows for many students to be out and playing at the same time. All upper elementary classrooms (3,4,5) are located in the back half of campus. There are separate buildings for the different grade levels, but many of the classrooms are separated by foldable walls that can easily be pushed and moved to open the space. One issue with this, however, is the noise that can come through the thin walls. Many times, if a classroom is loud enough, you can hear through the walls and it can become distracting for students. With the upper elementary classrooms being in the back, the primary grades (K,1,2) are all in the front building. This building unfortunately was not part of the newer renovation but will be the first to be updated within the next five years. There is also a state Transitional Kindergarten in the front in a portable that is more independent from the school. The campus layout utilizes the maximum amount of space to create an open and safe environment.

There are various policies and rules in place within the school; many are written down and clearly stated for students, but some are unspoken and considered to be more of the everyday practice. For example, students are expected to follow a ROAR model (R-responsible, O-organized, and R-respectful). These ROAR expectations are what guide student behaviors and set the guidelines for whether rules have been broken or not. The ROAR expectations are different for individual classrooms, hallways, bathrooms, and lunch tables/playgrounds. Along with the ROAR expectations come ROAR tickets. These are meant to be passed out whenever a student is considered to be being a good ROAR model. I struggle with this concept, and often go back and forth on whether I think it benefits student behaviors or harms them. On one hand, ROAR tickets are a helpful way to publicly reward a student for good

behavior, and when used in the appropriate setting can encourage other students to refocus and get back on track. My issue with the tickets lies in my belief to foster students intrinsic motivation. I am hopeful in a sense that if teachers encourage intrinsic motivation and avoid the extrinsic students will develop a will to work and will be more motivated to complete tasks because they want to. Kendra Cherry of Verywell Mind explains that "...both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are important ways of driving behavior" (October 19, 2018). This is not to say that one is greater than the other, but that when used appropriately, both extrinsic and intrinsic motivators encourage student success.

On the opposite end of the ROAR rewards are citations. A citation is bestowed upon a student when he or she has done something to harm or bully another student, showed defiance, academic dishonesty, and/or broken school rules. I have noticed that the process of deciding a student receives a citation is different for every teacher. Some are more free with handing out their citations and write students up frequently, while others keep them close and only pull them out when there has been a big problem. I am the latter. I believe that it is more powerful to take the time and talk to a student about why what they did is wrong, than to immediately write them up and send it home to be signed by their parent/guardian and get in trouble. Yes there are times when action should be taken, but if the action is taken so frequently it tends to lose its power and you are left with a stack of papers and students in trouble who might not fully understand why they are in trouble in the first place. I believe in positive and restorative classroom discipline that allows students the opportunity to process their behavior and change their point of view.

Based on my time at the school thus far and experiences with multiple teachers, I have noticed that morale among the teachers and staff is mixed. The principal is great when it comes to rallying the group and sharing her excitement and care for each student, but it does not always trickle down to the rest of the staff. Depending on who I am talking to, the students could be great kiddos who may try to test the waters but all in all are wonderful. I could also speak to someone else and hear a very different opinion. I

believe a lot of it has to do with time spent on the job, and personal positive energy. Yes teachers are tasked with colossal amounts of responsibility, but they also have one of the most rewarding jobs. Every day is something new and while it can be challenging and overwhelming, there is something good in every day and every student. There are teachers, however, that lack this positive outlook. They see the trainings, the extra requirements, the sub plans, as an excess amount of work that they do not have time for and are tired of doing. I have observed that in cases like this, morale among the students is low as well. When they are in an environment where the teacher is not happy to see them, they feel it and do not always respond in a positive way. But, if they are in the former environment, where the teacher is excited and looking for the good, the students reciprocate those feelings.

In the world of educational technology, the district is relatively progressive. They provide hands on training, seminars, and conferences for teachers to attend that focus on incorporating technology into the classroom. One of the main focuses of the district is preparing 21st century students. Aligning with this core belief is the implementation of technology in the school sites. Students have access to various applications and websites that promote coding, reasoning skills, and robotics. We are also lucky enough to be a one-to-one school where each student has access to their own tablet. Having the tablets allows students to explore at their own pace and practice skills that they will need as 21st century citizens.

Within the next year or two, the district is planning to implement a STEAM lab in every school. The STEAM labs are going to be designed so every space is usable and enhances learning. Inside the labs will be a whiteboard wall, foldable tables, rolling chairs, Virtual Reality headsets, and the opportunity to customize it to fit each unique school site. Seeing how the district is moving forward into the technological age and working towards providing access to all students excites me for the future.

Providing this opportunity for students now will provide them with the skills to be active and prepared 21st century global citizens.

School Mission and Demographics

“Our school is dedicated to empowering the whole child through creative, well balanced instruction” ring proudly as the mission statement. Each decision made for students’ education is designed to emulate the mission of the school. The vision is for the community to join together, creating a family of learners that respect and care for each other, creating a positive learning environment for all. In order to make the mission and vision statements come to life, the staff works towards creating positive learning environments for all students in and outside of the classroom. There are also trainings throughout the year for teachers to learn about a variety of educational tools to engage a diverse set of learners. The school also hosts a number of events that reach out to the local community, fostering connections and embodying the vision of creating a thriving learning environment.

In my classroom specifically, the words “creative, well balanced instruction” motivate my master teacher and myself every day. We work towards creating learning opportunities for each learner to be successful. When we plan weekly, my master teacher and I look beyond the regular paper and pencil curriculum and look to include a variety of experiences for students to develop 21st century skills. Technology plays a large role in our daily instruction. Rather than being used as a time filler, the technology in the classroom is strategically implemented to provoke inquiry and develop students’ skills.

The school is a melting pot of learners and educators, filled with diverse languages and prior experiences that when brought together create a true community. Among the students, 8% are African American, 1% are Native American of Alaskan Native, 2.9% identify as Asian, 1.7% as Filipino, 79.6% are Hispanic or Latino, and 6.9% identify as Caucasian or White. Each ethnicity bring their own prior experiences and knowledge, and although they are vastly different, the students work together to establish an environment where they can work and support one another. In total, the school has a population of 524 students, scattered between grades Kindergarten through fifth. Compared to other local public schools, this number is relatively low. Many of the students have spent many consecutive years there, their

families even attending before them. Teachers have not just taught the students, they have taught their siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles and even parents. The community ties run deep.

