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Realities of the First-Year of Teaching

Research on the Inspiration Behind, Reality of, and Effects of a First-Year Teacher.

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Teacher Education Program

Dedication

To my mother and father, whose unending love and support have made this pursuit possible; and to my grandmother Esperanza whom we all can thank for the opportunities given to us daily.

Abstract

The purpose of this research was to identify the factors which lead to and negatively impact student success, taking a specific look at the Pomona area and tracking the experiences of one first-year teacher and three of their students throughout an entire academic year in the charter school setting. Beginning with research on the experiences and beliefs which motivated an individual teacher to join the field of education, it then assesses how the academic and cultural backgrounds of three different students lead to their overall identity and school success. The latter research identifies factors within the city itself which affect schoolwide culture, testing performance, student and staff retention rates, and the overall student classroom experience. A final review of the individual teacher experience concludes that student growth directly relates to an increase in teacher understanding of lesson planning and classroom structuring, but factors such as administration, school culture, and low teacher retention will negatively impact student academic and emotional growth.

Keywords: Urban, School, Culture, First-Year Teachers, Retention

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Preface

The Ethnography is broken into four sections, parts A, B, C, and D; each focuses on a different lens of the teaching experience in an attempt to capture all the facets of culture and experience which come forth in a year of teaching. The sections follow a chronological timeline of research from pre-teaching to first semester to the closing of the school year and include first-person teacher experience, personal interviews with students, family members of students, and staff; as well as city, local district, and school-wide data, and the findings of other researchers in the fields of education and academia.

Part A is an exploration of the ideological and experiential factors which influenced my decision to become a teacher and the desires I have for my students. Through intensive self-reflection and consideration, I document the specific events and moments which lead to me choosing a career path in education. My reflection also breaks apart the specific beliefs I hold in regards to social justice and the causes which developed these beliefs. I further documented the aspiration I held to create an inclusive and sociologically relevant classroom for my students and myself as a new educator.

Part B was conducted throughout the first semester of the academic school year from August to November. It is a close look at the lives of three of my students, each chosen because they represented a different group of the student population. The first student is an English Language Learner, who does not receive any EL support classes. The second student is one who has experienced the separation of his parents and struggled with his sexual identity over the past years. The third is a student who, although GATE classified, has an extensive behavioral record and many classes with grades lower than that expected of a GATE student. The information from

this section was collected through interviews in my classroom with the individual students, interviews at home with their parents, and observations made in my classroom.

Part C delves into the culture of the city, school, and classroom. In order to fully assess these areas, an investigation was done on the city's geography, racial populations, homeless populations, primary jobs, the city mission statement and purpose, and other areas which lend to city culture and community. Further, research was done on the local districts and a similar art school in the areas of test scores, racial groups, and both student and teacher retention rates. Finally, I identified the differences between The Business and Arts Academy and the local district in order to identify the factors which most lend to student success and difficulties.

Part D is similar to Part A in that it was conducted through intensive self-reflection and analysis of both teacher and student performance. The findings of this section reveal that the intentions of section A, while well-meaning, were not entirely attainable.

Who am I and why do I want to be a Teacher?

From early childhood literature was a focal point in my life, I could be found at family parties with my nose in a book, sneaking a page of reading under the desk while my teacher was talking, and even once I snuck a book out of my teachers room to finish reading at home – only to admit later that I was too excited to wait for him to finish reading aloud. While this interest continued in my life I did not initially wish to become a teacher when I first went into college and felt rather discouraged by the popular opinion of English as a major. I have found now that English is a palpable experience which drives my passion for understanding literature as life and reading through the lens of social activism. My main purpose in teaching is to create an environment for students to feel safe in their beliefs and abilities, while at the same time using literature as a means to educate students about our various privileges in life and what that means for the progression of equality and how we understand the world. My interests have always been inclined to Literature, but understanding my interest for social equality did not come until I learned how to properly study literature and had, in a unique point of my life, came to understand my role in the outdoor education industry as a Latina.

I was first made aware of social inequalities in a college study away program in Yosemite, inspiring me to further pursue educating myself on Sociology and Literature throughout college. At the same time, I was spending my weekends and summers creating a position for myself as an outdoor educator, teaching all age groups from college students to fifth graders how to navigate the backcountry. I was able to literally see what I learned analyzing sociology and literature as it played out among my students while we were in the backcountry. It was because of the combination of sociology, literature, and outdoor education that I came to

pursue a role as an English teacher and am inspired to educate students to survey literature as a reflection of life.

Early Exposure to Literature and Family Background

I was greatly fortunate that my parents believed literacy to be important in a child's creativity and learning, and took me and my siblings to rent books from the local library every other week. My mother and father had both come from low-income backgrounds and emphasized the importance of education and literacy to the four of us children early on in life. My father did not finish his High School education until his late '20's and wanted his children to be motivated to do more than him. My mother passed down her strong Mexican culture to us and emphasized the values of perseverance, hard work, respect, and cultural pride. My parents throughout our lives fed the idea that we were meant to achieve something greater than they had ever imagined. They had given life everything they had to provide a future for their children, now we had the duty of representing our culture with pride and succeeding in school and providing a future worthy of the efforts they had devoted to each of us children.

One of the first books I recall reading was "The Little Prince" by Antoine de Saint Exupery. I had read many children's books, but as a ten-year-old reading "the Little Prince" I could tell there was something more behind why I was attracted to the book. I recall imagining myself as the Prince, traveling to different planets, longing for my rose, taming my fox only to lose him, feeling his longing and joy with every word of the page. Having always had the gift to call upon intense emotions within myself I can now identify this as my ability to sympathize with characters and relate to their plight despite our differences. It was not until I was in college that I learned the philosophical grounding the book rooted as the main theme and why my young interest had peaked at the deeper questioning. This text exposed me to themes that relate back to

human life such as innocence lost, friendship, and self-sacrifice. As I have grown with Literature over the years it has become apparent that when I read I become part of the text, I am in it wholeheartedly and with each hanging question, broken love, and painstaking imagery I am an omniscient character within the text.

My own discovery of literary themes was supplemented by passionate teachers who took time to encourage my literary passion and engaged me in conversation about the texts I was busy reading. With early exposure to literature and supportive teachers, I was setting the groundwork for what would be my later belief, the idea that literature is a reflection of life and that through it we can come to understand ourselves and the world around us. Educational experiences that expose students to controversial themes and real-life experiences set students up to critically view literature as it relates to our modern world. Students also have the opportunity to have an increased interest in English and Literature when they are taught to relate to and analyze the shared culture and experiences they may have with the characters or material. Most importantly though, when students are taught to begin viewing the text as a reflection of life from an early age the education system can begin to make the world a better place to live. In this way, it is preparing socially educated citizens. Part of why early education is significant is because as educators, “We want students to become self-directed, motivated, critical thinkers who understand the world around them” (Fisher and Frey, 2011). Students must be inspired in their early education to pursue the direction of their interests, whether it be reading adventure novels about boys who ride bikes, or discovering Native American poets who sound like their grandmother. It is the job of the teacher to motivate students to look at their interests critically, and to set them up to connect those interests with the greater world in later education.

Early Perceptions of Teaching

Initially, my interest in literature did not leave personal ambitions and throughout adolescence, I never dreamt of going into teaching. If I am being honest had quite a negative opinion of education as I heard many teachers talk about it as their fallback when they failed to do something else in their field. Having been from low-income schools I had stark memories early on of my elementary teachers petitioning for higher wages, and in high school saw one of my math teachers handed a pink slip during class. Teaching seemed to be something people ended up doing, not something they had dreamt to attain, and with all the potential issues and low pay, I did not consider it as a career option. The reasons for my early dislike of teaching are in large part my ignorance of what the role of a teacher consisted of, and also a fear that I would not go beyond the classroom if I were to go into education. Understanding did not come easily, as I scarcely allowed myself the opportunity to reflect on teaching as a potential future. My journey to pursuing a future in teaching was painstakingly slow.

My disdain did not fade completely through college, as even after I finished my undergraduate degree I vehemently avoided the possibility of signing up for a credential until I had the chance to substitute teach for a full year and experience teaching through my own lens, not through that of my teachers. I needed a flexible job after graduation and was unwilling to commit to anything permanent in hopes that I would find a job as a backpacking guide for the summer. A friend had mentioned that subbing paid well and that they found it to be worth the pay and effort. Not wanting my degree in Literature to go to waste I signed up to substitute in my nearby district, hoping that I would pick up primarily High School English courses. After a painful learning curve the first few months I came to build connections with the English teachers in the district and was able to spend enough time in their classrooms that I could see the positive

impact I was having on students in the classroom. I now know I was meant to teach, but I had to first learn to accept that it was okay for me to become a teacher, and more so to want to become a teacher. It was through my pursuit of Literature I came to understand my need to teach others and to do my part to make the world the kind of place I would want to leave for future generations.

“English is not a strong future you should be investing in,” is a phrase which I am sure many passionate humanities minded individuals have heard. Much like them, I grew up hearing that while reading was fun I needed to invest my future in where the job market was headed, I needed to ask myself whether jobs would be in humanities or in STEM. Having never gone past a GED, neither of my parents knew the significance of Literature in the workforce and were hopeful my siblings and I would each pursue futures in the medical or computer engineering fields. This is not because they wanted to keep us from our passions, but was because they wanted to see us escape the blue-collar work they had spent their lives trudging over.

The exception to this expectation of my siblings was between me and my mother. Having been a school secretary for the past 20 years my mom silently hoped I would go into teaching because she had seen how much more teachers were paid than her, how they received more time off throughout the year, and how they were respected amongst each other. She knew that it was a tough field to get into at the time, though, and even pointed out herself the vast number of teachers who had been laid off in our district my last few years of high school. She wanted me to go into teaching because she knew what I did not, she knew I would learn to love it and she knew I would work hard to succeed. My mom never pushed the idea too far though, because she realized the difficulties that came with teaching and often sided with my dad that a secure future was my best option.

Having been raised with this engrained in me I mulled over the names of foreign majors during my time for college applications and struggled to stick with any one future. All the while I continued to fervently read outside of school, putting any extra money I had into buying new books and devoting myself to my English AP courses. Despite my own passion what I wanted most was to make both of my parents proud when I represented my family with my future.

Moving Towards Teaching through an English Bachelor's Degree

As a haphazard attempt to please my parents and carve my own path I initially set out to become an accountant when I started my time in University, hoping to eventually help non-profits in providing housing resources for countries with obscure housing laws. While I was determined in the business classroom and devoted hours to studying I was constantly haunted by the lack of existential and social reflection business courses offered. During my second semester of Business Calculus and Accounting II, I had a distinct moment sitting in the dorm room my freshman year where I asked myself, "Why am I paying a ridiculous amount for an education I am not passionate about?" I would spend hours scouring over charts and calculating numbers for companies which did not exist and which, I realized, did not positively impact the world around them in most cases.

After many tear-filled nights, wondering where I went wrong, wondering why I was so pained about schooling when I had the opportunity to be a first-generation college student, it slowly started to creep into my thoughts that I needed to change my major. That which I most fervently avoided for the sake of pleasing and impressing others, the switch to the Humanities, was clearly what I had to do in order to make myself happy. I understood literature had a greater purpose in the world alongside questioning and that I needed to pursue it.

The next day I went to the English Department and asked the first professor I found available to tell me what I could do to join English. I missed books I had told them, I miss critical thinking and feeling as if my thoughts had the power on their own to change the world for the better. I knew I wanted to feel part of something greater. That day I switched my major to English Literature after having invested a year of my studies in Accounting, and with a little regret that I had lost a year of English studies, I celebrated being done with business.

If I am being honest with myself now, I know part of the reason I changed majors was that I wanted to do a study away program at my school which only allowed Humanities majors. High Sierra was publicized as a semester in Yosemite. I had never been there and really had never been anywhere without my parents. I wanted the chance to go backpacking, see a National Park, and experience the wilderness in a context outside of the safety of Southern California. After plenty of tears shed with my mom and saving up all of the money I earned from work the semester before I convinced my parents to support my decision to join this program. My mother came from a traditional Mexican background and was already torn that I was not living at home for college, but now to live so far that I could not see her on the weekends was heartbreaking. It pained me, but I knew I had to go and figure out what I was going to do with Literature and why I was continually drawn to the idea of studying texts in a wilderness context.

Impact of Study Abroad and Philosophy on Teaching Goals

The first thing I noticed as soon as we finished our eight-hour drive was that I was the only Hispanic person in our cohort, a pattern which has followed me throughout my outdoor experiences, the significance of which I will discuss further on. The next thing I came to understand was that these professors expected more of us than any professor I had yet studied alongside, particularly the two Philosophy and English professors. Here I took a course which

challenged me to understand the way I approached literature through all of my biases. The course was called Literary Criticisms; the English professor at times used it to analyze philosophical texts but focused on the application to real life. While I should have been exposed to criticisms throughout High School English this was my first time seeing the various styles and I struggled to keep up with the rest of the six-person class.

During that time I coined my belief that literature is life. I spent extra time with the material because of my late exposure to these criticisms, but it was in those late hours spent analyzing the text that I started seeing the biases and beliefs of the movements which created these criticisms. I saw the way each author's geography, past experiences, political environment, and individual culture could be understood by reading the text. I came to believe that not only was history a representation of life but a record of history and a potential foreshadowing of our future if we do not make changes. What I came to understand in the criticisms course is something which I hope to transfer to my students and believe is imperative they understand to enact positive change in the world. At the end of this course experience, my professor stopped me out of the blue one day to say he thought I would make a great teacher and genuinely hoped I would pursue it in the future, something which I did not understand at the time but am now grateful for his small guidance.

Impact of Outdoor Education and Diversity on Teaching Goals

At the same time I was taking this course I began my journey in Outdoor Education, going on multi-day backpack and rock-climbing trainings with the High Sierra program, securing an internship with the colleges Outdoor Adventures Department, and obtaining a job as a backpack guide for the next few summers. Being an outdoor educator holds many similarities with the classroom, but has some trends in populous that drastically differentiate how it looks.

Most poignantly, my training teams were primarily young men who had been raised doing boy scouts and camping with their fathers. I was in all of my backpacking training the only Latina, one of few females, and one of few people from a low-income background in such an expensive field. This is significant because it is the first time I became distressingly aware of those areas where I lack representation and privilege. These differences required I work harder than any of the men, represent women with pride, and allocate my financial resources wisely to maintain my role as an Outdoor Educator. Representation is something I now hope to bring into my classroom because as much as I wished I had a role model in the outdoor industry I know many students wish for a role model in their teachers.

This is an experience which I am incredibly grateful to be a part of two reasons; the first of which is my opportunity to represent minority ethnic groups and women as outdoor leaders. The next reason is it has given me empathy for my students that I am able to translate back to the classroom. In the same way that I had to hike faster, carry more weight, and go further than any of the men I worked alongside to prove myself, I understand that many of my students carry their own adversities and must struggle through them and carry their added weight to succeed. As an outdoor educator, I have seen children carry backpacks weighing half their weight six miles uphill, I have hiked alongside young women who pushed through their asthma attacks, and listened to young men talk honestly by firelight about their deepest fears. This experience to work intimately with my students in the backcountry allowed me to recognize my students as individuals with complex backgrounds and ideas, and as people who are capable of more when given the right setting and challenges.

Working with Minority Youth in the Backcountry and Connecting it to the Classroom

Another important note from my experience in the backcountry is my realization that I desire to be a representative for Latinas; women with various adversities that can do more than the world believes of them. On a special occasion, I was given the chance to take a group of eight girls from Orange County on a backpacking trip, but was also asked to bring with us two young Hispanic girls since I was the only Hispanic staff member and female who could speak Spanish with them. What was special about these two young girls, setting them apart from the others, was that neither had ever been on a hike, much less slept outside, while many of the other girls had come year after year on this trip. Hiking with those two young ladies and seeing them complain less in some cases, figure out new issues, and push themselves out of their comfort zones inspired in me a desire to find a way to incorporate working with youth in my future, though I did not know yet in what capacity as an educator. I felt I had a duty to continue to represent myself, these young women, and create places for representation for a multitude of minority groups in fields where diversity is scarce, including even now in the classroom.

A popular philosopher in the Outdoor Community is the Pragmatist, John Dewey, who advocated for a progressive classroom and started experimental methodologies with encouraged students to directly interact with their surrounding world as a means of educating. (Dewey, 1925). This approach would later be referred to as a hands-on approach, and while in outdoor education it is referred to as a means to connect ecology and fieldwork to students I have come to understand it in terms of my own studies. I believe that everyday students interact with culture, whether it is their own or that of their surrounding community. I believe a hands-on approach to culture would allow students to make greater connections to their surrounding community and begin to understand the patterns and unique differences in life and cultural themes. I believe that a progressive, hands-on approach leads to student identity formation and an ability to translate

their hands-on experience to the classroom material in understanding English text and its cultural lenses.

Impact of Sociology on Personal View Educational Goals

During my last college semester, while I was still working outdoor education part-time, I took a class on introduction to Sociology. My passion for social activism blossomed during this semester. I came to understand the significance of individual cultures and the various intersectionalities that define each person. In an interesting exercise our teacher had us rate our levels of privilege and consider, based off of how many points we had added up, whether we would be in the front row of our classroom with the most privilege, whether we would be in the middle with partial privilege, or whether we would be in the back row with almost no privileges. We took into account our gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, physical ability, age, religion, and mental state. I had understood the world and literature up until this point as a series of cultures and lenses, these cultures and lenses were broken down in this experiment to allow me to see intersectionality in identity. The concept our teacher wanted to demonstrate was intersectionality and which I believe is imperative in allocating resources to students.

Understanding Youth expands on the role of intersectionality and culture in the classroom, explaining one way in which someone could experience a lack of privilege in comparison to classmates who they have been around for years. The text states, “A person’s positive self-concept, however, also depends on the extent to which she can bring that identity into society beyond her ethnic group and experience it being valued. If the dominant group in a society holds the characteristics of an ethnic group in low esteem, then ethnic group members are potentially faced with a negative social identity” (Nakkula and Toshalis, 2013). Students view themselves in respect to the world around them, a large part of which is their school experience.

As they begin taking steps to understand their identity it is done in part through the 'lens' of their school environment, part of that being popular culture. When students are in a school culture that negatively reflects their identity group students may begin to see themselves in that same light.

A negative representation could be a school with a predominantly Eurocentric school demographic resulting in the school's sports stars being predominantly from European backgrounds. Now consider that a student with a Venezuelan background who aspires to join the basketball team only has standards of non-minority students to compare himself against. This could result in low self-esteem as he sees a lack of representation. While this may sound extreme it is a small recurrence of what has already happened in history. In *Brown versus the Board of education*, it was decided that, "...racially segregated schools generated a sense of inferiority" (Kauchak, 2001). Schools may not be segregated, but can certainly have racial minorities and bifurcations at play. Another issue, highlighting the significance of this quote could go so far as to consider clothing style. If a student comes from a low economic background and is unable to afford buying up to date clothing every year it could lead to that student being perceived as unkempt by others and in turn feeling that about themselves. While processing their early identity students are coming to understand culture at the same time and inadvertently judge their classmates along with themselves to hold to a cultural standard.

As a teacher, I aspire to consider and design my class support systems around the intersectionalities my students step into the classroom with, many of which cannot be seen and may never be recognized. As an educator, understanding my students allows me the opportunity to provide them with the resources they need to succeed and with lesson plans that collaborate with and expand on their cultures. I understand the significance of students understanding how intersectionality functions in their own cultures so they can learn to advocate for themselves, and

how it functions in the cultures around them so my students can advocate for others. When looking at literary texts I believe it is of utmost importance that I teach my students to analyze texts with an eye for intersectionality, understanding the historical and cultural impact of the author's words in their life and what it means for all of the people they interact with daily so they can start procuring steps for a more culturally tolerant world in the future.

Impact of Subbing and Personal Experience on my Views of Education

As a Substitute Teacher, I have been very fortunate that both districts I have been a part of had a student demographic similar to the one I grew up attending school alongside. Both districts were considered low-income with a majority of title one schools in each district. The student demographics in both districts were more than seventy percent Hispanic, with many students being either the children of immigrants or immigrants themselves. An interesting fact is that both districts, Chino and Azusa were next to the middle and upper middle-class communities of Chino Hills and Glendora. Both districts, though, are bifurcated from their surroundings to some extent and many of the students find themselves to be the group minority in at least one sense.

I find myself feeling inspired to teach this student demographic because of their adversities, and the fact that despite the difficulties these student bodies face the students create their own tight-knit cultures which celebrate their Hispanic heritage and value the strife for success that comes from adversity. At the same time, I have been flipped off, cussed at, and disrespected in many ways by students from these districts; something which I believe comes from a lack of guidance and misunderstanding of support systems. It is for these students that I hope to become a teacher and provide support for students before they feel pressured to such extremes.

I have had the opportunity to sit in classes of forty students, all of whom were considered the schools lowest performing students, and I have also had the opportunity to sit in a class of the schools only eight AP Biology students who were all female. Both of these student groups had the same demographic, but ended up in different places during their senior years of high school because of the need for added support. The student bodies I most thrive working amongst are those who grew up like me, with adversity, from immigrant families, capable of falling behind or thriving to their utmost potential when given the proper resources. It is to help all students feel understood and supported so they may succeed that I hope to continue working with high need schools.

How to Communicate with Students and Utilize Technology

Part of supporting students in this type of school is having clear communication with them, so students are aware of how they are doing, why they may be struggling, and how they can improve. When students do not care to put in more effort it is often because they do not see the point of their lesson, and while we practice giving easy to understand objective statements I would like to differentiate for my students by having an open classroom at lunch and whenever I can after school for them to ask me more about their courses.

Aside from this, I intend to build a Google Classroom, clearly organizing our assignments on the dashboard of our homepage and also putting up all assignments on a running board in the room so students can cross-check what they have done. With High School classes they take initiative most often with their studies and for this, I intend to use Remind, the school App, so students can send questions to me and I can send blast texts to all students with the answers. While there are some parents who still take involvement in their students High School

academics I intend to use email to contact them, that way our class time is not disturbed by any distractive class phone calls and so that all of our conversations are documented.

Having strong connections with fellow staff members is necessary for supporting my students, though this may not always be an easy task. Teachers and staff are not spared from the gossip and secrets that plight our students, however; this does not mean I should not try to have good relations with everyone on staff. Doing what is best for my students and having honest conversations with my fellow staff members is what I believe to be most important. Maintaining that my students are not affected by it and that I involve administration in more difficult staff conversations will be key to maintaining a healthy work environment.

Potential Difficulties in the Classroom and Resolutions

While I have many reasons to be passionate about becoming an educator, from literature to forming a cultural identity, I also find I am continually encountering trepidations. My greatest fears in working with these schools have always come back to my ability to relate to students. Another is that I will end up feeling like the teachers who I grew up watching a petition against their own unions and regretting their job choice. Being that I was only twenty one when I first started substituting in the classroom I quickly realized that students would latch on to my physical appearance and either use it to undermine my authority in the classroom or push boundaries too far by talking to me as they would a friend or even going so far as to ask me on dates. While these are minor circumstances that I quickly brush off, my fear is that walking the fine line of boundaries will be something I am continually distracted by rather than being able to focus all of my attention on the education process. With such strict rules for teacher conduct, and for good reasons, I worry that students may not understand why it is so imperative that because

of my age I take extra caution to not overstep any boundaries and encourage them to refrain from doing so as well.

Another concern I have, and one which greatly lent to my dodging of any Liberal Arts degree early on in my college career, is the potential dissatisfaction I have heard from many teachers. I have stark memories of my sixth grade teacher complaining to her students about her low wage, I remember an earth science teacher who had intended to get into Bioecology but could not handle the course load and ended up having to “stick” with teaching; these instances were common throughout my education and as I got older I noticed more so how teachers who were not in love with their work came to be burdened by the expectation and did not seem to receive the support they needed to be motivated and successful teachers. My fear is that my enthusiasm for education would fade as I have seen in many of my teachers in my adolescence.

Thinking proactively on these potential issues I am hoping to put the following practices into action to prepare myself to be a teacher. With student boundaries, I aim to prepare myself to be a fledgling teacher by finding other young female teachers and learning from them how to create healthy boundaries with students. I also think it would be helpful for me to create a strong repertoire with the counseling department so that I can send my students to counseling with confidence before issues arise.

A strategy suggested in *Classroom Management: for Middle and High School Teachers*, is, “In the classroom, consistency means retaining the same expectations for behaviors that are appropriate or inappropriate in particular activities; it also means that these expectations apply to every student on all occasions” (Emer and Evertson, 2013). I am aware in advance that areas where I tend to drop my boundaries are when female students come to me with personal issues or invite me into their group dialogue about other students. I believe that because of this tendency I

have in creating an excessively friendly demeanor I need to practice consistency and expectations of all of my students, aiming to address early on my role as their educator and model what an appropriate relationship would look like for them.

While setting clear boundaries initially is going to be my main tactic I am aware that at times students may forget. During these instances I intend to fall back on what I have seen to be most efficient in the classroom by checking that there are other people around, that the class door is open for others to see in if I am alone with a student, directly reminding the student of my need to be respected as an educator and the strict boundaries I have set for our classroom, and lastly completely removing myself from risky situations to ask the direct advice of my workplace support team. By protecting myself and having transparency with staff members about my student interaction I believe I am setting myself up to be the teacher my students need.

To avoid teacher burnout I hope to diversify my lesson plans to not only engage my students but also myself. I also believe that building a strong support group and community amongst teachers and staff can assist with teacher motivation, reminding teachers of the purpose behind their meaningful work and to connect my work with my passion for social activism. Already in student teaching I have seen the benefit of connecting with my fellow staff for collaboration and classroom advice, easing my uncertainties about which lesson plans will work and whether students misbehave in just my class or all of their classes.

The classroom is in my belief the place where we start to make change in the world, teaching students about systems of justice and equality, and pointing out the faults in humanity so the next generation can work towards correcting them. Literature is a reflection of history, a representation of our lives, and can be analyzed to understand culture and ourselves. It is my

desire as an English teacher to give my students the tools they need to take what they learn in the classroom and from English to make the world a better place for future generations.

Part B: Who are my students?

Introduction

When looking across a classroom filled with students it is easy to create a single class identity for the room. The hour is ticking down, the disruptions are increasing, phones are out, questions are being tossed out, and as a teacher it can feel like an intense game of jacks. You know you want to catch all of the kids the first go, so as a teacher we create the lesson with the least distractions and that seems most efficient in getting each kid to the end goal of the assignment. As you will find out in the following section though, is each student is not merely a portion of the class identity, but rather an individual who in order to access the knowledge of the classroom must first overcome and look through the many lenses which make up their own identity.

In order to get a better idea of those lenses which my students navigate in order to access my classroom I decided, rather naively, to take a sampling of three students who seemed like the archetypal student. I began with a forty-minute interview with students during lunch and after school and followed up each with an at-home interview. When I began this process I saw my three students as the Emergent Bilingual, the eclectic dancer, and the femme punk rocker. The following research will provide insight as to my eventual shift in perception and realization of the commonalities and differences between each of these students.

Case Studt #1 – Alejandro Carrillo

Demographic Information. Every day without fail Alejandro Carrillo casually enters the classroom, flashing a giant smile and a mouth filled with metal. Through a youthful accent and innocent lisp caused by his braces he tosses out a, “Good Morning Miss” drawing out the ‘e’ sound in the middle of “miss.” While his words are heavily accented they are clear and one can

detect a conscientious effort to clearly communicate and vocalize on his part, something that has drawn curiosity and appreciation from many of his classmates. Having emigrated from Peru to the United States in Junior High, Alejandro brought with him a unique quality of language as well as a rich culture, which supports his educational endeavors.

Raised by his older sister until he was ten, Alejandro (now sixteen) is one of two children from a large Peruvian family. Many of them have also made the move to the United States and live in the Inner City of Pomona, California, with Tios, Tias, and Primos, and even a close cousin of his attends class alongside him. His immediate family though is a 25-year-old sister, his mother, and himself.

Initially, Alejandro was chosen to be part of the ethnography because of his incredible growth as an English Learner since his time began at The Business and Arts Academy, and because of the potential this provided to document and research his language growth. Rather quickly his unique personality, presence as an academic scholar, and musical talent outshined the difficulties he faced as a bridging English Learner or EL. Now, these have become assets to aid in his learning in the classroom.

A clean pressed student with hair combed and coiffed to rest on his left ear and adorned in conscientious attire, Alejandro has earned himself the title of one of the best-dressed students on campus. His obvious fashion sense, composed presence, and courteous nature towards academics and his teachers is closely related with his devout cultural background and enthusiasm to convey those qualities which he loves most about being Peruvian. When pressed to share his favorite things about his identity and culture there are three things that quickly come to are Alejandro's mind, a love of music, passion for self-improvement, and staying true to his Peruvian roots, all of which will be explained in this writing.

Academic Standing. As a native Spanish speaker, Alejandro is filled with hopes of bridging to RFEP before the end of the year, and he is one of the most readily engaged students at The Business and Arts Academy. Unfortunately, as a whole, the school struggles with a culture that avoids doing homework and any additional classwork, and Alejandro is not free from this illness that plights the students. Something unique about him is, every two or three weeks he will refocus and can be seen in after school tutoring every day after school as he expresses, “I’m smart but I can be lazy” (A. Carrillo, Personal Communication, 10 October 2018). His questions are less for clarity of direction and more for the purpose of deeper thinking. Recently, there was an instance where he was analyzing the quote, “If we cannot now end our differences, at least we can make the world safe for diversity” by John F. Kennedy. After standing with a partner in front of the quote for five minutes he called me over and explained, “Miss, I think the meaning of this quote is that ending diversity seems like a really big task, and that’s why it comes first in the text. The second half is the solution and it comes after because it’s so easy and simple. He is saying to just be nice and accept diverse people” (my paraphrasing). What further added to his analysis of the quote was the layout, which placed the first half of the quote in larger font and the “solution” as he put it, in a smaller font. He expanded, “the smaller text is like that because it symbolizes the simplicity of the solution” (my paraphrasing). With formative assignments such as this Alejandro excels, especially when he is given the opportunity to confer with a partner before hand. He conveys ideas specific to the English field of Academia in a way that is clear despite some grammatical speaking errors (See Appendix B).

Unfortunately, Alejandro’s analysis skills can become lost when it comes to written assignments. For this assignment in particular, students were asked to write a reflection piece explaining what they discussed while looking at the quotes. Alejandro’s writing is nearly

identical to his way of speaking, missing the occasional preposition, contractions, and use of subject-verb agreement. Even though this was not one of the standards being addressed for this particular assignment, it has affected him with other assignments.

For instance, at the end of a unit on the Harlem Renaissance students were given a summative writing assignment. Rather than complete the assignment he stopped when it came to the outline. It is easy to assume the student was lazy and unwilling to complete the task as he has admitted to being lazy, yet in this case, it is more than likely that the difficulty they would face in translating the essay overwhelmed their ability to complete it. While he has excellent communication skills, it is his ability to write without any grammatical errors that prevents him from obtaining standards. Looking at the ELD standards, his difficulties can be localized to the Productive category. Specifically, in his English class we need to develop English Language Development Standard twelve, “Selecting language resources a. Use a variety of grade-appropriate general (e.g., alleviate, salutary) and domain-specific (e.g., soliloquy, microorganism) academic words and phrases, including persuasive language, accurately and appropriately when producing complex written and spoken texts” (ELD Standards). In contrast to this, Alejandro’s oral expressions all suggest that he is on an advanced end of the Collaborative ELD standards.

Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity. When asked why he is such a kind-hearted person, Alejandro will quickly respond with his belief that he, “has Jesus in his heart” along with both his mother and sister. Proud of his devotion to his faith and his family heritage, Alejandro perceives both himself and his family as filled with humility and to him this combines with “royalty” and the idea that you must appreciate both yourself and what your family has provided you. (A. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 2018).

This is easily evidenced in Alejandro's friendships at school, as his closest classmate is his own cousin. This particular cousin arrived in Pomona only three years ago and Alejandro has, of his own volition, taken his cousin's success on as his own responsibility. He will routinely check-in with his cousin during class to make sure he understands the lesson and can even be heard chiding his cousin for slacking on assignments. All of this to say that socially, Alejandro sees his role as a supporter for both friends and family and so long as it does not interfere with his own academics I have and will continue to encourage the positive reinforcement he continues to invest in others academics.

Alejandro explains that part of this is because he has received much of his mother's personality and his sister carries the other half of her personality. An interesting fact when considering how significant a role his sister played in raising him. For instance, Alejandro feels most safe and confident when he is at church or in prayer, something which his mother expresses comfort in as well. He acknowledges that he is a teenager and will be lazy and goof off at times but because of his unique upbringing as an undocumented immigrant and having been raised by a sister he is, "mature" for his age. At one point he even reflected on the difficulty his sister must have faced raising him while she was only a young teen herself.

While he does appear to be well adjusted for his age, Alejandro still has his own personal struggles. For instance, he does have a concern in the back of his mind for his documentation status, he worries about whether he will be successful in music, and has self doubts when he is faced with issues that confront his faith. Something which Alejandro does like about our classroom though is a large "Dreamers Welcome" poster which is posted in the entrance which he states makes him feel that his teacher, "invites him" into the classroom (A. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 17 October, 2018).

Because of his unique upbringing Alejandro already holds many of the qualities necessary for a growth mindset and is self-aware enough to recognize when he is being lazy versus when he is truly confused. In order to continue supporting this student in his Academic language growth I will be introducing specific grammar lessons within the classroom (further explained under the section heading Action Plan).

Funds of Knowledge. When I mentioned to Alejandro that I would be doing an at home visit he was excited and eager to invite me into his mother's home, explaining that there may be some language barriers, but confident in his mother's ability to figure it out. Sitting outside their family home, the first thing to notice are the ripe lemon, lime, and various fruit trees that fill the front yard. Cars buzz by on a busy street in front of the home, but it is guarded by a small tropical forest and faded picket fence. It is easy to imagine a teenage Alejandro coming home from a long day of academics and music to the small, but inviting home.

In the house, Lourdes Carrillo, Alejandro's mother, had prepared an interview table in the middle of the family room by taking a sewing machine off one of her work tables and making a tablecloth of scrap material. With a warm handshake she greeted me in Spanish, waiting for my response to see whether I could work the language. A beautiful woman, dressed in formal attire she had a tired, but youthful face. The questions went smoothly after introductions, with mom getting more comfortable and willing to open up about her son's experience as the interview went on.

Quickly, it became evident that Alejandro takes a great deal of his personality from his mother as both of them have the quirk of expressing themselves in inspirational quotes. Within the first half of our interview she expressed that she wants, "for him to have a transparent heart, to keep his word" and "that life will be difficult but he needs to continue to stand up" (L.

Carrillo, Personal Communication. 20 October, 2018). Devoted to her children, she claims that it is difficult to find much free time to spend with them as she is the main provider of their home, a single mother, and “does everything” such as “clean, cook, and paint” in the home (L. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 20 October, 2018).

This does not limit her desire to inspire and assist her son though, as she is typically the one to help Alex with his schoolwork. Despite the fact that she cannot read his English assignments she tells herself, “Even if you can’t you have to say you can, because your son always looks to you. He needs to know his mom always could” (L. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 20 October, 2018). This she said in regards to the fact that she often does not understand his English homework but does all she can to support him regardless of this factor.

While it would be easy to assume that the use of solely Spanish in the home would limit Alejandro’s access to the English language it has become a resource, or fund of knowledge in the classroom. Ofelia Garcia and Jo Anne Kleifgen write in their book, *Educating Emergent Bilinguals* that, “The idea behind identifying funds of knowledge that can be used in the classroom is to create a more inclusive learning environment and thereby foster academic achievement for all students” (Garcia and Kleifgen, 2018). Something which has been a positive learning opportunity for Alejandro has been translating my Spanish to English assignments. I will often provide assignments with side by side directions in both Spanish and English for him and he enjoys annotating and correcting the Spanish so that it more accurately aligns with the English directions. He then instructs me of the changes to be used in future classes. This process he has started makes him feel part of the learning process for not only himself, but also gives him the responsibility and benefit of helping other Emergent Bilingual students.

Given that he was not with his mother for the first ten years of his life one would expect there to be a gap in their connection, but the two talk about one another with the same admiration and respect. Alejandro acknowledges his mother's efforts to create a better future for him and our conversation routinely turned back to her hope for his future.

At one point she asked how many years were left in his American education and the conversation turned to options in the UC system that Alejandro will have as an undocumented student. Specific concerns Lourdes has leading up to his future though are whether or not living in the U.S. has provided her son with more opportunities to engage in alcohol and drug use. Before bringing her son Lourdes believed that the United States was a beautiful place, but now that he is in the schooling system she sees it differently and worries about her choice to bring Alejandro. She recalls that with her schooling in Peru Lourdes stayed up until one am most nights to finish her homework, she was a quiet student who enjoyed writing, while her son is talkative and generally avoids staying up late to write. In Peru she explains that she was, "never offered a cigarette or even drugs" as the students took their schooling to be a serious matter, but knows that young children have offered these things to her son (L. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 20 October, 2018). She worries that school can be a destructive place for Alejandro and fights against this by reminding him not to go down that road and putting the power of his future and choice in his own hands. While there are plenty of opportunities to get caught up in teen drug use and gang affiliation in Pomona, Alejandro has taken his mother's words to heart and claims that he trusts her and tells her everything as he has nothing to hide.

A potential issue the family faces are stereotypes regarding their spanish speaking home and undocumented status, Garcia and Kleifgen write about stigmatization of non-English speaking homes saying, "They are thought to have substandard language skills, lack of

education, “inferior” family organizational structures and values, and “lack of interest” in their children’s education” (Garcia and Kleifgen, 2018). Lourdes has more than defended herself against these silent attacks by supporting Alejandro in his education despite her lack of access to the language. She claims that what she cannot write in English she will draw out for him and explain in Spanish until they make sense of it together. She emphasizes her own devotion to her education as a way to keep him motivated and reminds him of the need to have future goals to work towards. Lourdes acknowledges that being away for ten years was difficult for both her and Alejandro but emphasizes that the sacrifice was to provide him with opportunity and gives credit to the role of faith in their lives, as she has used her Catholic Faith as a way to rekindle relationships with her son and daughter

Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations. A member of the school’s music major, Alejandro plays a variety of instruments from piano, trumpet, bass, saxophone, and guitar for starters. His love for music extends so far that he often uses it as a way to both motivate and occasionally distract himself when working on homework. After school he claims he will sit at this desk to work and whether it be because he has finished or needs a mid homework distraction break will turn to his keyboard and come up with music to play on the spot. As a child Alejandro recalls seeing someone play the piano one day and asking his mom if she could sign him up for classes a local community college was hosting for young students. Quickly realizing the program was in place more to earn money than to teach, Alejandro complained to his mom who he remember saying, “I already paid for you to learn so you are going to finish taking lessons” (A. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 17 October, 2018). A motivated student and quick learner, Alejandro took music into his own hands at this point and began teaching himself how to play by testing out the different keys and looking up other online

piano lessons. Very quickly, Alejandro had taught himself to play piano and had embarked on what he hopes will be a life-long journey.

Sundays are most often filled with hours of church service and the task of adjusting microphones and power chords for the church band and choir. A devout catholic, Alejandro spends much of his Sundays practicing with the church. As he explains, “I like studying, but not school studying. I like to study what people think about life.” In particular he likes to live out the beliefs he studies at church by “taking what they’re saying and making it happen” (A. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 17 October, 2018).

An interesting quirk about Alejandro is that he is filled with inspirational quotes and sayings such as, “It is easier to give advice than take it” and, “You don’t know what you’ve got ‘till it’s gone” (A. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 17 October, 2018). This last quote in particular was in reference to his childhood in Peru. His mother, in hopes of providing a better future for her son, moved to California when he was only one year old and he was put under the care of an older sister. Reflecting back on it he considers how people may have judged his then fourteen-year-old sister for taking care of a baby at that time on her own. As one of my most courteous students, he claims this is largely what influenced the respect he learned to have for elders and adults, having been raised by a teenage sister until he was ten years old.

His mother’s pursuit and eventual ability to bring him to California largely inspires him to pursue self-improvement. His families lack of documentation does not deter him from achievement, but rather their story inspires him as he details, “I believe you have to have the right mindset. You have to know how to be someone” (A. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 17 October, 2018). This “right mindset” he practices through patience, using journals to self reflect, and taking time to practice self-discipline. Acknowledging the fact that his mother provided him

with more opportunity by bringing him to California he hopes to find a future in music and pursue a college education.

Action Plan. Looking at Alejandro's academics it is clear that he has potential to become a strong scholar of English and thrive in his academics. Endowed with a mindset for self-improvement and the desire to "understand things and have a lot to say," he needs support in his writing, particularly with subject-verb agreement, tense usage, as well as spelling. Alejandro himself has expressed that what keeps him from succeeding in his assignments is that, "I start well because I'm motivated but I need to be held accountable to finish my assignments" (A. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 17 October, 2018). The focus for Alejandro's action plan will be to improve the coherence of his sentences and spelling as well as completing his larger, summative assignments.