Amongst the staff the twenty-one of the teachers are female in comparison to the three male teachers. Unfortunately, the diversity of the students is not as clearly viewed among the staff. A vast majority of the staff and teachers are either Hispanic or Caucasian, and there are no African American members. I do not believe that this is intentional in any way but is rather a result of the community. With much of the community being Spanish speaking only, teachers who understand the language are highly sought after. My hope is that as new teachers begin to enter the field, the diversity among the staff will become even greater.

Through the active implementation of both the mission and vision statement, parents and family members are highly involved. More so in the primary grades, parents can be seen dropping students off, patiently waiting for their children to get inside their classrooms, parents can also be seen volunteering in the classrooms and helping teachers. There is also a group known as “Helping Hands” that is comprised of parents of students from all age-ranges and they work specifically on school-wide tasks. Each of these roles are completely voluntary but they provide parents with an opportunity to become more involved with the school community. In the upper elementary grades, however, parent involvement is not as high. Many parents portray a more relaxed persona, but some still work to be highly involved with their children’s schooling. Every month there is a ROAR rally and students are awarded with “Dragon of the Month” and they get to run through a tunnel of teachers and proudly stand up in front of their peers. Parents are invited to these events and there are always large crowds there to support their children. It is amazing to me still seeing the line of parents cheering for their child, exuding pride. The school continuously works to create these powerful moments for students and families, in the hope of fostering a positive connection with their education.

Classroom Exploration

When you walk inside the classroom there are desks everywhere, each in their own little group. Students' work is displayed on one wall, and anchor charts with valuable information fill the others. I cannot say exactly what my students feel when they walk inside the classroom, but I can share what I hope. I hope that when students walk inside the classroom they see how excited I am to see them. I hope they feel the excitement from me and it rubs off on them. I hope my students feel the care and love I have for them when I ask them how their morning is going, and the sincerity in my voice when something has gone awry in their lives and they want to talk. I hope my students feel the pride I have when they are enjoying their learning and taking ownership of it. I hope that even when I may be having an off day, they still feel the love and joy I have being their teacher.

My philosophy as a teacher rests on the foundation of creating a strong community and embodying the idea that we are a family; we may argue, get upset, say or do the wrong thing, but we still forgive, care for, and appreciate one another. After the weekend I share how much I have missed my students, making sure they know that they are welcomed in this space, they are safe, and they are cared for. Many of my students have difficult home lives that I in no way can fully comprehend, but I believe as their teacher it is my duty to create a space where those struggles can subside, and they feel safe and loved. Although the classroom is not completely my own I still work to establish this ideology as best I can, and when I do have my own classroom I will strive to embody this philosophy every day.

Many of the norms, routines, and procedures of the classroom were in place before I joined, and it was a difficult transition. The students knew more than I did (and sometimes still do) but they all were very welcoming to me. Every morning, students enter the classroom and begin their morning business. From there, math will usually take place, followed by writing and recess, then reading workshop, team time and lunch, and the day ends with either science or social studies, a quick clean-up of the class, any last-minute announcements and then students are free to go to their destinations. The only time plans really deviate from this schedule is if there is a special event taking place. Within this scheduled day are

the classroom routines and procedures, such as small group work and songs for clean-up and transitions. For a quick behavior check, students use a clip chart. There are five different levels and depending on students' behaviors they can move up or down. If a student moves up they usually receive a ROAR ticket, however, depending on the reasons a student moves down they could also be receiving a citation. The norms, procedures, and routines of the classroom create a structured environment for the students that allow them to thrive.

In order to help my students thrive, I strive to look at each of their assets and funds of knowledge. I know that each individual in the classroom is unique and has a vast set of knowledge they are bringing to the table, it is just a matter of tapping into those experiences and providing them the space to succeed. I enjoy creating opportunities for students to work collaboratively so they can practice their communication skills, but also learn from one another. Assigning groups, however, needs to be strategic. I need to look at the strengths of each student, observe who they work well with and maybe struggle to collaborate with, and I also look at their prior knowledge and experiences. For example, there is an Emerging bilingual student in my classroom and although he can speak and understand English well there are still areas where he needs extra support. I have another student who embodies the characteristics of a caregiver. She enjoys helping others in any way possible and is always looking for ways to help her classmates and teachers. She also happens to speak fluent Spanish, a fact that I only recently discovered a few months ago. Knowing both of their backgrounds, I make sure that I strategically place them in the same group and provide them with the opportunity to collaborate and succeed together.

Along with their assets and funds of knowledge, students also bring unique social-emotional needs. Previously stated above, all students come to school with their own struggles. On one end some may be that they are grounded because of a bad grade and all their games were taken away, but on the opposite end are extreme strains such as parents going through a divorce or family troubles. Whatever end of the spectrum their difficulties lie, many of my students walk through the door with the weight of

their world on their shoulders. There are many needs present in the classroom, and although some may come out through behavior issues often times they just need to know that someone is there to listen and help them process what they are going through. As I mentioned earlier, the district has a program called Second Step which is tailored to addressing the social-emotional needs of students and providing them with a toolbox of skills to handle their daily battles. As their teacher, the greatest support I can give my students is me. Letting them know that I am always there for them, and I am there to guide in any way possible.

Roughly 95% of my classroom is comprised of Hispanic or Latino students, the other 5% are African American, Asian, Caucasian, and Alaskan Native. There are fifteen females and eleven males in the classroom, and a large portion speak a second language. Among the twenty-six students in my classroom, five have been identified as GATE, there is one 504 plan, and no cases of IEPs. The five students identified as GATE are a part of the program and have enrichment classes after school roughly twice a month. In the classroom, however, they are provided opportunities to extend their thinking through hands on activities, collaboration, and inquiry. The needs of my one student with a 504 plan involve her need to use the restroom frequently, and recently working towards catching her up on classwork due to the numerous days of school she misses. There are many types of learners in my classroom, each as unique as the next.

In order to meet the needs of my unique learners, the resources in the classroom are extensive. Specifically, the widespread curriculum in the classroom. The National Geographic Reach textbooks and materials fill the needs of the Reading and Language Arts. Each student has a copy of their grade-level anthology filled with folk tales, fables, non-fiction articles and texts, and many more valuable sources of information. The National Geographic anthology is also available online. Focusing on the math materials, Houghton Mifflin's "California Math" is the sole math curriculum for the school. Many teachers also use outside resources such as Engage New York and Clothesline math to supplement some

of the broader lesson. Pearson Scott-Foresman's "California Science" has been part of the science curriculum, however, the district has been looking at other science programs and is looking to adopt a new one by next January. Almost every teacher at the school also utilizes Mystery Science. Mystery Science is filled with lessons and units across grade-levels and provides explicit plans and videos for teachers to facilitate. The program is loved by students because all of the activities involve hands on experiences that allow them to play and learn. Taking a look at the History, Pearson Scott-Foresman's "History-Social Science for California" provides workbooks for students and teachers to progress through. An unofficial adoption for the writing program at the school has been Lucy Calkins' "Our Pathways". Each lesson is explicitly structured with the narrative of the teacher, supporting materials, and examples of student work. Calkins is a favorite among the teachers and has even trickled down to the first-grade level. Another program exclusively paid for by the district is Meet the Masters. Members from the Meet the Masters Program visit about once a year and provide lessons on famous artists and provide students the opportunity to recreate the artists' work. The school and the district ensure that students are receiving a well-rounded curriculum that is accessible for all learners.

After school enrichment programs are also provided by the school. Currently, programs such as Yearbook, Theater, Photography, S.T.E.M., and Coding are provided. These programs are led by different teachers and available to all students. Students are allowed to sign up for programs with written permission from parents and teachers. The school also provides Math and Reading intervention to students who may need more individualized support and practice. There are also programs for families and parents, such as an after-school cooking class and parent English classes. The goal of the school is to provide opportunities for students to become more connected to school and teachers.

The English Learners in my classroom receive structured English Language Development time and push in support during math and writing. Each morning, a designated aid comes in to support the students. She works individually with them, reading questions in both English and Spanish, helping them

sound and spell out words, and providing support in any way possible. This service is extremely helpful for the students because often times they understand the work but have trouble finding the right words, and that is where the push in support is most valuable. From 12-12:40 every day, the English Learner students attend a specified English Language Development class. A lot of the time is dedicated to preparing for the ELPAC test students have to take, making sure they are prepared with the appropriate skills and vocabulary. This explicit instruction time has helped many of the students enhance their English skills and given them a boost of confidence in their schooling.

I am lucky to be at a school where there are so many readily available resources for teachers, families, and most importantly students. The school truly embodies their mission and vision statements and is working to teach the whole child through the guidance and support of a positive learning community. With the continuous support of the district, the community, and the school, students will be leaving the school well-equipped with a toolbox of skills and strategies to help them become thriving 21st century citizens.

A Tumultuous Year

“Tumultuous /t(y)oo¹ mælCHooəs/ (adjective): excited, confused, or disorderly; synonym: full of ups and downs” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, n.d.). This has been a tumultuous year, but the knowledge and experiences I am leaving with will be treasured throughout my educational career. To say this has been an easy, carefree year would be a lie but looking back at who I was a year ago, and comparing her to the woman I am now, gives me confidence in my future. My journey has had its ups and downs and as I am closing the chapter on this experience, I am equipping myself with a multitude of skills, strategies, and memories to take on whatever awaits me.

The Whole Class Perspective

As a collective group, the students have shown much growth throughout the year. Looking at the data from the most recent district benchmarks, more students are meeting grade-level. At the end of the first trimester, the students took math and language arts district benchmarks. The data showed that at least half of the class was either below or far-below grade-level in both math and language arts. Although these results can be skewed because most students either skip through the responses or do not read questions, the data displayed that many students were struggling, specifically in writing. Since the first trimester, students have been working towards developing their writing skills through determining the main idea and identifying supporting details. In order to prepare for the district benchmark for third trimester, students will be utilizing their main idea and supporting details skills to analyze and summarize their reading topics.

During the month of February the entire grade-level administered a Common Formative Assessment, or CFA, for Language Arts. The assessment was reproduced from a physical paper copy and students are required to scroll through the questions on one side of the screen, while simultaneously scrolling through the responses on the other side. This proved to be confusing for many students, and one in particular needed to retake the assessment because they had been highlighting the wrong responses. The assessment begins with students reading one to two sentences and responding *A, B, C, or D*, however, as the assessment continues the passages become longer. The cluster of English Learners received a “below grade-level” score, this means that they are not meeting fourth grade-level standards, and their reading range is between a first and third grade-level. One student who is classified as Emerging was excused from the

assessment because, even with one-to-one support from an instructional aide, he was unable to understand the vocabulary and determine the meaning of the passages. About ten of the students who took the assessment showed that they were reading at grade-level, meaning they are able to read at a fourth grade-level and are meeting the standards. Of the twenty six students in the class, three were identified as exceeding grade-level standards. This data means that those three students are able to read and comprehend texts ranging from fifth to eighth grade. Although students are showing growth, there is a wide range of learning abilities present in the classroom.

Although the state measures academic growth, the students in my classroom have shown all around advancement this year. The cluster of English Learners in my classroom have blossomed in their learning. The Emergent student mentioned above began the year hardly speaking to anyone and writing in spanish or needing a scribe to write responses for him so he could trace. Over the past five months he has become more vocal in the classroom, expresses his ideas, reads out loud in English, and is able to write responses in English for short writing assignments. Seeing how not only him, but all of the ELs have developed and become more confident with their English skills has been a wonderful opportunity. The students recently participated in the English Language Proficiency Examination for California (ELPAC) and the English Language Development teacher is hopeful for reclassification.

Students have also shown growth in their social-emotional development. The new program implemented this year referred to as “Second Step” breaks down different social and developmental areas for students, provides them with different scenarios or role-playing opportunities, and requires students to share examples of how they would respond to the situation at hand. Although parts of the program can be dull, providing in class moments for

students to practice these situations and interacting with one another has allowed them to further develop positive social-emotional behavior and skills.

A large part of students' achievements stems from the instructional practices that are put in place. Everyday, students participate in small group work and partner discussions. Small group work allows more individualized instruction for the students, and a better gauge of where students are at with the content, and if it needs to be retaught or the class can move forward. Students are also able to work together with the small group to practice concepts and teach and learn from one another. During partner discussions, students are practicing turn-taking rules, collaboration, and problem-solving strategies. Other instructional practices implemented for students are visuals and manipulatives. Having a large portion of the class being below grade-level or English learners, students greatly benefit from seeing concepts, vocabulary, and other important topics through visualization. Related to math specifically, all students have shown growth with topics that involve more manipulation and visualization. Practicing the manipulation of items to understand concepts, such as fractions, allows students to see the math in a variety of presentations that work for their learning abilities. The growth of students cannot only be measured in numbers, but should include the development of their day to day lives.