While the school culture may be one that encourages students to approach academics as secondary to the Arts and his interest in music, my intent is to use Alejandro's strong connection with his Peruvian culture and desire for self-improvement to motivate him to succeed. One example of this is, aware of his ability to speak in inspirational quotes, I gave a whole class assignment to come up with a quote which does two things a) expresses their beliefs on life and The American Dream as well as b) expresses what motivates them to persevere in life either in light of or despite this. Alejandro's quote was able to do both of those things and builds on his funds of knowledge of optimism and positive self-development.

Additionally, Alejandro needs to be provided lessons that are specifically grammar based. In order to embed and scaffold this into his daily writings I will be creating lessons for the class that encourage students to find specific sentence styles, parts of speech, and tenses within the novel we are reading together. Alejandro will first be given multiple choice options and as we

progress in the lessons the differentiation will be taken away so that he is eventually finding his own examples within the text. We will work on creating his own sentences at this point moving from simple to complex and eventually to compound complex.

While these are immediate goals, long-term goals for this student are breaking out of the pattern of laziness he can occasionally find himself in by connecting lesson purpose with the students desire for self-improvement. In his particular case it will be helpful for the student to see the EL Standards and identify which in particular he wants to focus on and set goals together, as Alejandro is primarily a verbal processor and goal oriented. His mother, Lourdes, is a wonderful resource and explains that she wishes the school would reach out more when issues present themselves, not just when it has come to a breaking point. Her son in particular has not yet faced any behavioral issues, maybe in part because of her support as she explained, “I’ve become his friend. I can say, ‘son, let’s see, let’s do your homework’ because when you are struggling you don’t like that subject any longer because you have a bad grade. But when you are doing well you enjoy the class because your grades are good” (L. Carrillo, Personal Communication. 20 October, 2018). With her continued support, accessing his personal interest, and investing time in his language development, Alejandro will work towards the goal of becoming an RFEP at the end of this year.

Case Student #2 – Raine Gutierrez

Demographic Information. Most days Raine Gutierrez struts his way into class as if it is his own living room, throwing out the questions, “Miss, are you bored?! Can I dance for you?” with an eager look on his face. Standing just an inch over myself at 5’7” Raine has a warm and enthusiastic presence which this writing will soon expose. The only son still at home, Raine is the youngest of five with his closest sibling being a brother fifteen years older than him. Raine

explained this was his closest sibling, but he rarely sees him as this brother moved upstate to live with his boyfriend. His mother claims that because of this she and Raine have become best friends.

To describe Raine's personality further, on a variety of occasions I have seen Raine drop into his dance splits while handing in a paper, do a sassy jazz walk to Britney Spears blasting on his phone as he walks into class, and ask one of his classmates to film him while he tries a new dance move. A member of our school's dance major, he exudes a passion for dance through most of his interactions. He spends most of his lunch breaks clearing a space in my classroom to practice dances for the K-Pop dance club he founded on campus and will often beg to teach me one of his new K-Pop moves.

His passion for Korean culture is not just expressed through their dance, though; Raine avidly practices speaking Korean with the elders at his church. What makes this unique is Raine comes from a racially ambiguous home and is the only member of his family who has any interest in Korean dance, language, and culture – our school does not even provide Korean as a language of study. Initially piquing his interest in the culture was the unique dance style, but his passion took off once he realized how different the language was from anything he had heard before and he described the food as different than anything he had tried in Pomona.

In addition to all of his quirks and enthusiasm, Raine has strengths and weaknesses just as any other teenager. Reflecting on his strengths, he is great at creating classroom camaraderie and getting work done in class. For instance, he recently brought one of my more severe IEP students into his friend group discussion as he was, "sad 'cause no one ever talks to him." (my paraphrasing). He struggles, however, with grasping verbal directions as he often zones out or becomes distracted by points in the lesson that are not related to the immediate objective.

Confusion looks like a dropped jaw, slouched shoulders, and a doe eyed stare when it meets Raine, and at least once every class Raine wears this mask. As a model student, he is quick to ask for clarification and can easily be redirected to the intended objective with a few guiding questions, so the look of confusion does not tend to last long. He is particularly motivated to complete tasks when it comes to affecting his dance as well.

Academic Standing. Throughout the semester, Raine's English grade has balanced on a precarious C, occasionally shooting up to a low B, and every so often dropping to a D. In many respects his classwork has reflected that of an incredibly average student, but as I have discovered Raine is far from average (See Appendix C).

While his classification is an English Only student, Raine often writes his assignments in English and then translates them into Korean on the edges of his paper. He has gone so far as to bring his own whiteboard markers to class and ask to practice his Korean skills during passing periods, breakfast break, and lunch. This personal investment is an asset to Raine's future as the journal, *Bilingualism and Communicative Benefits* (2011) explains, "both interior and corner equilibria can emerge, and that the fraction of learners of the foreign language is higher in the country with a larger cost adjusted communicative benefit" (Gabeswicz, Ginsburgh, and Weber, 271). Their research has proven that the benefits of a second language in countries, such as the United States, can result in increased work opportunity as well as economic gain. While he may not be thinking this at the time, his second language acquisition is even helping to develop his understanding of English language phonetics.

Because he has invested such extensive time into the long-term goal of mastering Korean one may be surprised to find out that long-term class projects are not Raine's forte. When it comes to summative assignments, such as extended writings and multi-day readings he is quick

to lose interest. For instance, after nagging at him for over a month to turn in a late writing assignment, Raine still has yet to turn it in as he claims, “when I get home I’m too tired I just want to nap and look on instagram” (R. Gutierrez, Personal communication. 16 October, 2018). In stark contrast to this behavior is his ability to perform on formative assignments. In our current unit students are required to turn in a set of “4321” notes for every four chapters we read together in class. Raine will often ask for a hall pass to come to after school tutoring so he may finish his assignment and in three out of four cases will turn in his formative assignments on time. The overall quality of these assignments shows the general rushed nature of a student trying to balance being a club president, participate in full time dance lessons, and complete his academics on top of his social life. In light of this, his efforts in obtaining a C can be considered admirable at times.

The Business and Arts Academy puts a large emphasis on the role of group work in the classroom since our charter is incumbent upon it, but like many other students Raine feels that group work lends to more work for some students since, “one person usually ends up doing all of the work” (R. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 16 October, 2018). When working with others Raine’s work tends to drop in quality, possibly because he is relying on the efforts of others to complete the assignment. Across the board, Raine and his classmates work best when able to collaborate with one another for discussion and then complete their assignments on an individual basis. However, given that is the pedagogy of the campus and growing within the field of education it is best to intervene and try to improve student support of group work. Particularly because the benefits of group work outweigh the negatives when the teacher instructs group work correctly. In *Designing Groupwork* (2014) authors discuss these benefits as, “Productive

groupwork increases and deepens opportunities to learn content and develop language and thus has the potential to build equitable classrooms” (Cohen and Lotan, 6).

Looking at Raine’s performance on the English standards, he struggles with no singular standard, but rather he is decent at all and brushes the underside of mastery. This proves to be a concerning issue as research discussed in the article, *College Readiness for All* (2009) suggests, “high school students who graduate with higher test scores, better grades, and more rigorous coursework are more likely to enroll in and graduate from four-year colleges” (Coca, Nagaoka, and Roderick, 188). If Raine chooses to pursue a career in dance, or a CPA as his mother hopes, there needs to be a turnaround in his ability to demonstrate success on standards that will lead to better grades in English.

Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity. “I just love people!” (R. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 16 October, 2018). On this point, Raine is quite emphatic. What he is most concerned with throughout the day is how either myself, the person seated next to him, or any stranger walking in to the class may be doing. Raine makes it a point to check in with me at least once a day, including on days when I do not have him in my block scheduling. While he is obviously a happy and high spirited individual, this concern for others also demonstrates a selfless and caring nature in Raine.

This selflessness is part of what drew him into the Korean culture in the first place as he explained, “a lot of people make fun of Asians” and he does not find this to be acceptable since it is such a peaceful and loving culture (R. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 16 October, 2018). He often takes issue with the opinions of President Trump as he worries that those opinions could have a negative impact on our societal outlook of diversity and acceptance of Asian cultures.

Despite this, Raine maintains his positivity and finds solace in his church family. Every Sunday he attends Korean service after his mom drops him off in the morning. Here, he has developed a large group of teen friends who primarily come from various asian backgrounds. This access to such diverse cultures has made Raine a largely empathetic individual. One of his pet peeves to this effect is when other students aggressively handle the science room Gecko, Susan, as he explains animals shouldn't be toys for humans but have their own feelings.

His exceptional positivity, while truly an asset, has also lent to a few concerns. In particular, because he expects himself to always bring others up, Raine is incredibly bothered whenever he is unable to support one of his friends. For instance, recently he was torn between the breakup of two of his friends and, being quite socially aware, rather than hurt either friend's feelings, he chose to not tell either friend about spending time with each privately to console them. While this was a thoughtful act on his part, it creates concern as to whether he is sacrificing his own well being at times for the sake of those around him.

Despite this, as his teacher, my aim is to continue to encourage Raine to work towards understanding others. At the same time, since he has created an open dialogue between us I have encouraged him to allow himself to feel frustrated when things bother him, such as his concern for politics. The text we are currently reading deals with issues of racism towards immigrants and I have encouraged Raine to voice his frustration toward these incidents and come up with potential resolutions as a means to process through his hurt towards this prejudice.

Funds of Knowledge. Raine's home falls on the borderline of Pomona and the adjacent city, in a highly typical suburban middle class neighborhood. As I pulled up to visit with his mother, I was immediately struck by the beauty of their country style home. A bright red door adorns the front of the house with brown cobblestone steps inviting guests to step up. A single

tree grows on the right hand side of the yard, balanced out by an American Flag draping the left side of the roof. It is easy to imagine the home on the front cover of an American Lifestyle magazine cover, and one could imagine a place filled with love beyond its white paned windows.

Balancing myself on the black railing as I stepped up to the home, I could see Raine's excited figure move about while I knocked on the front door. Greeted by a shy, but excited "Hello, Miss Peterson," I was quickly directed to the dining room where Raine's mom enthusiastically shook my hand.

It was immediately evident the bond shared between Raine and his mother Leanette Gutierrez as she explained, "He's my buddy we do everything together" (L. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 18 October, 2018). While he has other siblings, Raine has experienced life as that of an only child, being the last one to still reside with his mom. A unique bond has resulted from this, as they truly do most things together, from dieting to facemasks, shopping at the mall and eating all of their dinner meals together.

A devoted single mother, Leanette works full time as a CPA assistant an hour from home, because of this Raine has to walk home from school everyday. While we discussed the potential risks in walking home, especially later in the evening, Raine happily typed away on his phone and flicked through instagram in the seat across from myself.

She explained that the long walk home from school is worth it for their family, however; as Raine did not always have the academic support he does now. As a child, Raine struggled with hyperactive behavior that his previous schools did not know how to manage. Leanette detailed being called in for parent-teacher conferences routinely as he was always in trouble. She explained, "The schools could not figure out what was wrong with him and told me he would grow up to be a menace to society" (L. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 18 October, 2018).

Difficult for any mother to hear, she realized he was a handful and could not stay in his seat, but she did not accept the outrageous claims made about her child.

“Our life changed the moment we put him at The Business and Arts Academy” claims Leanette (L. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 18 October, 2018). A persistent mother, she was devoted to finding a place Raine would fit in, and he has found that in The BAA. In large part they both believe it is because of the large emphasis our school has placed in the arts and the opportunity this provides Raine to dance and listen to music everyday.

Still, Leanette does recall how her education was starkly different from Raine’s. She expressed that in her experience students merely had to show up to class in order to pass, but were more focused because there was less overall peer pressure and unattainable standards. Despite this, she is overall pleased with Raine’s academics and claims that so long as he is happy she’s okay with things as they are at our school.

The only minor issues she wished would change about the school were the overwhelmingly obvious issue of a high teacher turnover rate. Since this is a high need school with a very unique focus on arts and business on top of academics it can be rather stressful for academic teachers to balance school scheduling within their own curriculum. Leanette acknowledges this and pointed out that it is also likely the reason why so many young, first year teachers like myself work at this school. She also reflected that it would be helpful if the school considered the additional responsibilities that single parents must take on. For instance, if there was a safe ride share program in place she would not have to worry about Raine walking through Pomona after school.

Today, Raine is far from the “menace” teachers once claimed him to be and is a model for empathy and concern towards others. His mother describes him as someone who is, “loving

and constantly giving to others,” even though he can still be a stubborn teenage boy at times (L. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 18 October, 2018). For instance, because history is his favorite subject he is increasingly knowledgeable about politics. As the election neared changing his mind of any of the issues was not about to happen according to her.

Raine’s mother hopes this passion will take him far in life. While she was not able to complete her college education, Leanette has aspiration for Raine to become a CPA someday, but will be happy with whatever he chooses to become. What is most important to her is that he does his best. Encouraging him to keep his grades up, she ended our conversation by turning to Raine and insisting he promise to, “Keep your grades up” (L. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 18 October, 2018).

Experiences, Interests and Developmental Considerations. Unlike his mother, Raine is not interested in a future as a CPA, but agrees that the two are best friends, explaining that she is the one he feels closest to in life.

Most exciting for Raine, instead of a CPA career, is a future as a dancer or choreographer in the industry. Recently, he signed up to attend a K-Pop nationwide dance competition, but was too nervous the day of the audition to ask his mom for the drive out to Los Angeles. Other than dance, Raine is generally uncertain of what his future goals may be and when questioned about college seemed to not have reflected on the possibility of not having a future in dance. To this end, it will be beneficial to set goals for Raine in areas other than dance.

He expresses that dance and studying Korean culture have both been pivotal in his development, as dance improved his self-confidence and studying Korean gave him an immediate goal to work towards accomplishing. After listening to the conjugations in Spanish

class his freshman year he was immediately interested in ways he could use knowledge of conjugations to help with understanding Korean.

What he struggles most with in school is staying interested in the material. He loves when he can connect the lesson to what is happening now in the world, or as he puts it, “Now-a-day things,” and says that he learns the best when teachers try making the lessons relevant to his life (R. Gutierrez, Personal Communication. 16 October, 2018). His response is one that students typically express when questioned on what engages them in their own education.

Despite the vivid descriptions of Raine’s personality and dramatic concerns of teachers past, Raine is actually quite a reasonable student. If he is not immediately interested in a lesson, he is at least present and does his best to stay focused. When he received a new laptop for his birthday, he politely asked if it would be a distraction to bring into class and requested some of my free time to help him set up Google Classroom on his web browser. When questioned as to why and what has changed in his character, Raine says he does not recall being a difficult student in the past, but rather he was excited; and, he is still excited to learn today. He loves coming to school, learning new things, listening to others share their ideas and understanding people more because of these opportunities.

Action Plan. Raine is truly a unique student, which makes creating an action plan for his continued learning an exciting honor. Most important to the immediate future is developing in Raine a sense of concern in his own future. While he would certainly be a successful dancer he does not have an extensive idea of how to actually enter the dance industry and needs not only to be made aware of opportunity, but also instructed how to discover these opportunities on his own. Through one-on-one counseling Raine needs to be instructed how to research colleges that offer dance as a major or courses in choreography. In addition to this, Raine needs to be made

aware of what his options are following college, to assist with this process my intention is to direct Raine towards career counseling, either with myself or the school counselor.

As this is an issue of not exclusive to Raine our final unit for the year will be exclusively college research and an introduction to the application process. While our school does not have a college preparation program in place, it does market itself as a College Readiness school because it requires all students to apply to the local community college upon graduation. This emphasis on college readiness is what Melissa Roderick, Jenny Nagaoka and Vanessa Coca (2009) explain to be drawn from the idea and programs, “All kids college-ready” and a host of other clarion calls are heralding a new era of high school reform focused on college readiness and access” (Coca, Nagaoka, and Roderick, 186)

Additionally, Raine’s sense of dedication to his personal studies is currently driven by a general sense that his education is important yet there is a definite uncertainty as to why this will prepare him for a future in dance. What Raine responds most to is individualized attention and one on one tutoring, and to this effect I have sat down with him to discuss his immediate goals for the semester and connect them to a future in dance. Of course, at the top of his list are dance-specific goals, such as obtaining his left and right splits, followed by academic specific goals.

The first is to set time aside daily to complete homework. Fortunately, Raine does have his own bedroom and can create a private work space for homework time. His next goal was to work on completing end-of unit or summative assignments well in advance of his last minute habits. When he waits until last minute these assignments tend to overwhelm him and under pressure he chooses not to do them. By keeping up with the classroom timeline he will avoid the last minute pressure and also provide himself with the opportunity for teacher feedback before final due dates. The last and most important goal we have set is creating consistency in his

grades. From one week to the next Raine's grade bounces anywhere from a B to a D. The leading cause of fluctuation is the last minute submission of late assignments. In his case, providing the student with weekly calendars will be the first intervention to attempt to remediate this issue.

Overall, Raine is a passionate and capable student. While his grades occasionally fluctuate he does demonstrate the ability to be consistent with his daily check-ins to my classroom. Our next steps will be to direct the passion he has for dance and the consistency he has shown in relations into his assignments as College Readiness For All Reminds Educators, "the central strategy to improve college access and performance must be to ensure that students leave high school with the academic skills, coursework, and qualifications they need" (Coca, Nagaoka, and Roderick, 190).

Case Student #3 - Daniel Rochester

Demographic Information. Black painted nails, bright red lipstick, and a denim studded jacket on stark white skin: these are the first attributes individuals perceive when they encounter Daniel. Your typical punk-rocker type, he prefers to sit in the back corner by himself, blasting aggressive music through his earbuds and drawing band names on the edges of his paper in heavy ink. The oldest of three children in his family, Daniel currently lives with his father and grandparents, while his other two siblings have stayed with their mother. A sense of independence emanates from this student in his decision to both move away from his mother in the past year and to steer clear of the classroom environment as much as possible.

As I walk around the classroom and explain the directions to our classroom assignment, Daniel will quickly complete the work before I finish instructions and spend the rest of his time bent over the paper, feigning work or reading ahead on his own while listening to punk music. While this sets the scene of a "Bad Boy in the Back of the Class" themed movie, Daniel's

academic understanding is far from that typical of a “bad” student. In fact, Daniel is possibly one of my more talented students and, were there a GATE program in our high school, would very likely be a member.

It is easy to assume that Daniel does not understand what is happening in class and has merely mentally checked out, as he rarely volunteers answers and would not be caught intentionally explaining any answers to a classmate. However, the reason why Daniel chooses not to engage with the class, an academic weakness in some sense, is also what makes him a capable student. Daniel is quick to understand abstract ideas such as theme and symbolism in the text, and when asked to explain can connect these topics to the socio-economic situation of the world today. However, because Daniel is quick to understand it becomes tedious and burdensome for him to complete assignments as efficiently as others. Writing out explanations become, “See above” style responses. While it is often the case that Daniel does understand, there is a bit of a disservice done to his own education in these instances. His answers and explanations are often short and brief, his grade which could certainly be exemplary, borders on barely passing, and a quick glance at the gradebook will show quite a handful of missing homework and classroom assignments. Identifying how to challenge Daniel in a way that is engaging, and also empowering him to overcome individual challenges will be the the focus moving forward.

Academic Standing. Born and raised in Southern California by an all white family Daniel has only ever spoken English, outside of the little Spanish he took in his two years of required language. Despite this, Daniel is certainly aware that he is one of few white students in a primarily hispanic school and prides himself on his cultural understanding despite the differences between him and his classmates. He has even gone so far as to offer to me an

engaging way to teach the topic of white male privilege to high school students from an article he stumbled upon while flipping through Instagram.

Without any language barriers, Daniel has performed quite well on standardized tests, landing in the top percentile of students in the most recent PSAT and shows a deeper analytical understanding through his assignments (See Appendix D). As a child in elementary, he was tested for and accepted into the GATE program. This classification became lost in the rush of switching schools six different times throughout his educational career, each time moving closer to one or another parent for their convenience.

His interest in formative classroom assignments switches from day-to-day depending on whether he is engaged in the material or feels up to the challenge. While I encouraged him to join in my Advanced Placement course offered, he explained, “I know I would like it, but I’m kind of lazy and don’t want to actually do any extra work” (Rochester, D. Personal Communication, 15 October, 2018). What he describes as “laziness” has certainly affected his number of assignment submissions, yet what keeps him from failing is his tendency to do well on summative and larger assignments.

Almost always, Daniel prefers to work by himself in the back of the class. A thoughtful and understanding student, though, when asked to work with others he will join a group, read off what he has already completed, and silently listen to others. Whether he works alone or in a group his main goal seems to be to quickly finish up the work, often in a rushed, halfway complete manner, and return to his music or whatever else he may have to work on for his music major classes.