The Individual Student Perspective

Juan

Juan (Focus Student 1) has shown tremendous growth in using punctuation and drafting complete sentences in his writing practice. In Juan's first piece of writing "The Running Day", he was focusing on getting all of his ideas down on the paper that he either tended to write run-on sentences, or would write incomplete sentences that did not have a complete subject and

predicate. However, Juan recently completed a research project about Tropical Rainforests and was able to write a complete informational paragraph. He utilized sentence frames provided for the class, developed his thoughts, and included more punctuation such as commas and periods.

After reviewing Juan's action plan, we are still working on determining reading ability books but Juan's action plan was successful. One morning we sat together and completed a five minute reading interest survey. I sat with Juan, read him the questions and recorded his responses. Following the questions, he had to choose different genres of books that he enjoyed. I reviewed with him what a genre was and read through the list with him, stopping and clarifying any genres he was not sure of were. Once we had completed the reading interest survey, I explained that I would be taking the survey and our discussions, and using them to create a list of books that he can try before our next library day. I researched books based on his interests and reading ability, and once I had a complete list, gave it to Juan to explore. I explained where some books could be found online through school programs, and when we went to our next library time, searched for books from the list. Juan was excited, and he explored the different books. He began by reading a few, cutting those from the list that did not peak his interest, and searched the library. Although Juan did not reach his goal of reading two chapter books during the trimester, he was able to see more of the reading that awaits him. Juan continues to reference his list and search for books that he enjoys. According to Wood, students at Juan's age are beginning to read to learn, however, Juan is not at that level yet (Yardsticks, pg. 113, 2015). Juan is reading at a second to third-grade level, meaning he is still learning how to read. Often times, he needs help decoding words, and reading through a book, which lends itself to not having a high-interest in chapter books.

Later in the year, Juan began showing signs of an inflamed jaw. The right side of his jaw, close to the ear, swells causing severe pain and discomfort. Juan's jaw was beginning to swell more and the pain would become more severe that he would have to stay home. This past month, after a week of not being in school, Juan arrived one morning explaining that he had been in the hospital. The doctors had to drain the fluid that had built up in his jaw. Juan's inflamed jaw became a challenge for him. He was missing more school, distracted by the pain and discomfort, and not present for important learning opportunities.

The one strategy I implemented that has worked for Juan is identifying his reading interests. Once he was able to put a name to the different books he enjoys, Juan became more active in choosing his reading. Juan also benefited from working in small groups for writing. In these small groups he was with students who are at the same ability level as him, and was able to use them as resources when developing and revising his work. One strategy that did not unfold as I had hoped was to foster a strong line of communication with Juan. Although he comes and speaks to me about a variety of things, including sports and games he is playing, Juan has not shown much interest in speaking about bigger topics in his life. There was one day when we were walking next to each other and Juan smelled the gas from the lawn mower and stated that it reminded him of his dad and family in Mexico. Knowing the story of his father's passing, I asked how the smell made him feel. Juan shared that it made him happy to remember, but it also made him sad to think about his family. Unfortunately that was the end of our conversation, but I made it clear to Juan that it is important to have those feelings and if he ever wanted to talk about them I would be there to listen. Although we have not been able to talk about the deeper

struggles in his life, I do hope that if Juan is ever feeling plagued by his emotions he is aware that he can come to me at any time.

As Juan prepares to enter the fifth grade, I would encourage him to begin keeping a personal dictionary where he can write down words that he uses often but does not know how to spell accurately. I would also prompt Juan to challenge himself by choosing to read one chapter book for every comic or graphic novel he reads, or to find a series of books that he truly enjoys and try to stick with the series and read at least two to three in a one month span. Over summer Juan should continue to read, including reading out loud and having someone read to him. Advice that I believe Juan's next teacher should know is that he is a good student but needs more of a push to work harder. Allowing Juan the opportunity to explore materials allows him to take action in his learning and often leads to better results in his work. I would also suggest providing Juan with a small dictionary to keep at his desk, so when he needs help to spell words he can utilize a resource right in front of him, which given the opportunity would do consistently. Juan is a hard worker and should be recognized for his efforts and growth.

Emma

As part of Emma's (Focus Student 2) action plan, we were focusing on her socio-emotional growth and her math skills. During Trimester 1, Emma completed an assessment for her math goal. The assessment contained three addition and three subtraction equations, and centered around the addition and subtraction of numbers to one million. Out of the six equations, Emma only answered one question accurately. Emma is a shy, quiet young girl who second guesses herself constantly and has trouble joining in with her peers.

Throughout the year Emma has continued to struggle with her math abilities. Although she has become more comfortable working with a partner and is able to demonstrate her understanding with a teacher, Emma struggles to work successfully on her own. When working within her math group, Emma can grasp concepts, discuss problems, and utilize her notes. After she leaves the group, however, Emma often forgets what she has learned and has difficulty utilizing the notes she took. We are still working towards sharing her frustrations with a teacher and asking for help when necessary. For the past month we have been working on Geometry, specifically identifying and drawing angles, and using a protractor. In order to assess students' understanding of the topic I created a quiz on Quizizz. Out of nine questions, Emma answered 78% of them correctly. She was able to utilize the knowledge she had gained and effectively display her understanding in a relaxed and engaging way. I believe using low-stakes assessments, such as Quizizz, are more beneficial to track Emma's growth and understanding.

Socio-emotionally, Emma has shown great growth. At this age, nine-year olds are more individualistic and can often spend more time trying to work on their own than engaging with others around them (Wood, Yardsticks, pg. 110). This described Emma completely. She is the oldest of her siblings and is looked to to help take care of her siblings and help around the house. Emma carried that independence with her into the classroom and struggled to engage with her peers. As part of Emma's action plan I was implementing time where her and I could talk and she could become more comfortable speaking with others about topics. At this point in the year, Emma has shown tremendous growth in her ability to participate in conversations with her peers and adults.

Emma was chosen as a focus student because she currently has a 504 plan due to common urinary tract infections. Although she has only had one infection where she had to stay home this year, Emma has been dealing with arriving to school on time and a high absent rate. This past year Emma and her family moved further away and have a longer commute to school. Often, Emma's commute leaves her arriving to school anywhere from five to twenty-five minutes late, or not arriving at all. This has proven to be a challenge because it causes Emma to miss part (or all) of the math instruction, which is what she needs the most support in.

The most successful strategy implemented with Emma was opening a line of communication. We were not able to keep up our weekly chats, but the more Emma became comfortable speaking with me, the more practice she would receive. I also attended one of Emma's basketball games, and I believe that strengthened her bond with me because she was able to see that I care about her life outside of school as well and support her. Establishing this relationship expanded Emma's comfort zone at school. One strategy that was not as successful was encouraging Emma to share her struggles with a teacher. When Emma begins to display difficulties with a concept, her independent character comes out and she is not open to asking for help.

I recommend that Emma continue to develop participating in activities with children her age. Instead of taking on as much responsibility as she does, Emma should spend more time participating in opportunities where she can interact with peers who are interested in similar topics. Emma would also benefit from more one-on-one time with math, helping to fill any gaps and clarify concepts. Rather than being in a small group, Emma needs more personalized instruction so she can be monitored and feel more comfortable asking for assistance. Advice that

I would provide for Emma's next teacher is to be patient and welcoming. Emma's mother has shared multiple times that she is slow to warm to change, and that often leads her to hide in her shell. One possible solution could be asking a more outgoing, friendly student to sit with Emma or have a conversation with her. Relating to math, I would encourage Emma's next teacher to include Emma in small group reteaches or provide more practice with a peer to help deepen her understanding. Emma is a hard worker and with the appropriate supports she can be successful both academically and socio-emotionally.

Hector

The action plan for Hector (Focus Student 3) tailored to developing his writing skills. During the narrative writing segment of Trimester 1, Hector wrote "The Dolphin Wave", which captured an adventure that he shared with his family in Cancun. Part of Hector's struggle with narrative writing was focusing in on a topic and elaborating on it to develop a story. Part of Trimester 2, Hector worked on a research project about the High Deserts. Hector is a very analytical student and much of his interest are fact driven. This project allowed Hector the opportunity to explore a new topic, gather facts, and present his knowledge to others. Although he is still developing his writing mechanics, Hector spent a lot of time researching and developing his writing to accurately share his information. Hector utilized various texts, videos, and sentence frames to develop an informational paragraph about the High Deserts ecosystem.

Part of Hector's action plan was implementing opportunities for him to explore more non-fiction topics. Students were required to choose one non-fiction book from the library to familiarize themselves with various informational topics. This strategy proved to work well for him because during this time Hector was able to browse the library and discover books on topics

that interested him. Related to Hector's socio-emotional development, the strategies implemented did not work well. Many of Hector's frustrations come out on the playground with other students, a time when I am not around him to observe or provide immediate support, and he does not openly share the problems with a teacher.

As Hector moves toward a new year, I would recommend that he continues to study topics that interest him. Along with his reading I would also encourage him to keep a journal where he records the information he is learning and writes brief opinions or ideas on the topic. Focusing on his socio-emotional development, I urge Hector to practice the 4-7-8 breathing technique (breathe in 4 seconds, hold for 7, breathe out for 8) when he can feel himself becoming frustrated or upset. Developing the habit of slowing down and breathing before reacting to a situation will be something that will benefit Hector in the long run.

In regards to Hector's next teacher, I would advise that they are respectful and thoughtful of Hector's religion. Much of his dilemma and lack of comfort with topics at school are because he does not want to do anything that would be deemed inappropriate by his religion. Keeping this in mind, making accommodations for certain assignments or being thoughtful about holidays or fun activities are important to make sure that Hector is not feeling left out or uncomfortable with the situation. I also would encourage his next teacher to provide enriching activities that will provide opportunities to further extend Hector's thinking. These can be as simple as questions for Hector to research after he finishes an assignment, or an extension to the assignment that permits him to dive deeper into his learning. Hector is an intelligent young boy and provided with the right support and push he can truly be successful.

Each of my focus students has an abundance of assets and funds of knowledge. After speaking with their families and conducting home visits, I was able to obtain a better understanding of the knowledge they have that may not be “academic” but has helped mold them into the students that they are. One thing all three students have in common is how hardworking they are. Everyday they give their best effort in the classroom. That is something that has been taught through their family, that is not something you can teach in school. Based on their individual funds of knowledge, I created action plans that were tailored to their needs and strengths. Although there were strategies implemented that did not work as well, each of the students has shown substantial growth not just in their academics but in their social and emotional development as well. As the end of the school year is fastly approaching, I feel confident in Juan, Emma, and Hector. Through their dedication and hard work I know that as they enter the fifth grade they will be able to handle whatever is thrown at them.

The Developing Professional Perspective

This year has been a roller coaster. It began with excitement and nervousness; as the coaster raced through the air there were times where I felt like I was flying, but there were loops that twisted me upside down and left me with a strange sensation. As I begin my decent back, I am filled with joy (that I can finally get of this ride), but also fear and excitement for what awaits me when I step on the platform. It has been one tumultuous ride.

There have been, what seems, more challenges than successes this year but I am thankful for both experiences. The biggest challenge I faced this year was having to move to a different school in the middle of the first semester. I moved from a Kindergarten/First grade classroom in an affluent community to a Fourth grade classroom in a low income community, where 80% of

the population speaks another language other than English. It was a big move and trying to integrate myself into the classroom after almost three months in school was a challenge at first. Along with the new set of students came different social-emotional needs. Nine and ten year olds are at a different stage of development than five and six year olds. Not only are they at a unique turning point in their life “marking the end of childhood”, according to Wood, but students in fourth grade are facing a peak social-emotional developmental stage (Yardsticks, 2015).

Although there are always going to be challenges, it is important to celebrate the successes. Looking at the year and racking my brain about what I feel is my biggest success, I believe that being able to establish the relationships I have with my students is my proudest achievement. Many of them were leery of a new teacher being in their classroom, and they were unsure what to think of me, but I was determined to foster a community between the students in front of me and myself and I believe I have achieved that. Scholastic addresses the notion of a successful classroom community as one that “fosters a sense of belonging and promotes positive social skills and academic achievement” (Scholastic, 2019). As an educator I believe the first step to a successful year begins with establishing a strong community among the students and between the students and teacher.