While Daniel’s assignments may reflect that of a minimally engaged student, he responds well to small group and one-on-one discussion. Often times, I will sit side by side with him, ask

for an explanation of his response, and end up with a page long explanation that illuminates and goes in further depth than I anticipated. Given that he cares deeply about being a genuinely good-natured individual who pursues what is right in the social justice sense of the word, his ability to follow my individualized instructions is in stark contrast with any stereotypes his visual appearance may suggest.

Reflecting on his achievement in the Common Core State Standards, there are few that he struggles with when it comes to verbal explanations, often excelling and going beyond my expectations for student understanding. However, producing written documentation of these reasonings is an endeavor for both him and myself. This reflects itself in his growing list of unsubmitted written assignments. It is possible, and likely the case, that because of his adeptness in understanding assignments feel tedious and repetitive to him, not offering the level of challenge he needs in order to succeed without being bored into laziness. As he explains it, “I like to keep my ideas in my mind” (Rochester, D. Personal Communication, 15 October, 2018).

Socio-Emotional Development and Social Identity. “I feel like I really am who I am,” was one of the most striking beliefs Daniel has shared with me (Rochester, D. Personal Communication 15 October, 2018). This belief is eerily similar to psychologist Erik Erikson’s theory explained as, “I am who I experience myself to be within my own cultural affiliations, and, perhaps, in opposition to the cultural affiliation of others” (Erikson, 1993 as cited in Nakkula and Toshalis, 2013). Daniel’s identity is one which could easily be overlooked as a rebellious and lazy student. He has, however; proven to himself, me, and my classmates that he is a more complex student than merely an archetype and has created for himself a unique and individual culture.

Bassist for his three-person punk band, named Syringe Exchange Punk, Daniel claims that he is most passionate about playing with his band and hanging out with both of his band mates (See Figure D. 4.). He sees himself as someone who is devoted to consistency in relationships, part of the reason why he keeps only two close friends, and claims to feel as somewhat of an outcast amongst his classmates. One reason why he has switched schools so many times is because of the teasing he received from classmates and others at the skatepark for dyeing his hair, painting his nails, wearing bright red earrings, and dressing in whatever clothing he feels like for the day whether it be leather jackets or fishnets and a skirt. As a heterosexual, white male Daniel believes that he is, “open to diversity and want[s] to travel the world” (Rochester, D. Personal Communication, 15 October, 2018). While music is his current main priority rather than school, he feels that meeting new people by traveling to diverse areas is his ultimate goal and will continue to help make him a ‘decent person’.

The characteristics that have made Daniel somewhat of an outcast lead into some of his greatest strengths. Possibly because he knows what it feels like to be judged from earlier school experiences, Daniel continually reaches out to partner with students who may not have a partner for group discussions or pair-share activities. Further, he considers himself to be a safe friend to students who are part of the LGBTQ+ community.

More often than not, however; Daniel does not showcase his positive attribute as he is fairly introverted and would much rather work on his own if given the opportunity. Behaviorally, Daniel displays no issues with either teacher or classmates. In cases where he disagrees with a classmate he will either keep quietly to himself or will ask later on whether he can switch seats. In cases where he takes issue with something in the way of my teaching he will share out his concerns in a genuinely confused rather than confrontational manner. While he holds a general

dissent towards authority, taken after his father he explained, he has yet to express any distracting behavior towards authority in my classroom.

It is possible that no major issues have arose because my classroom has also been deemed a “Safe Room” by a large majority of the LGBTQ+ members of the student body, which he holds great sympathies towards. On the rare occasion that Daniel has disagreed with the classroom agenda or task at hand it is easily remedied by my explanations. He is quick to see through any veil placed before his eyes and prefers honesty and transparency in our student-teacher relationship, something which has been refreshing to offer in my classroom.

Funds of Knowledge. In the first attempt to reach Daniel’s guardians I called his father, John Rochester. After a mildly awkward exchange he explained to me that Daniel’s grandmother took care of all his school stuff and redirected me to contact her. After a week of calling with no response, I was finally able to contact grandma, Olivia Rochester, who had just returned from a week long vacation. A stern and conservative woman, she was gracious enough to invite me to their home a few cities away from the school. A traditional, single-story American home, the streets were freshly swept and all of the houses in the neighborhood resembled one another in a neat and comfortable suburban fashion.

A few moments of silence followed my knock at the door, ended abruptly by Olivia swinging the large white door open. Inside their home resembled the orderliness that comes with retirement and not having any small children around to disrupt the order of everything. Daniel was away with his father at the time, as they enjoy practicing music together, and his grandfather was busy about the house working on his own responsibilities.

At the outset of our interview Olivia was quite concerned with the purpose of my questions, asking who would see it and whether it would affect his education at the Business and

Arts Academy in any potentially negative way. A few weeks previously Daniel had been suspended for non-academic reasons and she was concerned this played a role in my presence at their home. After consoling her on these matters she was quick to get through the interview while maintaining her general good nature.

Their community she explained to have mostly individuals their age rather than Daniel's, something which he complains about often. His interests she agreed were primarily playing guitar in his dad's band or bass in his own band. She seemed unsurprised with how little time Daniel spent at home and how most weekends he was away with one friend or another claiming, "he is just like his dad" (Rochester, O. Personal Communication, 23 October, 2018).

She explained that Daniel, "wants to be a musician, skater, or a journalist and travel around" but seemed a bit concerned by this idea as she hoped he would choose to attend college and go a different route than his father. Part of the reason Daniel is so close with his father has been because of their shared love of punk music, similar fashion, and underlying rebellion, yet she acknowledged that Daniel was never happy living with his mother and two years ago asked to move in with the three of them; an opportunity for which she has been grateful. While living with his mother she explained he struggled quite a bit in school, possibly because of his mothers' focus on her two younger children. Despite this, she hoped that a switch to the Business and Arts Academy would improve his interest in school; yet, his recent suspension and fluctuating grades tell her, "he has other things on his mind and needs to find better friends" (Rochester, O. Personal Communication 25 October, 2018). While she is concerned about his interest in school she seems to have no doubt that Daniel will be successful in whatever he chooses so long as he puts his full heart and effort into his passions.

Neither grandparents nor father were able to attend college, yet because of their work in respectable trade fields Olivia explained they have been able to live in a “comfortable home in a nice area” (Rochester, O. Personal Communication, 25 October, 2018). She believes that with family support Daniel can achieve a similar future for himself.

While our home meeting was brief, Olivia was obviously excited that a teacher had taken personal investment in her grandson and encouraged me to keep on him about due dates and homework assignments, as she knows he is a smart kid. Most surprising about this visit, while certainly not the most inviting interview, was how much effort had been put into creating a healthy place for Daniel on behalf of his grandparents. Though it was their home, they wanted him to have a place for himself, his own room, and to feel like they were all a family. As a mildly rebellious teenager though, my interview with Daniel exposes how he perceives this welcoming environment.

Experiences, Interests, and Developmental Considerations. Sitting next to Daniel for our interview, I noticed a staple was in place of his septum piercing and he explained the actual jewelry fell out and this was merely a placeholder until he could buy a new ring. One of the things Daniel cares most about is that people can see and understand his identity just by looking at him. The authors of *Understanding Youth: Adolescent Development for Educators*, explain an idea which Daniel may be experiencing, a stage of the Erikson Influential Model whereby, “Identity formation, then, is the dynamic process of testing, selecting, and integrating self-images and personal ideologies into an integrated and consistent whole” (Nakkula and Toshalis, 2013). Eager to discuss each of the topics I brought up, it became obvious the extensive amount of time Daniel has invested in creating his identity and reflecting on how past experiences have defined

him. It is likely that the ‘consistent whole’ of Daniel’s identity is his expression through his physical aesthetic and music; this will be further explained in the following section.

Daniel gives credit to his father for introducing him to punk music and feels that he is the closest family member he has. His grandparents he described as, “Old, white people. They try to be nice and invite me to dinner but serve weird things like plain turkey with pineapple” (Rochester, D. Personal Communication, 25 October, 2018). For the most part he tries to avoid them and says most of his time is spent playing drums for his dad’s band. Obviously excited about this he went on to say their sound is, “fast and heavy hitting, but sometimes slow and leading to impending doom” (Rochester, D. Personal Communication, 25 October, 2018).

When he is not playing music with his dad or two other friends Daniel likes going to either the skatepark or to skate in his grandparents’ neighborhood. While this brings him a lot of joy as he described skating as an activity for “black sheep,” he expressed receiving quite a bit of judgement from other boys at the skatepark for painting his nails and wearing jewelry. He quickly brushes off their remarks with a “Why does it matter?” (Rochester, D. Personal Communication, 25 October 2018). As explained previously Daniel has a true passion for being an understanding individual and would rather avoid confrontation and interfering with the lives of others. This may also suggest a self-assuredness and confidence in his own identity development.

While this may sound as if he is unaffected by the thoughts and opinions of others, his current relationship and feelings towards his mother suggests otherwise. After living with his mother for the greater half of his life Daniel recognized a devoted favoritism to his two younger siblings. The feeling of being cast aside is part of the reason he asked to move in with his father. This, combined with switching to six different schools, are the key causes of Daniel’s desire for

intentional and meaningful relationships as opposed to knowing each of his classmates. In addition, wanting to become independent from any family reliances Daniel made sure to obtain a job at the age of sixteen and has been working after school since the beginning of the year so that he does not have to rely on anyone.

When asked how his best friend would describe him a light quickly illuminated Daniel's eyes and he did not need prompting with any questions to continue talking. As rebellious teenage boys they can easily be found causing mischief, joking around, skating, playing drums, or even watching the "Jackass" movie collections. What was most important about this conversation, however; was the realization Daniel came to at the end of his elaboration. "I think I am a very reasonable person and the voice of reason with myself, friends, and family" (Rochester, D. Personal Communication, 15 October, 2018). This unique quality about Daniel shows itself in how he treats not only his friends and family, but also his classmates; in particular, is rather fond of working with two of his classmates with IEP's who struggle to complete classwork. His skill for reasoning becomes a tactfulness in empathy to his advantage.

Action Plan. At the outset of speaking with Daniel he wanted to clarify, "School has never been my thing, I want to be able to do what I want whenever I want it" (Rochester, D. Personal Communication, 15 October, 2018). In looking towards Daniel's future what will be most important is generating a personal interest in his own education. Daniel has the skills of a natural scholar and considers himself to be a deep thinker and quick learner, evidenced by his quick ability to learn most rock instruments. He considers himself to be adept in arguing, using an advanced vocabulary, and experienced in his English skills.

It appears that because of his lack of interest in his own schooling Daniel has not had the opportunity to demonstrate his English ability given his current academic status in the class.

What will be considered in the future is developing formative assignments which assess the same standards but allow students the option to incorporate and express their own identity. What Daniel feels most invested in currently is expressing himself through his mannerisms and clothing as well as developing his music. Assignments which give him a space to do each of these will set him up for a personal investment in English.

Authors Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey have written in their book, *The Purposeful Classroom*, about the differences between Extrinsic and Intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation, something external such as grades, appears to not immediately preoccupy or concern Daniel. Intrinsic motivation though, such as relating to a song and feeling encouraged to pursue this connection, appears to be what has motivated Daniel to succeed in his music classes. Taking these ideas in mind, this particular student also needs to be presented with options as to the ways in which he can complete his assignments to provide autonomy and a sense of trust between student and teacher.

Most importantly, what Daniel will greatly benefit from is positive reinforcement and encouragement. While he prefers to sit in the back and avoid volunteering answers aloud during class a negative byproduct is he can become invisible and silenced. Given his particular history, in order to encourage his advanced academics and personal well-being I will continue to check in routinely with Daniel and make time to encourage him in completing his assignments. Fisher and Frey explain the benefits of this as, “Our recognition of their efforts can also be motivating, as can their sense of membership and belonging and increased responsibility for learning” (Fisher and Frey, 2011).

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

Micro-Community Research

Located between Los Angeles and San Bernardino, the city of Pomona has become a diverse cultural hub for both lovers of the arts and various ethnic groups and boasts of being, “the seventh largest city in the Los Angeles County” (“Data USA,” 2018). The large number of citizens does not deter the efforts of city government, however; as council meetings are known for lasting late into the evening. The Mission Statement on the city website reads, “The City of Pomona improves the quality of life for our diverse community.” (“City of Pomona California”, 2019).

According to the last census, the city houses 151,142 individuals and continues to grow at a slow 1% every ten years, an insignificant increase compared to the California state average of 12% population growth (“Pomona, Ca. Population and Races,” 2019). According to the data website, Data USA the average household income for these Pomonans is \$50,360 a year, the average individual income is half this number between \$20,000-\$25,000 (2019). Strikingly, of those 151,142 residents, about 70% are of a hispanic background, much greater than the total U.S. hispanic populace at 17% (2019). The concentration of a large hispanic demographic lends to a strong presence of hispanic culture within Pomona, as a tasty eatery from one of the many hispanic cultures can easily be found on most street corners. This 70% is composed of nearly 88% mexicans with the other 12% being other various Central and South American ethnicities (“Pomona, Ca. Population and Races,” 2019). In the 2010 census, performed by the United States Census Bureau, 63% of Pomonans also claimed to be White. This information appears to be in conflict with the presence of a 70% hispanic population, however; many hispanics identified as two races , both white and hispanic. There is a smaller population of Black

Americans within the city at 7% population and 9.3% of Pomonans identify as Asian American (2011).

Given these statistics, Data USA explains, the primary languages spoken are English and various styles of Spanish followed by Chinese and Tagalog. There are a number of store fronts where Spanish is the only language spoken. More than half of the residents, 64.9%, speak a non-English language and 20.3% are not yet U.S. citizens, much greater than the 5% national average (2019). This may be because of the high immigration rates from Mexico, El Salvador, and China, but this is a small decrease from previous years.

While statistics can help to paint a picture, there is still much to be said about the intricate communities within Pomona. Because the metro goes through Pomona's downtown center, many individuals commute to work in nearby cities. This system creates an atmosphere in the early mornings and evenings that is quite similar to that of a bustling metropolitan. At the same time, it is not secret that nearby cities have relocated their population of individuals without homes to the next city over, Pomona. Small encampments can be seen popping up in various parts of the city and surrounding industrial areas. Driving into Pomona in the mornings allows one the opportunity to see what daily life is like for the individuals who live in this unique city. Driving through the city's widespread industrial district there can be seen permanently parked cars and RVs lining the streets with tarps and blankets that cover the windows. There are typically one to two individuals folding blankets into shopping carts or backpacks. Given that this area is filled with mechanics store fronts and large warehouses it is curious to see the number of individuals that also spend time between this and the train tracks nearby. Driving further towards the downtown center the number of cars quickly picks up alongside sidewalk traffic. Brown-Skinned Mothers can be seen holding children in tow as they walk to school, nursing students run to class

at the nearby college in their scrubs, a man rises off the sidewalk with a foam mattress he had been sleeping on, and the library doors open as a clerk opens up. A glimpse into the daily downtown life reveals the intricate cultures utilizing this area.

Recently, the walking bridge that goes over the tracks was closed to student use as an encampment developed in the covered area. As of 2016 the city of Pomona had a count of 689 individuals without homes (“City of Pomona”). This number has gone down in recent years, but maintaining a consistent count proves difficult given that many of these individuals are often relocated by Pomona and the surrounding cities police departments. Data USA claims the poverty rate is at 21.5%, a much more concerning number as two out of every ten individuals would fall under that title (2019).

It is also interesting to note that the home ownership of the area is 11% lower than the national average at around 50%. The other 50% of residents rent homes or apartments (“Data USA,” 2019). In the downtown area alone, there are 3 apartment complexes all on the same street. Being located right next to a metro station may lend to this increase in apartment rentals, but there is no research to confirm this possibility.

In an interview conducted with a Pomona resident, Peter Robins, key concerns expressed regarding city needs were specific to “increased safe and affordable housing, park safety, and addressing issues with crime and poverty” (Robins, P. Personal Interview 6 February, 2019). While there are some wonderful resources, such as the Pomona Historical Society, the local Farmers Market on Saturdays, and a library which the city had to fervently fight to keep, there seems to be more need than than material assets. Unfortunately, these assets do not make up for the the key issues expressed by this resident that, “The sale and distribution of drugs is a bgt problem here, and prostitution” (Robins, P. Personal Interview, 6 February, 2019). These

challenges are not new to the city, as over the past two decades the police have setup routine sting operations in an attempt to control this growing problem and divert the existent methamphetamine population from parks designed for children to other locations in Pomona. According to this resident the main area for sex workers and the sale of drugs is less than two blocks away from the school and downtown area in various motels. While these may seem like brazen topics, the resident interviewed claims that before these issues are addressed, there cannot be a safe environment for students and children in Pomona. Once students can go to local parks without worrying about being confronted and there are more after school programs to keep students busy, then the presence of the homeless population can be addressed.

Community Events and Community Members

In an interview with a second Pomona resident, Susan Marcos, she explained, “The rich culture in Pomona is the fact that this is a latino city, as LA is changing and gentrifying, Pomona hasn’t changed a bit” (Marcos, S. Personal Communication, 6 February, 2019). A key facet of the hispanic culture, pride in one’s origins has made its way into the Pomonan culture; it is evident that there is an immense amount of pride to be a citizen of Pomona. Susan, in her early thirties and a mother of two, explained that, “A lot of the city’s issues do not become prevalent until you look further, the arts district really distracts from these issues”(Marcos, S. Personal Communication, 6 February, 2019). Despite these issues, many citizens still have an immense love for their city and support the continual self-reinvention that occurs in the downtown area as it continually transitions from music to education to arts focused.

The reality of Pomona is that while the Arts District is one of its key assets, this can at times cover up the need it faces. Insights about the community focused on the challenges faced about the homeless community and crime. She explained, “We are absorbing a lot of people’s

homeless, and we are not a rich city. Either the state needs to step in or we do a lawsuit against surrounding cities” (Marcos, S. Personal Communication, 6 February, 2019). The need for money to support the homeless population and providing resources is because the city of Pomona has an incredibly tight budget. Most years, the budget is not enough to meet the needs of the city much less support the homeless population of surrounding cities. Despite this, the downtown area has a series of shelters, some that are open year round and others that are only open during the winter season. The stance of the city on the homeless population has been to explain that this is a problem to be addressed by the county not something that the city of Pomona can tackle alone, and so for now law enforcement allows these individuals to stay and the few shelters available do the best for what resources will allow (“City of Pomona, California,” 2019).

As per crime we discussed the presence of gangs in Pomona. For the most part, gangs are isolated to the streets they live on and while there is occasionally violence it stays within their gang rivalries. The issue with this is the reality that many of our students come from these areas with a gang or homeless presence. The emotional expectations for students in these environments does not disappear when they enter the classroom, making issues of the city issues for the classroom as well.

A quick look on the city website provides city’s core values as, “Cultural Diversity, Fiscal Responsibility, Focusing on the Future, Excellent Customer Service, Leadership, and Clear and Open Communication” (“City of Pomona California,” 2019). Cultural diversity has certainly been their strongest asset, as the city hosts key events which highlight the different groups in Pomona. In coalition with the school is the “Art Walk” hosted every first Saturday of the month. At this event, student artwork alongside that of local artists is displayed in the downtown area for people to view and purchase. Pomona has gone so far to emphasize the

significance of art that there is even an “Art Tax” placed on buildings that do not have any artwork. The Assistant Principal has explained that the Business and Arts Academy has large murals on each of their building in order to avoid this tax (Peters, J. Personal Communication, 5 February, 2019). Many other business fronts have also adopted the mural strategy and as one drives through the city they can enjoy the beautiful, often culturally reflective artwork on these building fronts. For instance, in the downtown area there is a large mural of The Goddess of Pomona, a young Latina woman who has helped with various social work organizations in Pomona.

Peter Robins, the gentleman interviewed in Section I, went on to explain, “It’s a place that is always reinventing itself, which is not necessarily good because nothing can stay open. There is always something new being presented in the downtown area. It is almost like endless artistic creative destruction” (Robins, P. Personal Communication, 6 February, 2019). Within the downtown area there are quite a few closed storefronts and even a closed hotel. At the same time, the YMCA is being reconstructed and the local Universities continue to expand into the city. In a way, the hispanic culture is the one consistency about the city’s collective culture, as its art and business presence is ever changing to meet the needs of and stay relevant with the youth population.

The biggest presence in the city are the two Universities. There is Pomona University, part of a greater college collective and there is SouthWestern University. SouthWestern has revamped and very much saved the downtown area with the large population it has drawn and with the increased popularity of its programs, increasing the popularity of the city and its downtown. Further, many of the large businesses in the area have worked together to keep the downtown area alive. For instance, students from the school will work with small businesses as

part of their final Business Portfolio. The students create artistic ways to market for these small businesses and get to learn about the realities of running a business. Many of the businesses also showcase artwork from local artists in their shops. Looking into any given bar one can easily find the iconic paintings of downtown artists or see musicians setting up to play.