After the TPE Clinical Evaluations, I feel strong in TPEs 1, Engaging and Supporting all Students in Learning, 2, Creating and Maintaining Effective Environments for Student Learning, and 4, Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences for all Students (California Teaching Performance Expectations, 2016). Within each of these areas, I have been able to design my teaching with the various learners of the classroom in mind. I am continuing to work

towards becoming proficient in these areas so I am better able to address and support the needs of my students.

The three areas of the TPEs that I would like to grow in are: TPE 3, Understanding and Organizing Subject Matter for Student Learning, 5, Assessing Student Learning, and 6, Developing as a Professional Educator. Focusing on TPE 3, I am working towards growing in my ability to organize subject matter across curriculum, such as integrating Science in an English Language Arts lesson. In order for students to relate topics and develop a deeper understanding of concepts, they need to be able to see the connections. Assessing Student Learning, or TPE 5 is an area I need to grow in. I can design and implement activities for all students, but if I am unable to assess their learning I will not be able to adjust instruction or measure the growth of my students. Finally, TPE 6 (Developing as a Professional Educator) is a constant area of growth. Teachers should be constantly working towards reflecting on their practice and discovering new ways to make their lessons engaging and impactful for students. My development as a professional educator is an ongoing process that requires constant growth and reflection.

As I reflect on the academic progress of my students, I must also reflect on how my teaching has influenced their growth. First, I believe that fostering relationships between myself and the students has created a space where they feel safe and open to pushing themselves and attempting new things. I also believe that students' achievements reflect the thoroughly planned instruction designed with various differentiation and Universal Design for Learning that meets the students at their level and makes the learning accessible. At this point, I am setting a goal for myself to work towards achieving proficiency in TPEs 1, 2, and 4, and continuing my growth in

3, 5, and 6. I also am setting a personal goal to appreciate the little moments in the classroom, and taking more time to enjoy my students and establish a positive learning environment.

Reading my words from when I was in the beginning stages exemplifies the wildness of this journey. Although there has been a lot of personal and professional growth, my reason for choosing this profession still rings true; I want to make a difference. There is no other job that allows you to reach so many different lives than a teacher. I still believe that a teacher is responsible for helping students not only develop academically but socially as well. My experiences as an elementary student laid an unstable foundation. I did not have a teacher that I felt truly believed in me or hoped for my success until my later years, I had to believe in myself. As I take one step closer to becoming an educator, I feel these words more than ever. No matter the background, abilities, or experiences, all students deserve someone who believes in them; all students deserve a champion.

The most influential book I have ever read as a student was *The Power of Moments*, by Chip and Dan Heath. “We must learn to think in moments, to spot the occasions that are worthy of investments” sums up the power behind the book (Chip and Dan Heath, 2017). It was not designed as an educational text for teachers, or a manual for Human Resources in a fortune 500 company, but it applies to us all. In life there are moments that seem fleeting, but “noticing the occasions worthy of investments” strengthens our relationships with everyone involved. I found this book to be an example of my goals as a teacher. Moments can hold positive significance, or they can be destructive memories we come back to years later. As an educator, I have the power to engrain those positive moments in my classroom.

After every formal observation, I must answer the same question “What does it mean to be an effective educator?” After months of answering the same question, I believe I can sum up what it means to me to be an effective educator in a few sentences. Being an effective educator means looking at the students in your classroom and not only seeing the challenges and obstacles they face, but seeing the possibilities. An effective educator provides all students with an equal opportunity to be successful, recognizing the different needs of the students and providing the tools and skills necessary to thrive. Effective educators are champions and advocates for their students. They understand that life is a challenge, but they continue to fight for their students no matter what. An effective educator understands that teaching is a tumultuous journey, but still gets on the roller coaster, excited for the ride ahead.

Conclusion

As I end my ethnography, I feel as though I am shutting the door on a part of my life I never knew would be so impactful. I have spent the past year working, and crying, my way through this program feeling ready to leave and say it just didn’t work out. But that’s not who I am. I was dedicated to myself, and as the year went on, I became more dedicated to my students. I couldn’t leave them; so I pushed through.

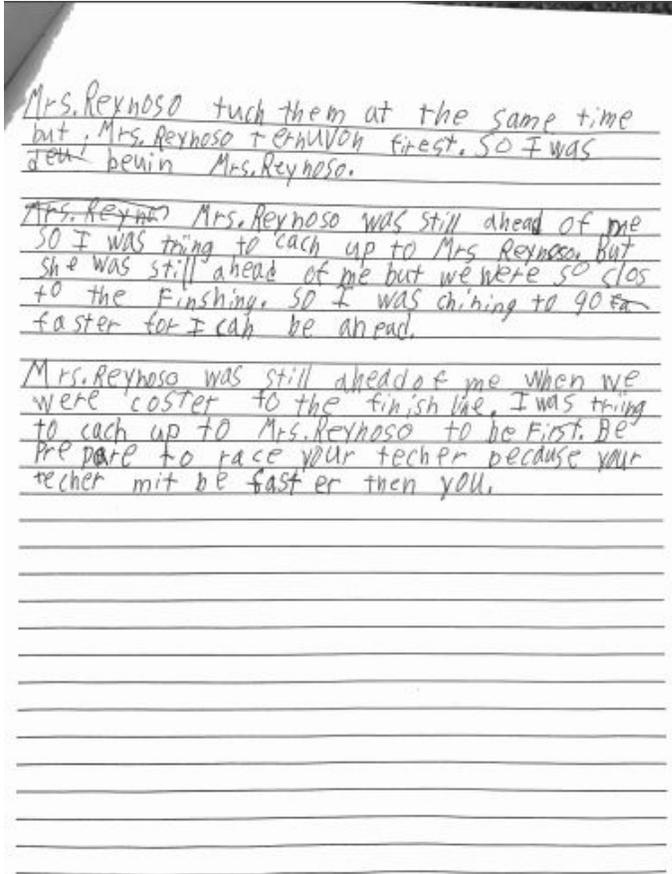
This tumultuous journey has brought me the opportunity to experience life as an educator. Life is long, students can be trying, but walking in to work every day knowing even the smallest thing can make a difference is why we do this. There is no fame or fortune

associated with teaching (although an NBA basketball player's salary would be great compensation), we have the power to change the lives of these children. My experience this year and reflecting through this ethnography has helped me solidify my reasons for becoming an educator. I am a teacher because I believe in providing students with a safe and engaging learning environment, a home where students come to learn, make mistakes, and grow. Through my actions and my classroom, I work to guide and support students on a path of becoming active, engaged, and thoughtful collaborative citizens.

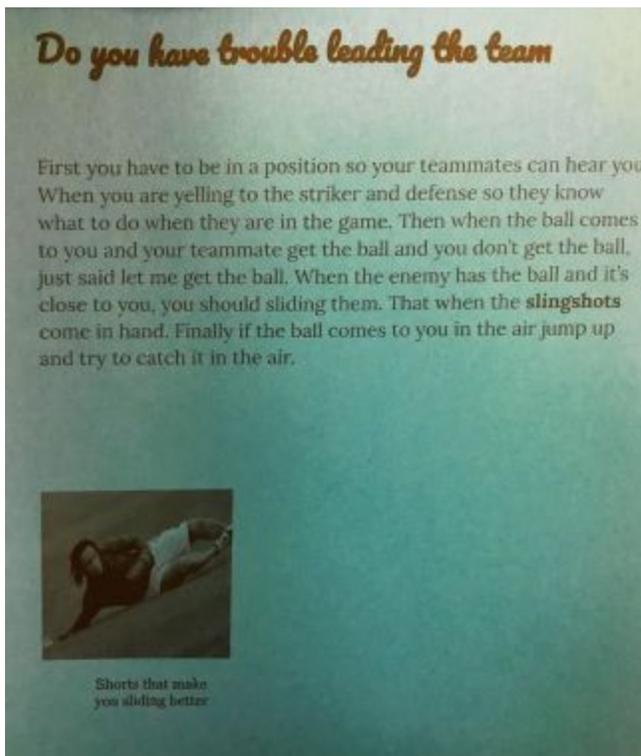
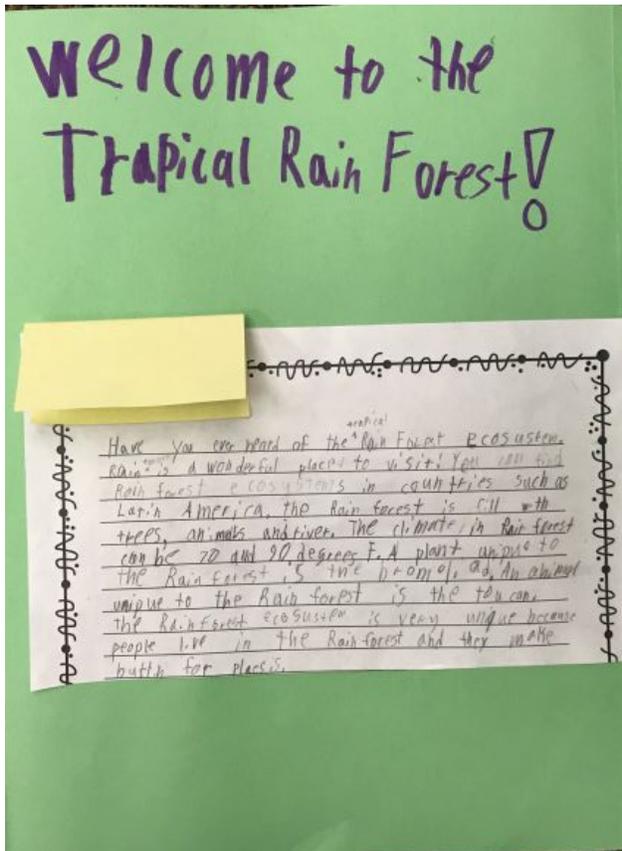
A question asked after every formal observation (that will forever be ingrained in my mind) is "What do you believe it means to be an effective educator?" At first, my responses reflected the depth of my personal experiences: brief, shallow, and thoughtless. As I developed, so did my responses. I began taking the time to reflect on how I wanted to be an effective educator, rather than my experiences with them. I conclude my ethnography with a quote that sums up my beliefs on what it means to be an effective educator. "*Every child deserves a champion, an adult who will never give up on them, who understands the power of connection and insists that they become the best they can be*" - Rita Pierson.

Appendix

An excerpt from Juan's writing "The Running Day" (1st Trimester, Narrative).



Juan's Tropical Rainforest research project (2nd Trimester, Informative).



Juan's writing, *How to be a Goalie* (3rd Trimester, informational).

5 Hours... still stretching

First, if you get hit from the ball your coach will tell you to lay down and he will grab your legs and he will bend your knees to your stomach so your stomach doesn't hurt. when you are doing stitching for the game you are doing a lot of legs work so your legs doesn't hurt in the game. If you want to do any stretching, you can watch a video to stretch you can.



Stretching so when you are run it won't a lot.

Goalie god

First you have to be not scared of the ball. Next you have to have goalie glove .you might be wondering why can we be using regular glove because goalie glove are sticker. Then you have to have a goalie shirt so the referee now that you are goalie. When you have all the stuff you are going to need sliding shorts because when you have sliding shorts you can slide better the sliding shorts. Finally you need **shinguarde** and **cleats**.



Shinguarde are to pertikcer for your shin.



Cleats are for to make you faster.

An excerpt from Juan's Miner's Journal (3rd Trimester, Gold Rush)

I have just spent
months at sea. All I
see was water and
No land 2 months
I see land and boats.
Thoseen, I met poeple
form the world
and came here
to min gold
and be Rich so they
can give there love
ones at home.

When I got off the bot
people were taking bits
so I when to a hotel.
It bin 4 day later
and we are going to
min so gold so I
can bring in back
to my home and have
some mony. People are
take about were a
guy found a big chunk
of gold so I when
to a diffint place to
min some gold.

Emma's Fraction Fish (creating equal parts of a circle)



Write the value in words and as a decimal value.

1.17
one and ~~seventeen~~ ~~hundredths~~

1.34
one and thirty ~~four~~ ~~hundredths~~

Handwritten notes: "tens to the 5", $+3$, $\frac{3}{5}$

Add $0.5 + 0.24$

0.5 + 0.24 = 0.74

Emma's decimal fraction assessment (3rd Trimester, recognizing and identifying decimal fractions with base ten blocks).

Emma's Addition and Subtraction test (1st Trimester).