Stepping out of the downtown area, though; there is a great bifurcation between the downtown arts members and the greater hispanic population. The further you go from downtown, the less the arts presence becomes apparent. While there is great cooperation within downtown, much of that has neglected the greater population. In the downtown area brand new apartment complexes stand out with their clean earth tones and symmetric windows. As soon as one leaves downtown, though; it becomes apparent the number of abandoned homes and empty storefronts that could not be swept up by the 'saving presence' of the downtown area.

While it is much easier to point out the flaws of the city, it is important to note that the richest point of cultural wealth for the city comes from its own citizens. As Peter Robins explained, "I'm happily stuck where I'm at. I'm strangely content with my city and work when I shouldn't be with either" (Robins, P. Personal Communication, 6 February 2019). Why he "shouldn't be" content with either is further expanded in the next section.

School Site Research

Pulling up to the school, a gentleman sleeping in the planter is lightly snoring and a bag of leftovers sits at his feet. The sidewalk at times has a bit of fecal matter pushed to the side where trash, the occasional syringe, and condom collect, and it is not uncommon to be approached by someone with questions. For instance, in a recent experience I was approached by a woman with tousled hair and a large tank top falling off both of her shoulders to reveal two protruding collarbones. The woman walked past three students to the door of my car where she

placed one hand on my open door and the other car frame to face me as I stepped out. “You’re a college grad,” she said to me, a bit distracted and not making eye contact. While still blocking me into the car she proceeded to ask me for any money I could offer and how to get to a street whose popularity is not for its positive aspects. My typical experience walking in to work is the typical experience for my students as they enter and leave the school in their home city. While this may have been a surprising experience for me, for many of these students it would not have been out of the ordinary.

The Business and Arts Academy maintains a large presence in the city of Pomona, whether this is for primarily good or negative reasons is up to debate as many of the issues faced by the city are present in the student demographics. As Peter explained, “It’s kind of like Pomona itself, locals talk badly but still appreciate it and want it to be here. It’s constantly creating and destroying itself. People root for it the same way they do Pomona, but they both need to do better” (Robins, P. Personal Communication, 6 February, 2019). Why it has developed this reputation is from its success despite the spread out school, constantly changing rules, and high teacher turnover rate.

The school itself is spread over two city blocks. One campus houses the middle school to eighth grade population as well as all of the dance major classes. The next is home to just the arts teachers and senior classes, and the third is for ninth to eleventh grade core classes. The Senior Campus was once a bank building, the middle school was once a series of office buildings (including part of the Police Department), and the Main Campus was once a boat warehouse. If this sounds a bit confusing, well it is also fairly confusing for students who will often mix up classes, head to the wrong building, or end up fifteen minutes late because they thought it was

time for an arts block instead of academic, or they will get stuck behind a train as they head over to passing period.

This layout also makes communication amongst teachers fairly difficult. Since many of the classroom phones do not work or arts teacher are too busy with major instruction to be accessed there is fairly little communication between core curriculum teachers and arts teachers. Amongst core and arts teachers teachers on campus there is a slight Us versus Them battle for support and resources from administration. There is also little to no communication about what is happening in each of our corresponding classes because the professional development for arts teachers and curriculum teachers is held at different times in the week. If a teacher from either campus wanted to meet with each other an email would have to be sent two days in advance in order to accommodate classes, because at times their scheduling does not align. For this reason, it is not uncommon for teachers to find out last minute that more than half of their students are gone for a field trip they have never heard of before.

Another downside to this layout is that locating both students and administration can be a task unto itself. If our sole counselor for all four grade levels of the high school is not in her office, it would be impossible to track which of the three campuses she is visiting. The same goes for locating any of the Assistant Principals on campus.

An interesting fact to note is the lack of a principal at the school site. The Business and Arts Academy currently has five Assistant Principals, and seven people on the board of directors. The directors is a group of individuals whose investments finance the school. Each of the five Assistant principals has a different role from behavior, testing, curriculum, arts, and safety. Each of them also has a smaller list of duties they maintain which can only be found out by asking that

particular AP, a system whose confusion is only compounded by the fact that principals are almost never in their offices but traveling between campuses and meetings.

The confusion and disorganization of administrative responsibilities has certainly had a negative effect on teachers. Morale amongst teachers on campus is fairly low as an interview with a previous school teacher revealed why there is an incredibly high teacher turnover rate for the school. This teacher, who wished to remain anonymous said, “If people have money they get out and most teachers leave,” this is because there is an immense amount of pressure placed on teachers by a disorganized administration, a lack of resources for the SPED department, and new teachers in particular are not well supported when it comes to dealing with issues specific to the school culture (Anonymous, Personal Interview, 8 February, 2019)..

For instance, a teacher was able to spend two years showing movies in an English class before anyone took action. This was only noticed after English test scores were on a consistent decline for two years and this teacher was released. To improve test scores administration has told teachers to pick their highest scoring students and focus on improving that specific groups test scores and to do the same with a group of lowest scoring students. This tactic, does not help the overall student population as the author of *Un-Standardized curriculum* explains, “In a review of 14 large-scale studies examining the relationship between testing policies and student achievement, Lee (2008) found that test-driven accountability produced only modest achievement gains and had no impact on closing the racial achievement gap” (Sleeter, 2017). So while it may benefit the school reputation and administration to invest in this practice, overall it is only worsening the race gap in student test scores. The race gap, an issue which many teachers who care about social justice are put off by, is the divide that occurs between test scores for students of color and high test scores for white students.

The fact that teachers have become disposable and replaceable by the campus has caused for the same mindset amongst students. Students often complain about how often teachers come and go from the school. For instance, midway through October the eleventh grade team lost our Earth Science and AP Environmental Science teacher. Students, used to teachers leaving, quickly adopted a lackadaisical attitude when it came to any science work. Three substitutes later and the seventh grade science teacher has been relocated to eleventh. Issues this teacher now faces are getting students to complete assignments after a semester of not being held accountable for any work. This has also left the seventh grade without a teacher, shifting the lackadaisical attitude from one student population to another.

At the moment the key issue for the school site is increasing student test scores and preventing another mass exodus of students as occurred in the previous semester. In order to address these issues, however: administration and the board of directors must first tackle why it is they have such a high teacher turnover rate. Once they can get teachers to stay then teachers and administration can work together to solve these issues rather than putting the pressure on one another.

While there is technology at the school site, fifty chromebooks for each grade level, it is a fairly difficult transition to get students to use technology. Students and teachers have not been given any formal or informal training on how to use this technology in the classroom and so it becomes the task of the teacher to research and implement any new technology resources for their room. While this may sound like a simple task the difficulty increases when shared laptops are needed for testing in another room, students with no training struggle to troubleshoot wifi issues, or students that are social media savvy but not necessarily tech savvy lose assignments in

the great abyss of the web. All of these issues have simple remediations which could be solved by a formal training from administration.

School Mission and Demographics

Fifteen years ago a group of investors decided they wanted to open a school in the downtown area of Pomona. One of them, the owner of multiple businesses, and the other two both involved in the field of education, rallied a few more investors to open The Business and Arts Academy. This information was given to me during my new teacher training at the beginning of the year. While the school website has a “history” subsection, it does not actually explain any of the schools founding but rather goes into the philosophy of whole person development. The lack of clarity provided by the website reflects the overall lack of communication that occurs between staff, teacher, administration, and directors.

The schools mission is, “To create accomplished life-long learners, the SAE's standard-aligned, college- preparatory grades 6-12 program emphasizes arts and business through innovative project-based learning” (Burger, 2019). This can be found on the school website underneath a message from the now-resigned Director of the school. When students come to the Business and Arts Academy they are required to choose one of seven majors: dance, digital arts, theatre arts, visual arts, vocals, instrumental music, or a specialized art, and they are also enrolled in a series of required business courses. Students remain in this major for their four years at the Academy, eventually taking an Advanced Placement course in their art. As students move through the major they are required to build a “portfolio” of all of their art, business, and academic major works.

While the mission statement does not directly explain it, the goal of this learning strategy is to create artists who know how to market their work and how to work in teams with other

artists. The “emphas(is) on arts and business” in the mission statement reflects the students organization of importance when it comes to their academic and arts classes. In most cases, students find their arts classes to be of greater importance than their academics.

For this and many other reasons, I find the mission statement to be rather lacking when it comes to supporting students. My personal philosophy is that education should teach to the population the school has been given, not the demographic it wants to have. In Un-Standardized Curriculum it reads, “Gay (2010) explained that culturally responsive or culturally relevant teaching “filters curriculum content and teaching strategies through [students’] cultural frames of reference to make the content more personally meaningful and easier to master” and “insists that educational institutions accept the legitimacy and viability of ethnic-group cultures in improving learning outcomes” (Sleeter, 2017). Research on DataQuest reveals that the student population is eighty percent hispanic, five percent African American, ten percent white, and five percent other minority races (2019). This percentage is significant enough that my belief is to educate to the population you have been given with culturally relevant material. For instance, the history teacher has asked permission and been denied the opportunity to teach a course of Latino history in Southern California. In the case of the Academy, while many students do commute to have the opportunity to study art, the majority attend the school simply because it is near enough to their home to walk or be dropped off in the morning. For these students, the arts and business requirements of the school then add another barrier on the way to high school graduation.

Notably, the California School Dashboard has identified only 50% of our students as college and career ready, an incredibly alarming statistic when the competitor art school in the area has 85% of their students graduate with college and career readiness (2018). Given that most of our students end up taking eight courses at a time including a Home Room block used

for SAT Prep, many students simply do not have the time in their schedule to complete all of the core academic classes necessary to be college and career ready. This also reflects in state testing where, according to California School Dashboard, the competitor art school, with shorter school days and less arts classes has scored “Above Standard” in both Math and English SBAT testing while the Business and Arts Academy steadily declined to “Below Standard” over the past two years (2019).

Another issue faced by the school is chronic absenteeism. The school currently has 13.4% of students classified as chronically absent (“School Performance Overview,” 2019). This does not include the exorbitant amount of tardies from being delayed at the train or being taken out of class for an arts related event. The School Performance Overview goes on to note the graduation rate is 92.9% at the Business and Arts Academy, slightly more than the 86.8% of the city high school, but still lower than the 96.3% of the competitor art school. Comparatively, the absentee rate is only 4.7% at this competitor school (2019).

Given that the Business and Arts Academy has a student population that is 79.4% socioeconomically disadvantaged, it seems necessary to acknowledge how the issue of chronic absenteeism and graduation rate is an issue of social justice. According to research by Michael A. Gottfried, “The findings suggest that chronic absenteeism reduces math and reading achievement outcomes, reduces educational engagement, and decreases social engagement” (2018). If one of the roles of educators is to close the achievement gap, then in schools with historically underrepresented student populations it should be of an utmost priority to reduce student absenteeism. For instance, on days when it rains there is an increased number of absences because students who walk cannot find a ride to school, issues like this must be addressed and resolved by the school.

Students who thrive on this campus are those who came to the school for the arts and those who left previous schools for not being able to meet their mental health needs. For instance, we have a large LGBTQ population on campus alongside a great number of students who experienced severe bullying in their other schools. Because our classroom size is smaller teachers are able to invest more in one-on-one relationships with students and meet the social-emotional needs of these students. Additionally, students who chose to attend the school in order to be exposed to the arts succeed in the school because of the large emphasis the school places on success in the arts industry. For those students who attend the school because it is close, because it is public, or because their guardians decided it would be better than alternative school it becomes a great issue of time management and devotion to a past director's arts mission, someone who they will never meet. The large number of classes taken by students, expectations to curate and collect their art and academic work over the years, and expectations outside of school to market and produce their art sets students up for failure if they do not already meet the niche requirements of a Business and Arts focused school.

Looking at parental involvement, the school uses ParentSquare as the main form of communication between all school staff and parents. Unfortunately, parentsquare necessitates that all parents and students have access to technology outside of school which is certainly not the case. In a message sent out to 50 parents regarding students with failing grades it only elicited two responses. It is possible some parents were too busy to respond, some did not feel it necessary to respond, some never saw the message, or some simply did not have access to the message. Regardless, the school sends out messages on ParentSquare daily with reminders of early release dates, upcoming shows, changes in staff, or any necessary updates. The school also hosts SAW meeting once a semester, where both parents and students are invited to come in the

evening and share their concerns and ideas for the school. This past semester the eleventh grade SAW meeting hosted five guardians out of 110 total students. While this may seem like a small number, it was actually an increase from previous years. Parental involvement at the Business and Arts Academy is at times limited given that the majority of our parents work full time in order to support their students, it was not surprising then when parent-teacher meetings were held in the middle of the day and not a single parent showed up.

Classroom Exploration.

Gray Cement flooring, four white cement walls, and a narrow runway-like setup are the three most striking characteristics about my classroom. A vaulted ceiling with exposed wood beams creates an industrial and sterile setting, a unique environment when compared to the typical California classroom. Given the height and narrow layout of the room it creates a type of echo chamber for student voices, and the kids have learned to speak in low tones to avoid the dull roar that occurs when too many people gather in a small place. The site chosen for the Business and Arts Academy was once a motorboat showroom and warehouse. The transformation from a warehouse to classroom is memorable, but certainly shows its flaws in the partitions that separate rooms, lack of windows, awkward room set-ups, and a campus spread across an entire downtown area (See Figure 1).

The 11th grade English classroom is located on the Main Campus of the three, just past the train tracks and Metro Station. Students often walk in a few minutes late as it is common to get stopped by a passing train. Although it is not the best location and the narrow setup has made for some creative desk placement, the classroom is certainly one of the more comfortable rooms on campus. After having been told by a student in the first week of school that, “Miss, your classroom reminds me of the hospital and I have bad memories with that.”(my paraphrasing).

After this conversation it became of great significance to me to decorate a classroom that feels like a place of learning rather than industrial and invites students to in to the room. This was not an easy task considering the classrooms more closely resembles a showroom than anything educational.

Despite this I have found opportunity to trim the three whiteboards with colorful borders, place warm lights to offset the blue phosphorescents, and cover the walls in student work. Given the narrow layout of the room, most student work is towards the middle of the room, behind students so they are not distracted by drawings in front of them. I have also strategically placed two patterned rugs in the room to warm up the cold cement floor and provide a space for students to lounge more comfortably. The biggest change I have made to my classroom is putting in a medium-sized green couch and a single lounge chair at the rear of the room. This small seating area has become the most prized section of our classroom and students will quickly pile into this area before and after class during passing period. Students are well aware that they may not sit in the couch area during class, but that does not stop them from fully stretching out during passing period (See Figure 1 far left corner). In the article, *A Comfortable Truth: Well-Planned Classrooms Make a Difference*, Prakash Nair explains that when students feel comfortable and welcome in a room they are more likely to have their social and emotional needs met, allowing them to engage with the class material (2007). I have put this belief into practice with considerable effort to decorate my classroom with student work and inviting colors (See Appendix A).

Now, the same students who once said my room reminded her of a hospital asks to come in during every lunch and passing period to spend time in her “safe” classroom. She is one of many students on campus who suffer from severe anxiety and other various forms of mental

illness. There is a large population on campus of students who had to leave previous schools that felt like hostile environments to their mental needs. There is also a large SPED department on campus, as I have eighteen students out of 95 who have variations of an IEP accommodation, not including the shocking number of students with anxiety approved 504's. I also have two students that require a one-on-one aide and two more students that both share an aide; unfortunately, an aide for these four students has not been present since the first month of the year. It was recently disclosed that the person in charge of our SPED department was excused from duty, likely because so many of the SPED requirements were not being met.

Locating the exact number of EL students was a task unto itself, as forms from the beginning of the year are already outdated. The school functions much like a revolving door with students coming and going fairly often. Regardless, last year the 11th grade had 5 English Learners ("Data Quest," 2018) and the 5 we began this year with has dwindled down to two as the revolving door of the school has taken three of our students to nearby campuses in Pomona. In an interview with one of the four high school Vice Principals, John Peters explained, "It's surprising so many students leave considering we have a higher RFEP and ELTEL turnover than the state average" (Peters, J. Personal Communication, 2019). In speaking with the Spanish teacher, she made me aware that there are at least 20 RFEP's at the eleventh grade level.

While there is some support for SPED and EL students, the reality is that there is not enough. Our school tends to draw in more students with IEP's than any of the surrounding high schools because of our unique and accepting school culture. In order to compensate for the lack of support outside of the classroom, myself and many other teacher differentiate as much as possible. For instance, a typical lesson will have sentence frames/starters for students with an IEP and will include powerpoint slides to follow along as the teacher gives instructions. In order

to help EL students I will have all directions translated in Spanish and will give a Spanish copy of the text we are reading to my Spanish only students. Most activities will have a bonus question for GATE students, where they can challenge themselves by choice to answer a more difficult question. Despite these accommodations, students with IEP's and one-on-one aides are still in need of greater support than can be offered by individual teachers.

Overall, the school has a culture that is opposed to violent physical aggression. There has not been an on-campus fight in over three years, something admirable for a high school campus. This is likely due to the fact that our schools draw in a student population who wishes to avoid the typical high school environment. Our students proudly wear the title of "outcasts" from the average high school, especially since we do not have any sports teams on campus, something many students find unnecessary. At the same time, there are quite a few students who certainly miss this opportunity and end up transferring schools for their sport.

Since we have such a unique student population, teachers often have to come up with interesting ways to organize and develop the classroom. For instance, the majority of students will not do any homework regardless of how small or important it may be. We have a Mastery Learning policy on campus, and it is encouraged to allow students to turn in late work at any point in the semester; this has led to more than a few taking advantage of the opportunity and waiting until the last month of the semester to turn in major projects. Because of this, myself and many other teachers find themselves avoiding giving homework all together and instead providing extra class time to complete any work. In part, this is to allow the students time to ask any questions about the material while we are in class, yet it is also to give them the opportunity to avoid doing any homework if they are proactive enough.

Given that I teach English, my students are typically working with some type of reading, because either their after-school schedules will not permit it or because they are not committed to homework this needs to be completed in class. My lesson planning greatly incorporates the time necessary to read the book together in class and extra time to complete any assignments. To get through a single 20 page chapter and one complete lesson takes about a week, so an eight chapter book with eight lessons would take about two months to get through. In order to keep on top of the late work, at the end of each unit I set a deadline for students to complete all late work and turn it in, otherwise I do not accept it at the end of the semester. If a student wishes to revise writing my philosophy is that they should be able to resubmit as much as they would like, but if a student refuses to submit an assignment at the unit deadline, then I will not accept any later submissions unless their IEP has accommodations. While this rule may seem harsh, it is necessary in order to keep students accountable and keep grading somewhat manageable.

Further, because I do work with students ages 16-18 the rule setting in the classroom is a bit less unspoken than it would be in the primary to middle school grade levels. The students have been on campus for three years and understand the schools policies fairly well. They also know that I believe cell phones are meant to be used as a tool rather than for entertainment. If I have had to speak to a student multiple times about putting a phone away then I will confiscate it for the period, however; the rule I am most keen on is paying attention. I will often tell students to “check back in” when I see them scrolling through instagram, chatting with friends, and doodling away on another page. At the Business and Arts Academy, many students left their previous schools because they felt oppressed by the power dynamic between teachers and students, for this reason I have been warned on multiple occasions by other teachers to let my lesson plans do the behavior management and avoid any overt use of discipline in my classroom.

For the most part giving my students respect has in turn reciprocated the same respect towards me, at least as much as a 17 year old is willing to give a young adult. The mantra I repeat to myself and students daily is to give respect if that is what you want to receive.

All of my students have access to the same materials given by the school, a cart of 23 Chromebooks and a class set of the selected texts for the year, a personal google account, and a planner. For the most part, resources provided to students are only what is given by the teacher. For my own teaching purposes I have purchased class sets of the following: colored markers, colored pencils, colored paper, rulers, glue sticks, highlighters, scissors, sticky notes, index cards, colored pens, pencils, sharpeners, erasers, hole punchers, tape rolls, and a few other miscellaneous items.

While these materials greatly help student learning, it would be much better if these items were covered by the school or if there were a place students could access them outside of the classroom for free. Unfortunately, many students cannot provide these items for themselves and if there is not enough time to finish color coded annotations within the classroom, well, it is likely they will not get completed. Aside from this the key resource students need is access to a library. The lack of a library means students who want somewhere to study either during lunch or after school need to find a friendly teacher willing to open their classroom or they have to find a hallway indoors if they want to study. The lack of a library also puts the burden of book organization on the shoulders of English teachers who have a mixed collection of texts spread over three campuses. This year alone I have had seven books stolen from my classroom collection and because there is no school wide system of accountability there is no possibility to recover these texts.