Standard Algorithm
(Addition and Subtraction to 1 Million for 4th Grade)

Add

$$\begin{array}{r} 12,468 \\ + 6,531 \\ \hline 18,999 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 456,172 \\ + 543,828 \\ \hline 1,000,000 \end{array}$$

$$364,106 + 345,663 = 709,769$$

$200 + 18 \times 100 = 97$

Subtract

$$\begin{array}{r} 61,2943 \\ - 20,1831 \\ \hline 41,1112 \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} 900,756 \\ - 63,846 \\ \hline 836,910 \end{array}$$

$$417,563 - 27,582 = 389,981$$

Emma's Quizizz scoring and example questions on Angles (3rd Trimester).

3

Date: Apr 09, 2019, 10:10:am
IP Address: 163.150.230.253

Windows
Chrome

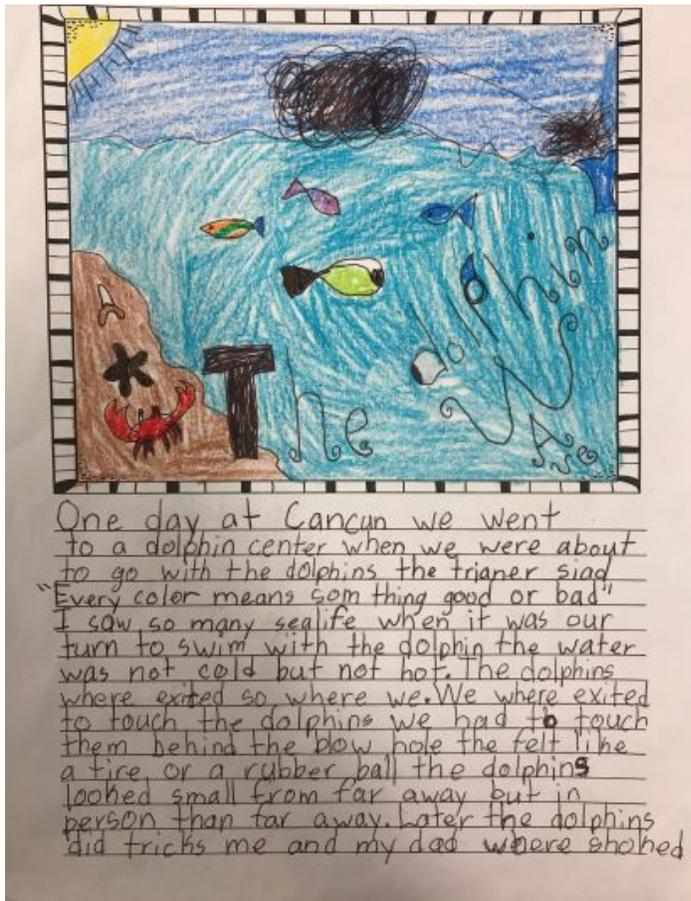
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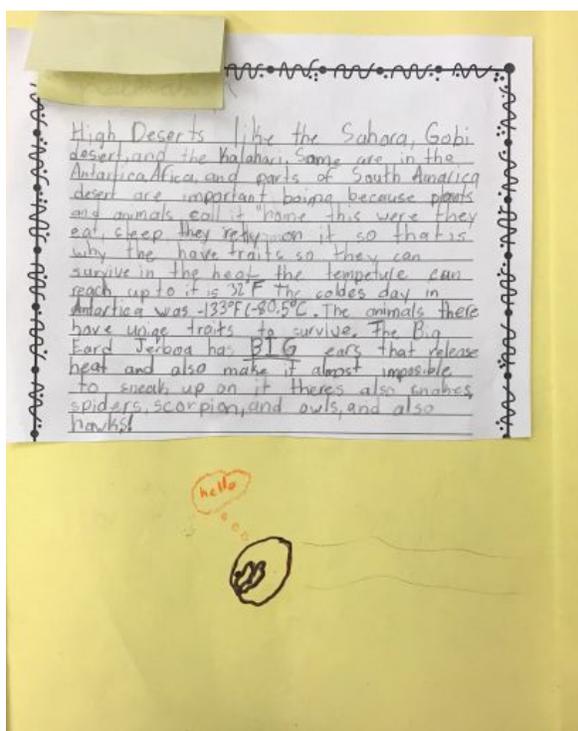
78% correct 22% incorrect 0% unattempted

- What does it mean to do a 360?
 ✓ You turn around in a complete circle 6 secs
- Angles that have a measure less than 90 degrees are called _____.
 ✓ acute angles 8 secs
- Angles that have a measure more than 90 degrees and less than 180 degrees are called _____.
 ✓ obtuse angles 6 secs

An excerpt from Hector's "The Dolphin Wave" writing (1st Trimester, Narrative).



Hector's High Deserts research project (2nd Trimester, Informative).



Hector's writing *How to Play Roblox* (3rd Trimester, informational writing).

Bees, Buzzzz, !!HONEY!!



Playing Bee Swarm Simulator to me it's a really cool game. What you do is go to the meadows to collect pollen for more... I mean Honey, honey is Honey is this game, then you can trade with the Nook Bear. To get upgraded items like backpacks, and tools to collect pollen faster for more HONEY that is why you have backpacks. And you can hatch bees to help you collect pollen, there is bears that gives you quest to complete, if you complete the quest you can earn eggs, honey Royal Jellies those can change or upgrade your bees, but there is also a bear to that can kill you but that is later on in the game. Then if you hatch more bees than you unlock different areas then you start fighting Rhino Beetles, Lady Bugs, Spiders, Praying Mantises, a Werewolf, a King Beetle!!!!, and also The Black Bear these animals are bosses there is also a Scorpion, this one is another boss THE SNAIL!!!!!! When it turns night time there is also Fireflies that gives you random items and they can give you Moon Charms, they increase your Bees love with you, I think it's a 10/10 star rating for me at least.

ROBLOX

Friends

Do you like playing with your friends because playing with my friends is fun, we play Shark Bite, Dino Hunter, and obbys. We "Chat" in Chat we can also join each others games. Then we talk at school.

Rare as is true love,
true friendship is rarer.

— Jean de La Fontaine



!!!!!!WE ARE FRIENDS!!!!!!

An excerpt from Hector's poetry with Teacher feedback (3rd Trimester).

Sup I friend named Jayden
 maybe → he probably has a hitten
 named Kadon

I like the humming! Will this be a rap?
 In tilted tower there is super man powers and that sweets do some bets on some die that I will try. There's a pickaxe that I will by.

Don't forget to organize your stanzas & include the pattern

Get it! work → in progress → to a trim.

I go to lost lake to see drake and to get some wins to have to a trim.

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