As mentioned earlier, there is tremendous pressure on teachers to increase student test scores for the coming SBAT. According to the article, *The Impact of the Academic Library on Student Success: Connecting the Dots*, “Usage data were collected at six library service points during the 2013–2014 academic year. Analysis suggests an association between student use of the library and higher GPAs and retention rates. The findings may help demonstrate the value of the academic library to stakeholders and thus further integrate library services into course curricula” (2016). If administration truly wanted a long-term fix for test scores, investing in a physical library and study space for students would not only help with ‘increased GPA’ but the increased retention rate could help to shut the revolving door of the school.

Both students and teachers suffer when there is not a library accessible and there may be a reason why this is happening. In the text, *Un-Standardizing Curriculum*, it explains, “In many communities, testing serves as a substitute for investing resources to reduce class sizes, develop good school libraries, and help teachers plan and teach rich and engaging curricula. For example, a report in 2012 found states to have spent around \$1.7 billion per year on testing (Ujifusa, 2012), money that could have gone toward other pressing school needs” (2017). The school currently has an extreme emphasis on test scores, particularly at the eleventh grade English level, there is even an assistant principal whose sole responsibility is Testing and Curriculum. In previous years the eleventh grade test scores have been consistently declining, to the point that there is pressure from the state to improve test scores or lose the schools Charter. The emphasis on improving test scores as opposed to investing in a library sends the message that access to literature and a place to study is not nearly as important as high test scores.

At the same time, there is concern from the largest investor on the schools board of directors that the schools is not pushing the importance of literature as much as it should. For this

reason, he has donated \$5,000 to buy Kindles for a hand-picked group of “strong readers” for the year. At the end of the year, two students from each grade level will get to keep these Kindles. While attempts like this to improve literacy are appreciated, they are still neglecting to acknowledge the achievement gap for literacy between students of color and white students. It also creates an unsustainable literacy program, as giving only your best readers Kindles does not help the already struggling population of readers improve their literacy.

As educators, when we look at our school and the surrounding area we see it in a slightly different light than those around us. We see how the disadvantages of the city becomes disadvantages our students must overcome, we see how a disorganized administration becomes another stressor on the students, and we see how our own classroom plays a role in their everyday lives. Educators have the task of seeing the absolute best and absolute worst in our students at times. It is our duty to understand how it is and why our students came to be in their respective situations. As representatives of an equitable, socially just education, we have the opportunity to see beyond the frustrated sixteen year old who refuses to do their assignment and understand the greater battle each of us faces when we leave the walls of the classroom so that together we may combat those issues.

Part D: Analysis of Teacher Effectiveness

The Whole Class Perspective

As with many teachers across the United States, second semester has brought with it a noticeable change in my collective classes, a change for the better. In a given lesson this is most notable in their willingness to listen to directions the first time, offering up questions to answers, and turning in their assignments whether completed or not. By no means is this change in equal proportions from student to student, but to sit in a class from first semester to now the change is nearly tangible in student work. While student grades have remained consistent throughout both semester students in my classes have most poignantly made great strides in the number of assignments they submit on time and their overall behavior and attentiveness in class.

Looking at the first major change, increased student assignment submission, was by no means a difficult task to identify as it directly relates to a simple action on my part which will be explained in a classroom anecdote. Last semester for an in-class assignment I had eighteen students out of all of my classes that chose not to submit the assignment. While two of these eighteen were absent the day of the assignment, it simply confounded me that sixteen students who were in attendance that day chose not to turn the assignment in to the Assignment Inbox at the entrance of our classroom. Later on, I did accept this assignment as late work at the end of the unit, but I still ended up with twelve students who never submitted the assignment for review. It is understandable to question whether it was solely the one assignment, but this was a pattern that had clearly established itself in all classroom assignments with a physical component to submit.

In a purely coincidental lesson planning strategy I began to plan multiple days of lessons on one sheet of a handout paper so that students could see what they had already learned and

where they were headed. I had done this to help myself better scaffold learning for students and to ensure that I was staying focused on the objective I had initially set out to accomplish. Once students completed the task for the day instead of saying, “take it home and complete whatever you didn’t finish as homework,” like I would have last semester, I decided to collect these assignments at the end of class so I could pass them back at the beginning of the next lesson. I explained to students, “Even if you have not finished I want to collect these so they do not get lost in any backpacks between now and our next class.” This change from collecting an assignment at the end of class rather than at the beginning of the next class showed a dramatic change in the number of assignment submissions received.

Fisher and Frey explain in their writing, *The Purposeful Classroom*, that breaking down lessons into parts can help the teacher identify where it is precisely their students struggled and what may have caused potential classwide issues or successes (2011). This tactic was applied in the most recent assignment collected, all but students who were absent turned something in as their work for the day since each day was broken into a new part. While some of these assignments were still incomplete or blank altogether, it gave me an opportunity I had not been giving myself previously. I now can see the parts of the lesson where my students got stuck and stopped working. This little change has opened a world of understanding to myself as now I can give my students credit for the work they did complete instead of putting “0” and “missing” into the assignment book. It also allows me to go back and reteach with focus on specific problems or issues left blank by students. While student grades have not immediately improved as a result of this strategy, it has allowed me to address their needs more effectively.

The second major change that has come about in students this semester is their overall behavior. It was not uncommon last semester for me to have a serious talk with a different

student at least once a week. Often times students would try to flip these conversations saying things such as, “well you didn’t teach us (insert activity during which student misbehaved.)” Possibly as a result of the previous strategy I have started implementing, I have been holding students accountable to writing *something* on their papers given that they will be collected that day and not have the opportunity to “lose it” at home. It is also possible that since students have been with me for a longer period of time they have come to understand my expectations of them in the classroom. In a discussion with students at the beginning of the second semester, when I felt I had built a fairly meaningful relationship with most students, I explained that failing a class to “win” against a teacher whose class they do not like can only negatively impact the student. Nobody “wins” when a student has to retake a class in summer school or credit recovery.

Along with their behavioral improvement is their willingness to add to the classroom discussion. In a recent activity I asked students to come up with topics they had identified in our text which they thought could relate to theme. After giving students five minutes to come up with a topic and walking around to ensure that each student had at least five written down I asked half of the students to share one aloud while a volunteer wrote these topics on the board. In this activity all of the students on the left half of the class added their topic to the board. In the second half of this activity I asked students to turn their topics into complete theme statements. Again, I walked around and ensured each student had at least one theme written on their paper; I then had the right half of the class share out a theme they had identified. This lesson resulted in 100% student involvement as each child shared out the results of their work at least once in the lesson.

Unfortunately, second semester has also brought with it some harsh realities in stark contrast to the aforementioned successes. In first semester students took an Interim Benchmark

directly from the CAASPP website. While the results from this test were not disclosed to teachers, the general feedback from administration was that students scores needed to improve. After an increased focus in developing student ability to write clear and concise paragraphs I assessed my students once again at the start of second semester. The results of this comprehensive ICA are as follows; 19% did not meet standard, 37% nearly met standard, 36% met standard, and 8% exceeded the standard (Artifact). These results after working for a semester alongside students are less than satisfying as more than half of the students (56%) did not meet expectations to pass the benchmark. While it is possible that students did not perform at their best since it was an ungraded benchmark, it is still disconcerting. Future efforts to prepare for the 11th grade CAASPP at the end of April will include a mini unit on “What to Expect on the CAASPP” and “How to Take the CAASPP.”

Along with the pressure to improve student testing results has been increased prodding from administration to implement ‘rigor,’ ‘mastery learning,’ and ‘differentiation’ in the classroom. Though all of these are wonderful ideas and should be implemented in all classrooms, the reality is that most teachers have not been properly trained how to accomplish this given that many of them are new to the profession. In a study of Charter Schools researcher Catherine Scott revealed key issues in obtaining goals such as this, “This study encourages (1) researchers to question the ways in teachers can be supported through professional development to meet accountability measures and (2) stakeholders to consider how accountability measures focused solely on student performance can have detrimental effects on charter school curricula implementation and teacher retention” (2017). Not only has our schoolwide professional development when it comes to rigor and differentiation, but in an off the record conversation with one of administration they admitted that not implementing Mastery Learning is a top-down

issue on which we have not been properly trained. Further, to use Interim and Benchmark testing as a way to leverage student performance to teacher accountability absolves administration and ‘stakeholders’ of any responsibility. Regardless of who is at fault, it is the students in my class who are negatively impacted when they are not given proper access to mastery learning and their ability is judged by state testing alone.

While my students have shown significant improvements in their ability to accomplish tasks specific to my teaching style, the focus for the rest of the semester will shift to the ability to complete standardized tasks because of the large emphasis placed by administration to improve previous years scores. Overall, the small growth and successes in my classroom are something which I am proud to take note of, and at the same time something which I hope to continue to develop into the final portion of the semester.

The Individual Student Perspective

“It is clear that education must be the same for everyone” (Aristotle, Trans. 2012). The use of this exhortation by Aristotle was to suggest that each child have access to a public education with a universal goal in mind, an education which need be provided via the government in place. While students in Aristotle’s time were primarily studying reading, music, and gymnastics, students today are expected to meet an increasing number of academic expectations including English, Math, Science, History, Physical Education, Art, and a handful of extracurriculars determined by each district. While many people agreed with Aristotle, so much so that a system for education presently exists which is quite similar to his original idea, he was slightly off in saying that it must be “same.”

While working with my focus students I have found that each student functions best alongside educators who take care and time to develop curriculum and learning which fits their

individual needs. Although the many benefits to universal access to education is unquestionable, the need for individualized instruction was prominently enforced when two of my focus students left the second semester for schools which they explained upon leaving better met their needs. Despite having lost two-thirds of my focus students this semester I was left with a key bit of knowledge; it is the collective responsibility of the school to provide for student needs if there is the desire to change student academic success across all educational fields. If this need is not met by the school the student will seek elsewhere. As I discuss each of my focus students, I will address why that student has chosen to stay and/or the reasons why the school did/did not meet their academic needs. Fortunately, many of our students are able to find support in the surrounding schools if we are unable to meet their needs or have chosen to attend our Charter because it does fit their educational needs.

In looking at my first focus student, Alejandro Carrillo, my post-it note summaries of him were: “immigrated from peru,” “EL, maybe RFEP this year,” “Occasionally mixes English and Spanish words,” and had “Grammar and academic language struggles.” Some positive qualities noted were that he was, “great at communication and committed to his grades.” Ultimately, Alejandro chose to switch to a private school for boys in January because he felt that school would better prepare him for being a first generation college student as opposed to The Business and Arts Academy, however; before he left I began implementing specific supports to help bridge the way from EL to RFEP for Alejandro. The student was given a prompt in October, asking them to explain why the poem, “The Ballad of the Landlord”, had a shift of narrator perspective in the middle of the poem. The students response, while accurate, contained quite a few structural, plural, and tense errors. For example, instead of saying, ‘...this allows the reader to have a better understanding of the problem’ the student wrote, “...this causes the reader to

have a better understanding of the problem” (See Figure B. 1.). In order to remediate this issue I gave this student feedback specific to verb tenses. Since their understanding of the English language was already fairly adapt I made certain to only provide sentence frames when necessary and would encourage them to proofread my English to Spanish translations to see the difference in sentence structures. In his final assignment submission, a comparative analysis paper on Pat Mora poetry, the student was able to produce two, clear pages of writing. While there were still many grammatical mistakes, such as the following sentences, “Pat Mora not just shows the point of view of an immigrant culture being gentrified. She also gives a sad and dark side of how gentrification is being played in the immigrants” (See Figure B. 4.). While the verb tense is incorrect the student was able to make clear and concise claims on par with a more rigorous academic level. They were further able to support their writings with textual evidence and simple, but clear reasoning. Although his English writing skills did not improve vastly in the time I worked with him, Alejandro did grow in his ability to understand complex themes and them apply them to real life (See Figure B. 3.) . Given that he switched schools I am not certain as to where his academic levels may be currently, but I do feel certain that regardless of where this student were to attend they would be successful. As I look back on my intake interview with the student and later with his mother, there are many characteristics which I believe to be of a driven and capable individual, regardless of cultural boundaries.

My second focus student, Raine Gutierrez, had the following post-it-note summaries: “High energy,” “Needs a lot of attention,” “Wants deep and meaningful connection with teachers,” and has “Spelling and grammar struggles.” I must acknowledge that to some extent these post-it-notes do not comprehensively convey the personalities, abilities, and difficulties faced by my students. They are helpful though in remembering what my first assumptions were

regarding my focus students and as a quick guide to their areas of need. In the case of Raine, his immediate needs were more specifically social emotional. While his academics were certainly not yet reflective of his true potential, this issue could not be addressed until his attention was tended.

Looking at Raine's academics from the beginning to present point in the year his writing still contains similar mistakes and has unfortunately not evidenced significant growth in grammatical errors (See Appendix C). He has demonstrated consistent, and at times improved analysis of literature though. Possible reasons for this lack of growth will be explained in the latter paragraph. His most recent project has not yet been submitted to google classroom, but taking a look at the formative assignments from this semester demonstrate his present ability. When asked to analyze the front cover of *The Great Gatsby* and connect its meaning to theme he wrote, "The woman is believed to be daisy whom is not happy with her life. She might be rich and live the wealthy life yet it has not brought her happiness. It's only brought her to a miserable state of mind. She has been betrayed multiple times only to get herself that it was her fault" (See Figure C. 2.). Though this writing contains minor grammar errors and does not explicitly state any themes he did make an accurate analysis of the image and demonstrates character analysis by connecting it back to Daisy's personal life. He was further able to demonstrate analysis of the text in his CANVA poster on themes in *The Great Gatsby* (See Figure C. 3.)

In recent events, this particular focus student has had some rather harrowing experiences which he disclosed to me, explaining that he watched his mother get into a physical altercation with her roommate. Unfortunately, he did end up having to call police and give his statement on the events. As a result of this incident, Raine has fallen behind in not only my class but the majority of his core academic classes. Given that this student does lean heavily on his friends

and teachers for support both myself and the history teacher have allowed extensions on assignments from our current units. While Raine's verbal engagement in classroom discussion has increased since the first semester the quality of his assignments and number of submissions has remained relatively the same. Given recent events and the fact that he chose to come out to his family over Christmas break it is possible that the significant events of this year in his personal life have distracted from his personal academics.

Daniel Rochester, my academically advanced focused student had the following post-it-note summations about him: "Advanced, gets distracted when he finishes work too quickly," "Gets sassy when he thinks it is too easy for him," and was "Open to doing more advanced analysis in class." After a difficult year, which included an arrest, suspension, and multiple failing classes at the end of second semester, Daniel chose to transfer to another high school. This will have been the seventh school he has attended in his educational career. At the beginning of the year my intentions to differentiate for this student included the use of DOK Level 4 questions and frequent inclusion in discussion question. Unfortunately, despite my efforts Daniel missed quite a bit of schooling and became increasingly disengaged as the school year progressed.

In his earlier writings there was still quite a bit of reflection in his writing, the following example demonstrates his application of historical events to present day ideologies. Daniel explained in an Exit Ticket on "The Ballad of the Landlord," "The tenant could represent those in a lower class than the typical American. They do not have enough resources to fix the problem and do not have a strong enough voice (due to being oppressed) to stand up for themselves" (See Figure D. 1.). A socially aware student, Daniel was quick to observe literature through a sociological lens. However; once the end of his time on campus neared getting Daniel to

complete assignments was not just difficult but impossible at times given the amount of school he missed. In his credit recovery Daniel was given a two to three page comparative analysis on The Tortilla Curtain and Pat Mora's poetry, what was submitted instead was a half-page plot summary of the The Tortilla Curtain. This quality of work from Daniel demonstrated a decrease in ability and also suggested to myself and his other teachers that he had begun to check out of his own schooling (See Figure D. 2. and D. 3..

Immediately after submitting a large amount of credit recovery assignments to myself and a few other teachers Daniel failed to show up to class for two weeks. His classmates began to suggest the possibility of him transferring to another high school. Only after I went to the front office to ask about an issue from the previous semester did I find out this student had transferred to a new site. Daniel has been the last of a long list of students who chose to transfer out of the school this year, leaving myself and other teachers to wonder what can be done to improve student attrition rates.

In all three of my focus student cases my final reflections are to say that either nothing of great significance changed from the beginning of the year or that their early departure made any significant results inconclusive. For both Daniel and Alejandro it seems that the school simply did not provide for them the experience they were seeking. Alejandro was not given adequate English Language support to prepare him for college and Daniel felt that he was continually taking part in busy work that was too easy for him. Raine, on the other hand, has expressed to me that he feels the school is a perfect fit for him because, "the teachers are young so you can connect with them and they want to get to know you" (my paraphrasing). Despite this perfect fit, the reality of life outside of school affects all students. Why Alejandro and Daniel chose to leave could also be explained by the article, "Improving Charter School Accountability" as David

Osborne explains, “But as any charter expert can tell you, financial and management problems are often linked to academic problems. Seeing academic problems, some parents pull their children out of charters, and some of those schools fail because their revenues plummet” (2011). If the Business and Arts Academy intends to continue in the future the issue of student retention must not only be addressed, but fixing the issues which leads to it must be at the top of their list of concerns, most poignantly improving overall student academics as opposed to a single classroom focus.

The Developing Professional Perspective

After having nearly a year of teaching under my belt this first year of teaching is best represented in a metaphor of the film, “Indiana Jones: Raiders of the Lost Ark.” In one of the most well known films of the American film industry, we see the hero of the film, Indie, take hold of the treasure (an exciting job offer) only to find that his way back to the entrance (summer break and a completed school year) is filled with various traps and obstacles along with the ever looming stress of being chased by a giant rock that is trying to crush him (testing, emails, grading, behavioral issues). The only way for him to survive this experience is to constantly think ahead to identify which trap will be set off next and how to dodge it, at times thinking out of the box and using unconventional items such as a whip to get out of tight situations. The first year of teaching is very similar to this metaphorical scenario as new teachers are constantly coming across new issues and having to figure out the best tactic to address it in a quick and timely manner. Given that Indie himself was a classroom professor it is possible that some of his teaching skills helped him in tricky scenarios such as the iconic rolling rock scene. For instance, in my own classroom this has created a juxtaposition of personal growth in teaching ability and building relationships.

While my own first year of teaching has not presented any literal rocks chasing into the classroom it has more often than not felt like one trial after another, and; an extensive amount of personal growth and learning has been gleaned from this experience of tribulations. The largest of these trials has been the ever changing climate of the classroom. Unfortunately, adjusting to an inconsistent classroom environment is something which continues to take the most effort from my abilities because students are continually leaving and coming to the school, teacher morale is at a low with recent changes, and what students emotionally bring to class changes daily.

The school is renowned for being a continual revolving door of students. Many come to the school only to realize they do not like the lack of structure between the arts and academics, they do not feel they fit in with the quirky student personalities, or they do not feel challenged by the schools expectations. Studies in teacher attrition rates have shown a positive correlation between a lack of classroom resources and inability to consistently retain teachers (Buckney, 2004). Just as teachers leave schools for better support and access to resources, so do students. This year alone two of my own students left in first semester for schools which had one to one technology in the classroom and also had sports teams in which students could participate.

Regardless of why they leave, when they do it is constantly changing the classroom dynamic. For instance, a student who lead the charge on classroom discussion left at the end of first semester. Immediately following his departure the collective classroom engagement dropped and drawing students into discussion became similar to an extreme sport. The following month a second student left and a third switched to a different class period. As this class grew smaller students grew more reserved rather than opening up and my teaching style has had to continually adjust to meet their needs. This would not be a major issue in itself as a smaller class size is more convenient for grading, but as I am still coming to understand my own teaching

style, continually changing this style lead to more complications rather than self reflection on my part.

The second issue, low teacher morale, was in large part caused by the trickle down effect of administrative issues affecting teachers. Without a principal the school has chosen to opt for eight directors to be the Board of Directors for the school and underneath them are five Assistant Principals. The thirteen people who function as school leadership have responsibilities that are unclear to teachers and has lead to quite a bit of misallocation of responsibility and finances. In recent meetings with the Board it has been disclosed that a much larger proportion of funds has been allocated to art classes rather than academic, it also came up to discussion that one of the founding directors was surreptitiously released from job duties without warning for undisclosed financial reasons which directly affected the SPED department.

The lack of a principal, clear responsibilities, and honesty regarding finances has negatively impacted the morale of teachers throughout the school, particularly those who have been on site for multiple years and have not seen much change in a positive direction. This issue in particular is also a direct cause of the high teacher turnover rate on the school campus. Research by Educator Sung-Hyun Cha suggested that teacher attrition is resulting from these issues, "...our findings suggest that district- and school-level leaders concerned about keeping good teachers in the classroom can take steps to improve teachers' job satisfaction by enhancing salaries and the conditions in which teachers work. Forced to choose between these levers, administrators may be more successful in boosting satisfaction and reducing the rate by which teachers quit to take a job outside of education by focusing their efforts on improving working conditions" (2011). In recent events the school has decided to acknowledge that there is an issue

with the ability to retain teachers longer than one year, though actions to remediate this issue have not yet been taken.

The final major issue, while not particular to this site, is one that I have found I struggle with personally - student emotions. The school site is somewhat of a magnet for students with emotional needs that were not being addressed by their previous schools. Smaller class sizes and increased opportunity for artistic expression can be therapeutic for many students. Unfortunately, there is not a substantial mental health program active on campus and only one counselor is on site to service the entire high school student body. This puts an increased amount of responsibility on teachers to meet the needs of students seeking out mental health support. While I support my students in any way I can, I do not feel adequately trained or able to support students dealing with significant issues and more often than not will try to direct them to another teacher. Despite this, the emotional gravity of dealing with student needs is still something I struggle not to take home on a daily basis and it continues to wear me down.

In “Multiplication is for White People” author Lisa Delpit dives into the negative repercussions that hiring exclusively young and new teachers can have in the classroom, in particular when programs such as Teach for America or even temporary internship programs bring minimally trained teachers into cultures they do not fully understand the students end up suffering through the ‘revolving door’ of teachers (2014). In the case of students at The Business and Arts Academy there have been five Environmental Science Teachers in the past two years alone, not to mention the number of teachers in other subjects. Given the unique emotional needs of our students the constant turnover of teachers leaves students to assume that all of their teachers are going to eventually leave them. At one point a student even explained to me that the reason they cannot call me by my last name is because they will get attached and when I

eventually leave it would hurt them too much. Considering this school has made itself a magnet for students with social emotional needs one of its priorities must be to create an environment where there is consistency and these needs can be met.

While this is not an expansive list of the difficulties faced over the past school year, it is helpful to reflect on these and identify how this has helped me grow as an educator. Increased patience, the ability to devote myself entirely to my work, and being able to problem solve issues in and out of my classroom are the primary areas of growth I have identified in the past year, each of these I have considered to be a success in themselves. While I anticipated experiencing growth in these areas, the manner in which I came to experience this growth was not as idealistic as anticipated and more similar to the Indiana Jones scenario explained above.

Although I would not yet consider myself an educator who is at the prime of her career or in the running for any teaching awards I do feel that everyday I bring my best abilities to the classroom. Looking back at this year I do feel much more capable as an educator and able to stand in front of my classroom instructing. For instance, the first semester of educating often left me awake until the late hours of the next morning with lesson planning. Initially, my lessons did not connect cohesively with one another nor did they follow any obvious patterns. Now, I have found myself able to go through most of my lessons with a Do Now, “I Do, We Do, and You Do” segment, and Exit Tickets. I have also been able to connect up to three lessons at a time together in order to make mini-units within the greater unit, all while getting somewhat of a decent sleep every night. While I am still figuring out how to connect all of these mini-lessons into a larger, final project for the unit it has been a great personal achievement to be able to link one lesson to the next even if it is on a small scale.

Looking back at why I chose to become an educator is a bittersweet experience. “Bitter” because there is quite a bit of naivety that was crushed in the past year and “sweet” because it reminds me why I chose to pursue a career in the educational industry at a time when my morale is hitting a low given the near end of the year. My concerns going into education, teacher burnout, low pay, and trepidations about boundaries, all proved to be valid and true, yet it is helpful to recall why I chose to pursue education despite these obvious issues.

Initially, I was drawn to education because of my love for Sociology and understanding human relations. Through my love of Literature I identified that many writings are reflections of history, life and culture, and sociological issues. Literature then became an opportunity to perceive the various realities of other, diverse, groups and to identify how to make change in order to have a positive impact on the world around me. My intent to teach came from that desire to make the world around me a better place. My hope is that through teaching my students and I both can become more sociologically aware individuals. Having had the unique experience of starting my educational career in Outdoor Education I was starkly aware of the pervasive feeling of being an outsider within your own community. Given that there are not many female backpack guides and much fewer people from ethnic communities I noted that in this industry and others I wanted to be a representative for both of these groups.

Recently, I reviewed an email I had received a year and a half ago from one of my previous bosses in the Outdoor Education industry. In this email he had explained that I was empathetic to the needs of clients and students and would thrive in this industry if I chose to get a Masters and work towards the College Director position. At some point between that email and now teaching shone as a clear path to achieving this long-term goal and it is a decision I do not regret. Although I am not certain yet whether teaching is the perfect fit for me and worry as

to whether I will fall in love with the profession in the future. I am thankful for the growth it has provided, the opportunity to connect with students, and look forward to continuing this path at a new school site in the future. “To teach is to learn twice over,” a popular quote by essayist Joseph Joubert, rings true in my own teaching experience and while learning to be a teacher has at times been painful it is an experience for which I am grateful.

Conclusion

In the same way that no student is the same as another, neither is one teacher a photocopy of any of their colleagues. In this way my research highlights my unique experiences coming into education, but it also shows the shared, universal trials educators and students must overcome each day in the cities, schools, and classrooms we attend. Teachers, students, staff, and administration shape the school culture through the identities they bring into the classroom, the experiences which form their decisions, the policies they put into place, and the resources provided by school, city, and culture.

In researching my three focus students Alejandro, Raine, and Daniel it came forth that each student has a complex background and starkly varying home lives. Both of these directly affect their access to the classroom curriculum given that they must first interpret the material through the various lenses of their identity then through the lens of their teacher. For two of my focus students, the long-term side effects of being in a culture which did not support their learning lead to them leaving the school. For my third focus student, the school culture and community are the precise reasons why he has chosen to stay. From this I have determined that not every student can be reached by one teacher, but if educators and staff alike make an effort to reach out to a variety of students and understand their individual cultures, then we can begin to create inclusivity and increase student retention.

Issues of student and teacher retention are also directly related to the school culture created by administration and staff. When there are minimal resources in the school and classroom it is both teachers and students who suffer. The results are low student test scores and low teacher retention. In the case of The Business and Arts Academy these issues have compounded so severely that student retention has become a major issue over the past year and

can be directly tied back to the lack of a clear system of command, lack of administrative accountability, and that resources are improperly allocated to the arts rather than academics.

In Spring of 2018 I decided to begin a Masters Program in Education in the hopes that I could bring social justice into the lives of students in Southern California. Over the past year I have been witness to more tears, anxiety attacks, break downs, heartbreaks, temper tantrums, fights, laughs, celebrations, and friendship than could have been anticipated. While Social Justice was always at the core of my actions and lessons, the classroom is much more diverse and filled with emotions than a textbook definition can offer; the findings in this research suggest that while the experiences of a first-year teacher can be documented and explained, only those who have been in the classroom working day in and day out alongside students can understand and appreciate the true diversity of the student body.

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Appendices

Appendix A



Figure A. 1. English 11 CP classroom at the Business and Arts Academy after early decoration.

Appendix B

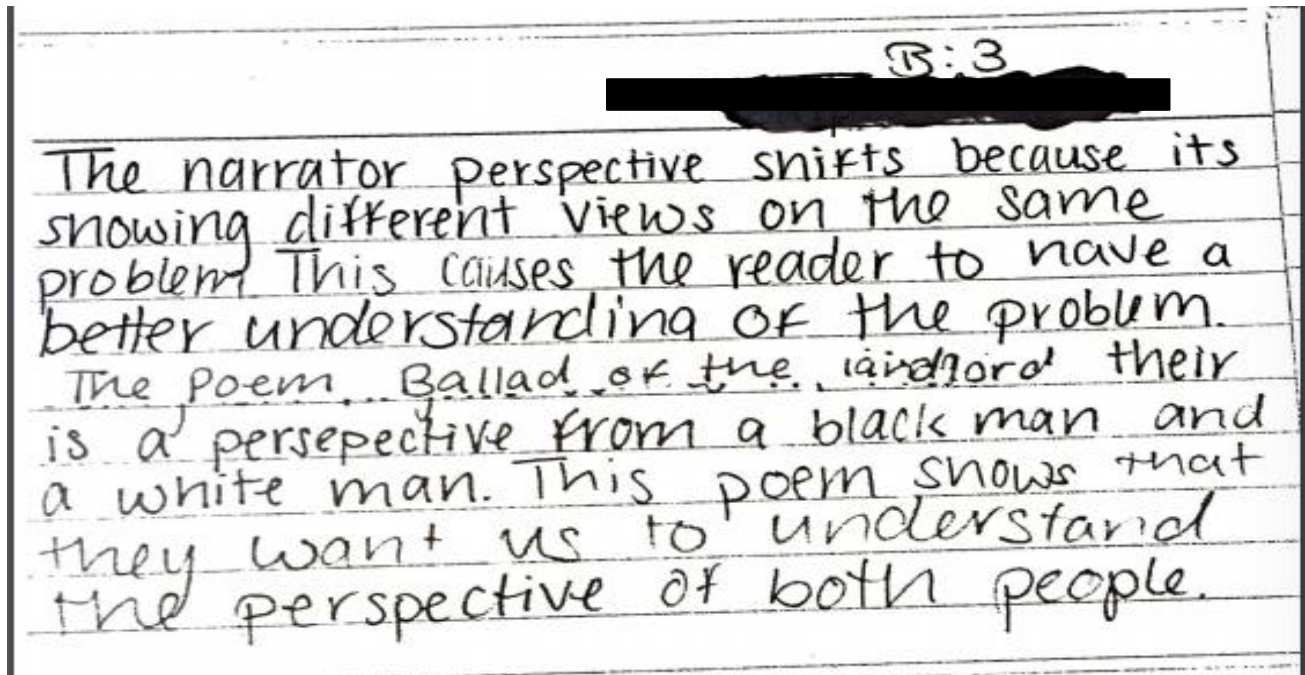


Figure B. 1. Sample of Alejandro Carrillo's Exit Ticket on The Ballad of the Landlord

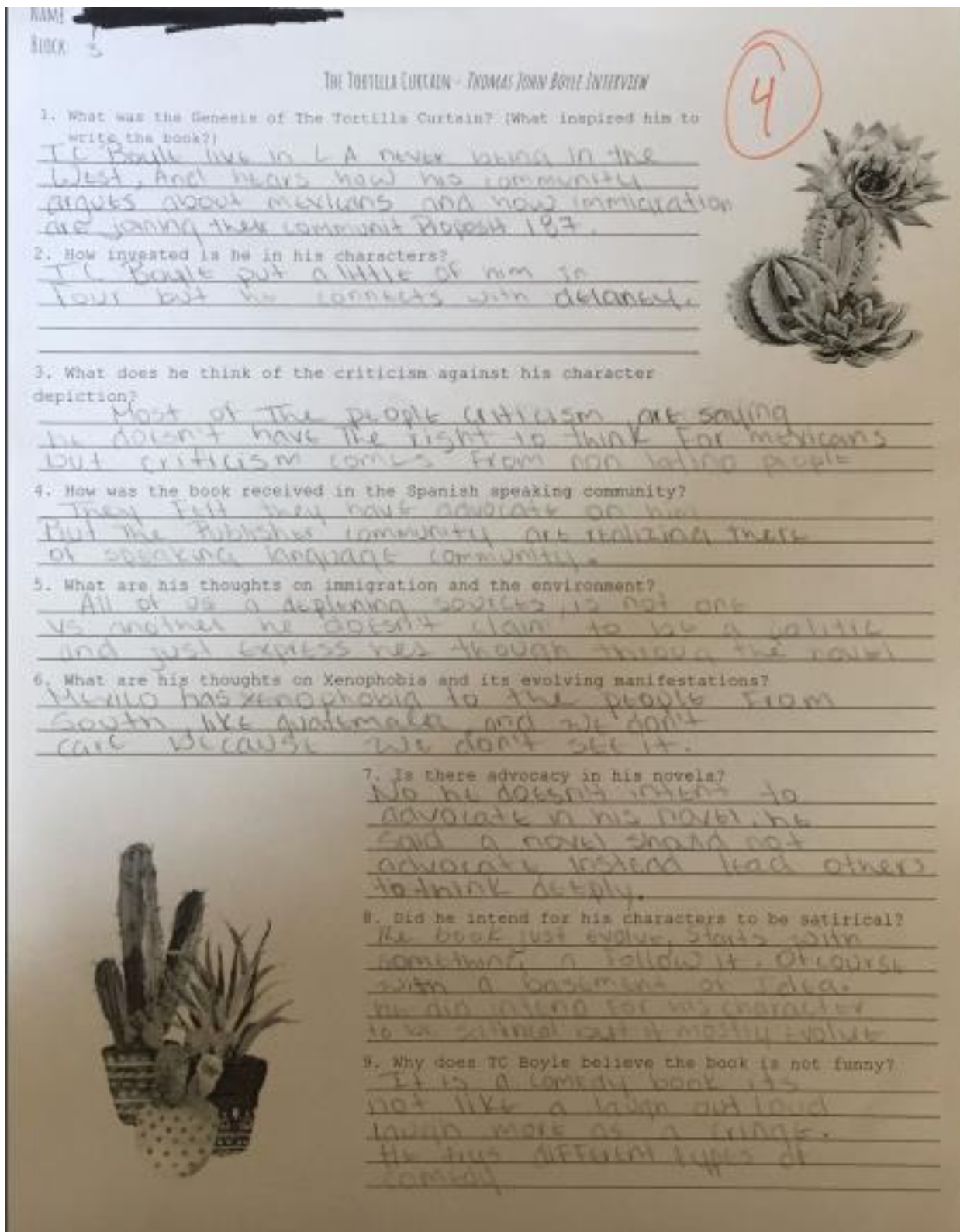


Figure B. 2. Sample of Alejandro Carrillo's T.C. Boyle interview notes

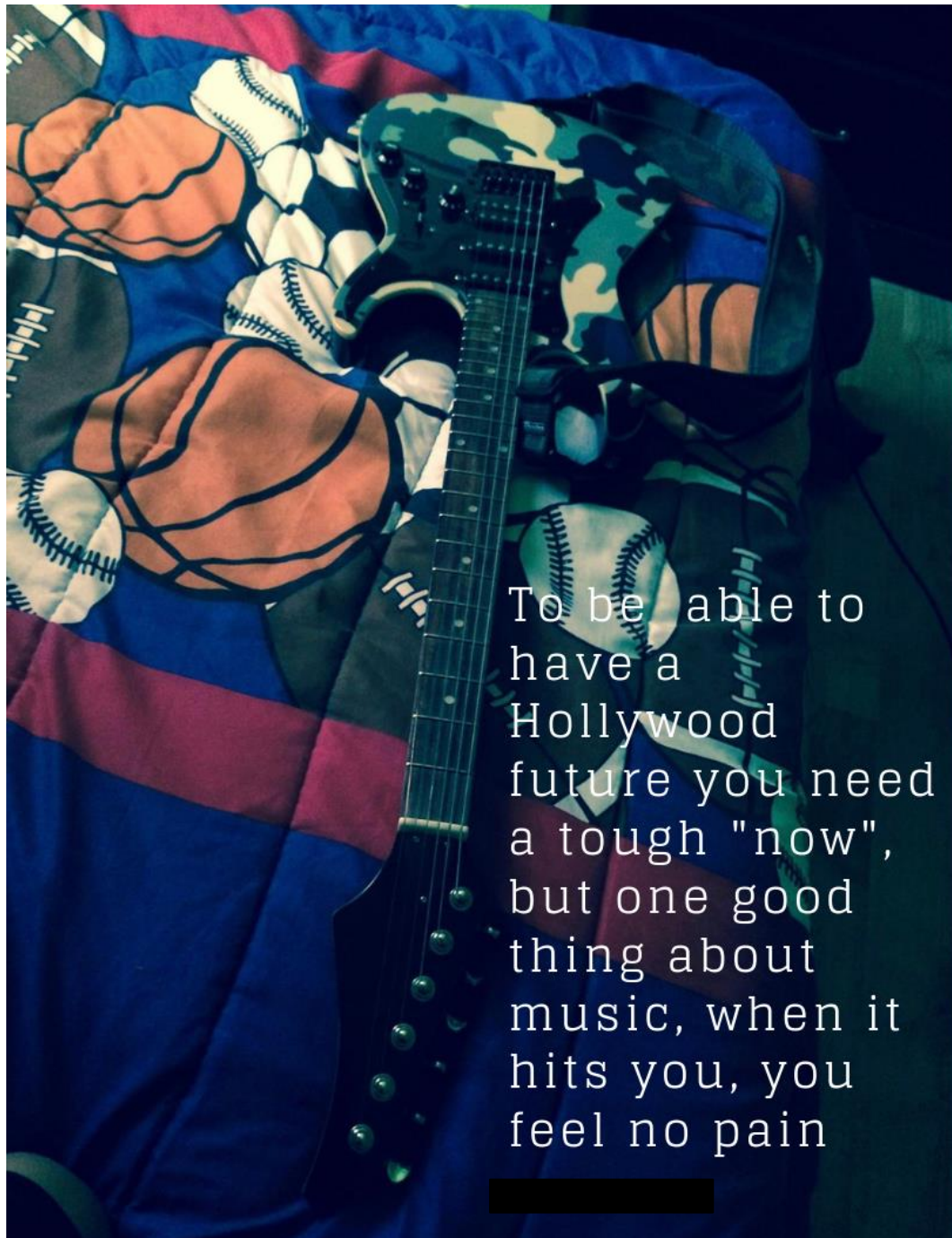


Figure B. 3. Sample of Alejandro Carrillo's American Dream graphic.

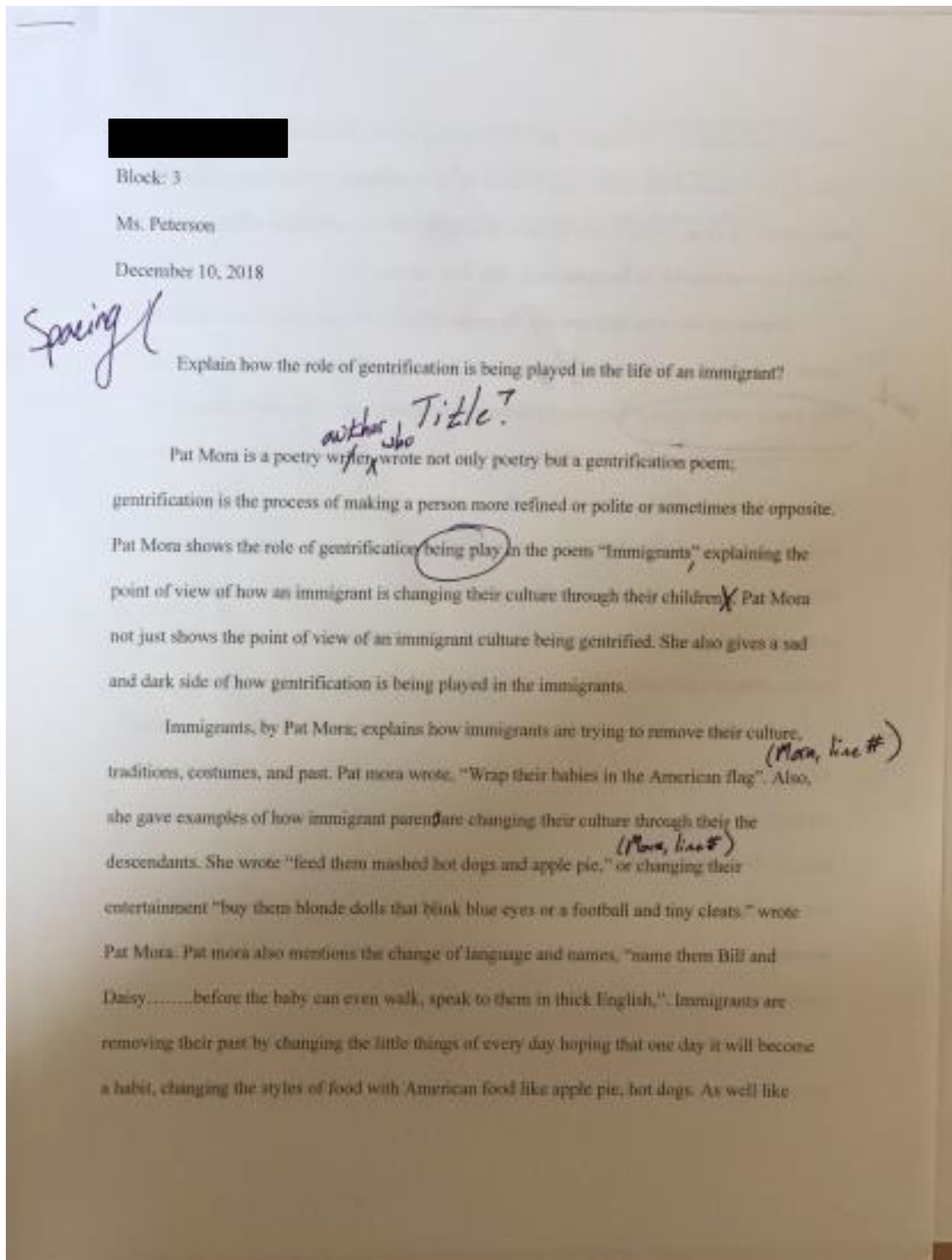


Figure B. 4. Sample of Alejandro Carrillo's Final Paper

Appendix C

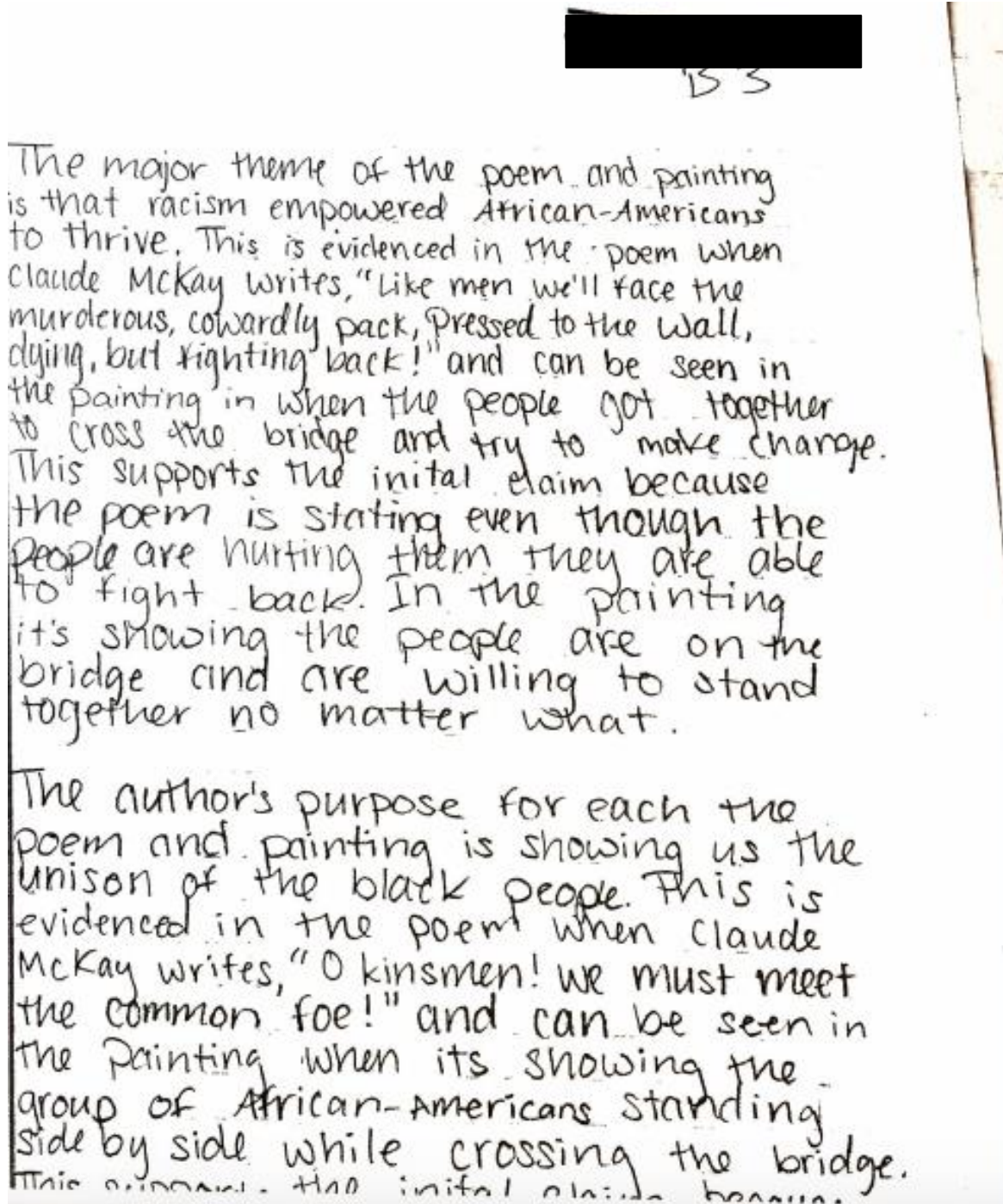



Figure C. 1. Sample of Raine Gutierrez paper outline from first semester


Name: _____
 Block: 3
Themes and Symbols in The Great Gatsby 3.5

Activity 1: Identifying Theme
 Part 1 Directions: List the different topics that have come up in the text so far. Using 2-3 topics for each theme, turn these into clear and concise theme statements.

Topics	Turn into	Themes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Love 2. Money 3. Regret 4. Mystery 5. Joy 6. Guilt 7. Labels 8. Empathy/Support 9. Betrayal 10. Secrets 		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People all have secrets are and are meant to be mysterious. 2. When Trust is betrayed it causes someone to feel guilty for the other person's action. 3. Luxury and wealth never promises to bring happiness. 4. Time can turn love into obsession.

1-5

Part 2 Directions: Look closely at the image of the front cover. What do you see? How does this connect with the themes listed above? What further meaning might be hidden in the front cover? Minimum 5 sentences, write small!



In the front cover it shows a gypsy woman crying with a city in the back. The woman is believed to be Daisy whom is not happy with her life. She might be rich and live the wealthy life yet it has not brought her happiness. It's only brought her to a miserable state of mind. She has been betrayed multiple times only to get herself that it was her fault.

Figure C. 2. Sample of Raine Gutierrez identifying theme in The Great Gatsby

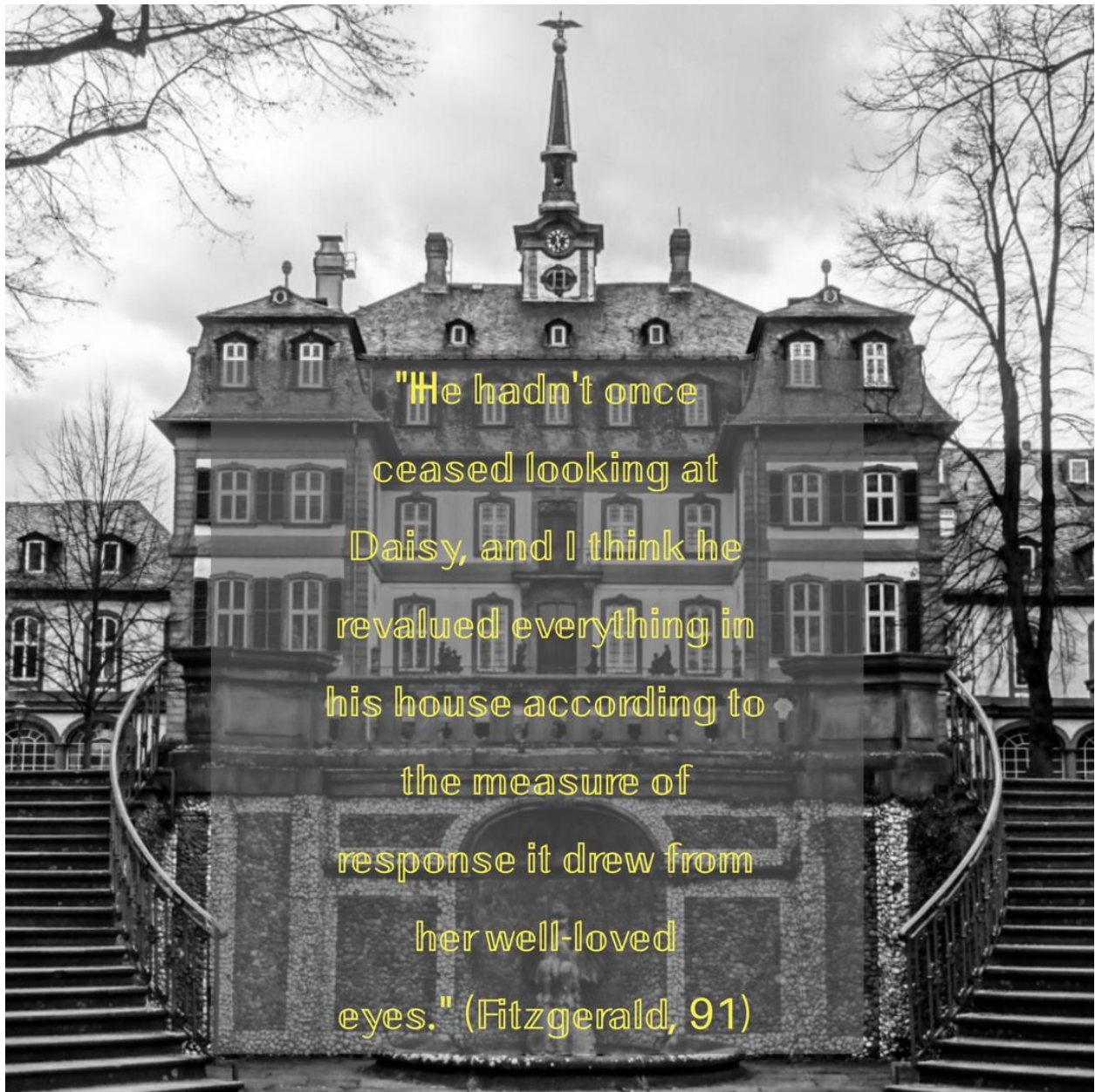
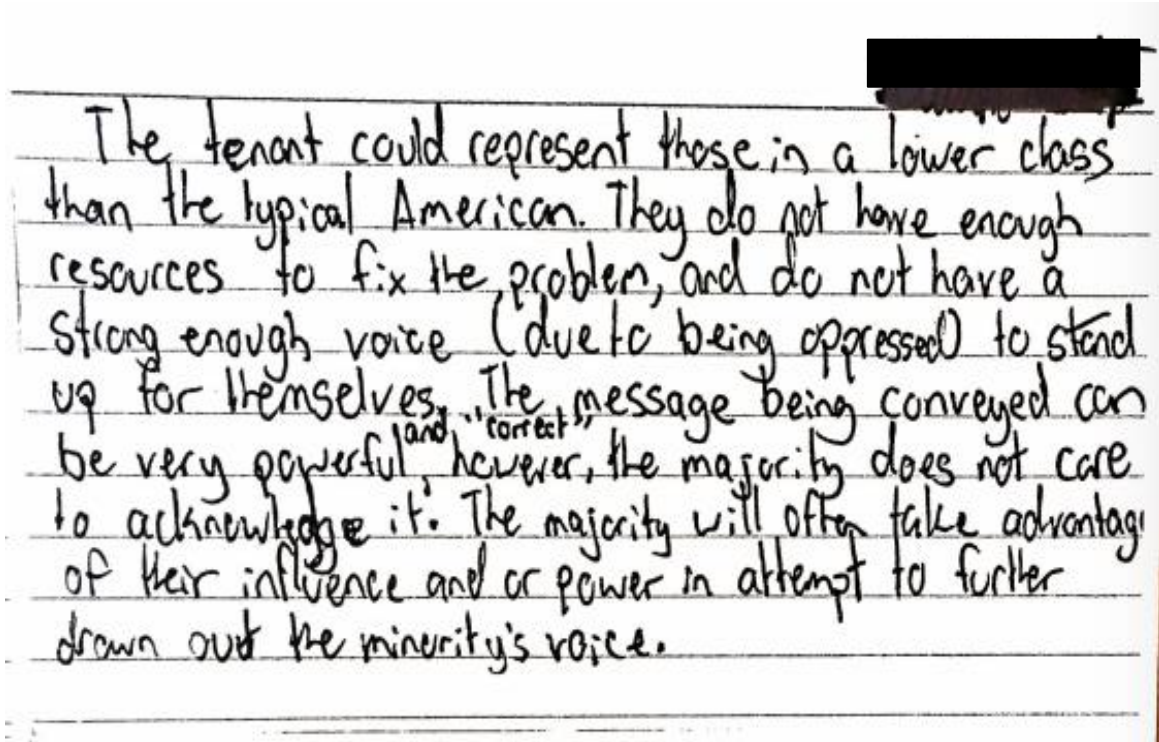


Figure C. 3. Sample of Raine Gutierrez symbolism and theme graphic in The Great Gatsby

Appendix D



The tenant could represent those in a lower class than the typical American. They do not have enough resources to fix the problem, and do not have a strong enough voice (due to being oppressed) to stand up for themselves. The message being conveyed can be very powerful, ^{and} ^{correct}, however, the majority does not care to acknowledge it. The majority will often take advantage of their influence and or power in attempt to further drown out the minority's voice.

Figure D. 1. Sample of Daniel Rochester's Exit Ticket on Ballad of The Landlord

QUOTES

"I told you - he was Mexican." - The Tortilla Curtain 15

Delaney says this to Kuya when he calls her, telling her about the car accident. Even though he claims to be a leftist, throughout the novel, he becomes more and more conservative. This also displays his toxic racism.

Q: What is environmentalism's role in this novel; how does it contribute to the overarching theme?

Delaney is fascinated by the lawlessness of coyotes - they are similar to Mexican immigrants in that they do what they must to survive. Life is so basic, the most important to tribalism.

"What kind of life was it when you felt safe in the bushes, crouching to piss in the dirt like a dog?" - The Tortilla Curtain

America does not feel safe walking down the streets; everywhere she goes, she feels hostility. Furthermore, she has no house; the only place to go is "wilderness."

THE TORTILLA CURTAIN BY T.C. BOYLE

CHARACTERS

Candice is a hard working US immigrant, determined to provide a better life for her family.

America fell in love with Candice and the promise of a better, running away at the age of 17.

Delaney is an environmentalist whose views on immigration make a U-turn by the end of the novel.

SET: Topanga Canyon, CA
1990's

Figure D. 2. Sample of Daniel Rochester's Final Project One-Pager for The Tortilla Curtain

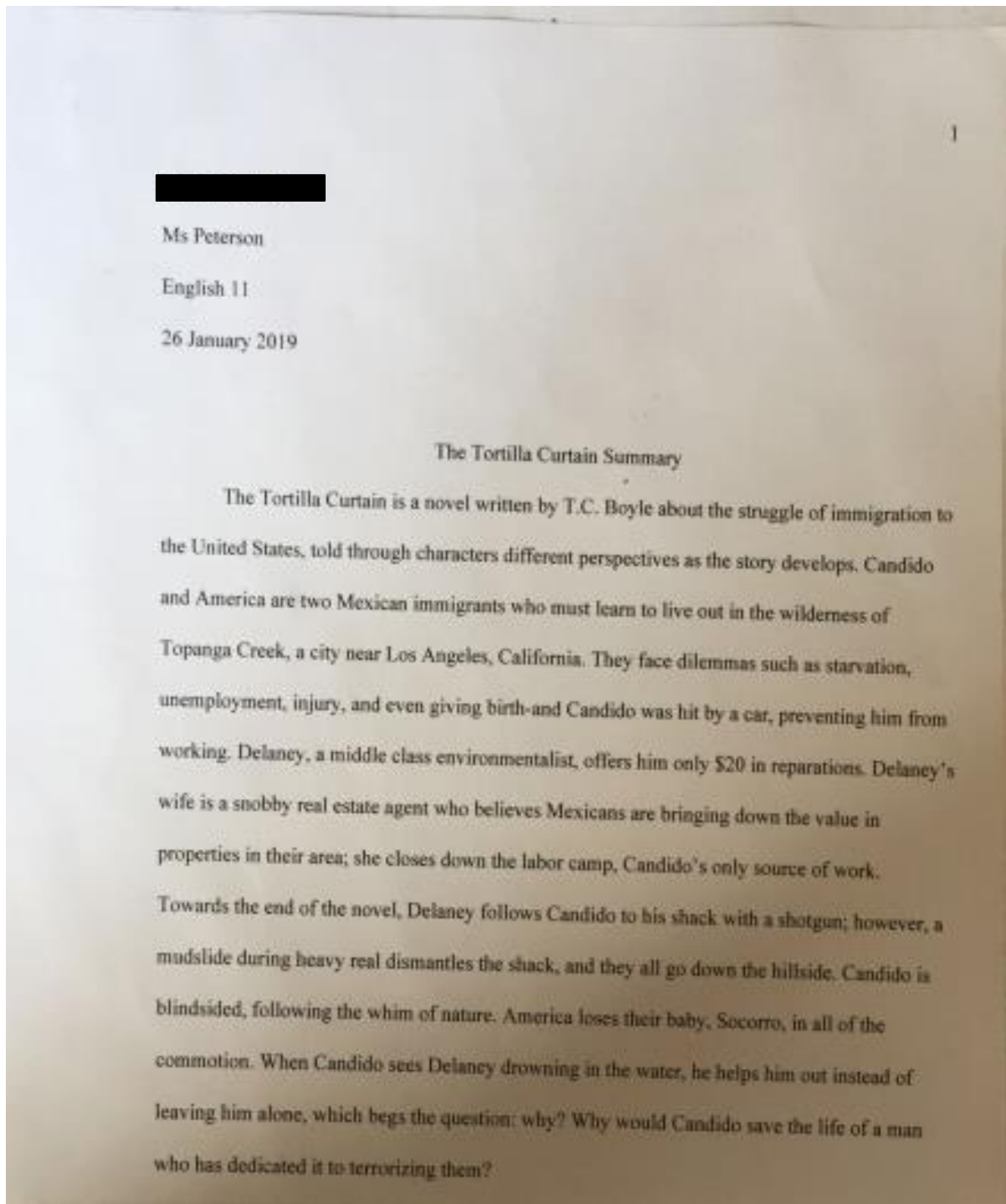


Figure D. 3. Sample of Daniel Rochester's Final Paper for The Tortilla Curtain

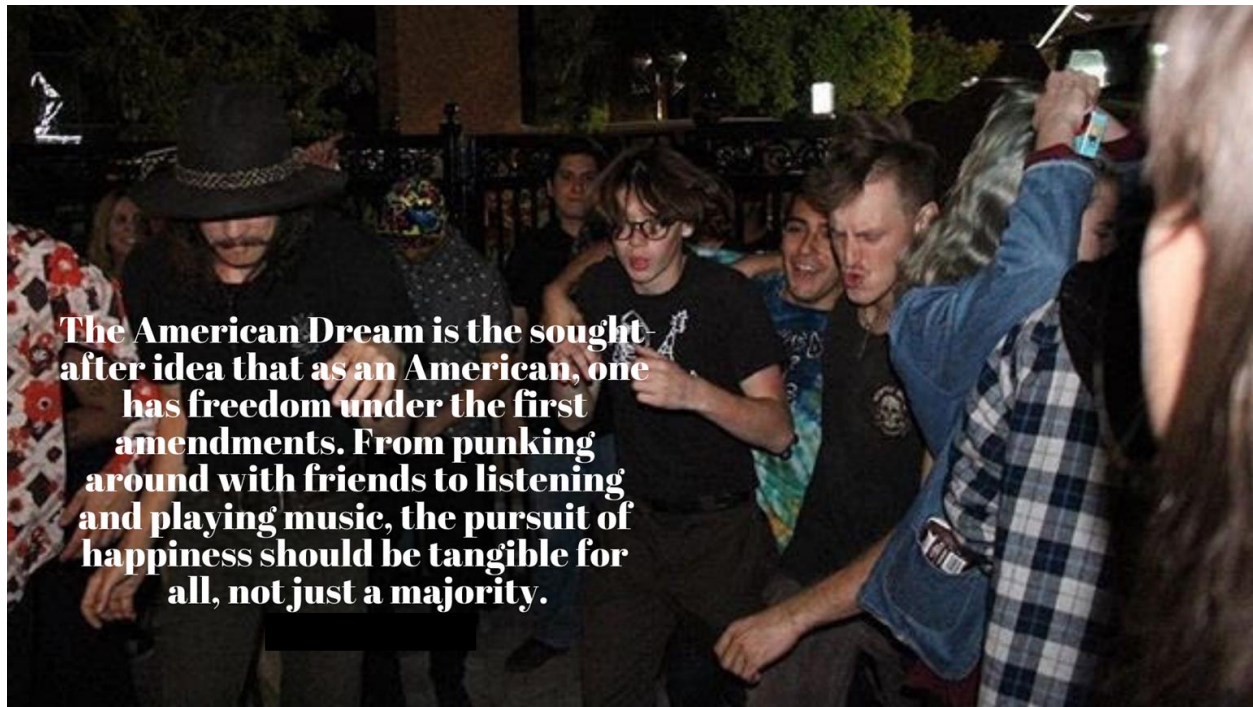


Figure D. 4. Sample of Daniel Rochester's graphic on the American Dream