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Ethnographic Narrative Project: Hwalbay Ginya Misi'

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### **Dedication**

I would like to thank God and my family for all the prayers and support that got me to where I am today. To the women who shaped me, Yvette Cook and Marci Smith, I am forever grateful for all of your love you gave me throughout my lifetime. So, I dedicate this ethnography to the strongest and fearless women that I know, my mother and grandmother. I would also like to recognize the members of my family Eric, Erica, Pete, Hanoda, and Sam who encouraged me to achieve my goals.

I thank the amazing Native American Student Program at the University of California Riverside where I connected with other indigenous scholars. This program supported me throughout my educational journey with student organizations such as the American Indian Science and Engineering Society and Native American Student Association, that encouraged me to educate indigenous youth. Especially to Roseanne Rosenthal, a strong and resilient indigenous woman who pushed me to continue my education.

I am truly grateful for the support system of Aqueelah Tillman and Stephanie White-Tillman, both of whom served as my personal role models. These extraordinary women continue to amaze me with all of the accomplishments that they have achieved. Thank you for offering help in any way possible. I am appreciative of the kindness and generosity that you both have shown me over the years. The dedication that both of you show to help others encourages me to not turn my back on where I came from, and to strive for greatness.

Lastly, to my tribe, my Pai (people), the Hualapai of Peach Springs, Arizona I would like to say han kyu (thank you). My tribe is important to me and I am proud to represent my Pai

wherever I go. I look forward to educating and encouraging indigenous students to pursue higher education and to achieve their goals.

### **Abstract**

My life experiences shape me as who I am as an educator. I walk with the knowledge of my ancestors and the protection of the creator. The path of which I walk is full of obstacles and challenges. I use my positionality to put myself in the shoes of my students. I am more than what I appear to be. I am a sister, daughter, student, and educator. In the Hualapai language, Hwalbay ginya misi', translates to "Hualapai sister and daughter". I use this title to reflect my identity and honor my culture. My ethnography describes my experience as a social justice educator in my first year of teaching. I had the opportunity to learn my students' strengths and needs to improve my pedagogy. From this experience I became referred to and known as, Miss Green, a teacher of social science and a social justice educator.

**Keywords:** *Social justice educator, Native American Indian, pedagogy, Hualapai.*

## Preface

Throughout this ethnography I learned a lot of things about myself and my students. This learning experience was eye opening for myself to reflect on my instruction and positionality. In my first year of teaching I had to balance a full graduate course load and full-time teaching. For my students, they too were learning how to balance their lives and extracurricular activities.

My students come first and when planning I keep in mind their strengths and needs. This was a new perspective for me to accommodate my students, which varied from each class period. Not all students think or learn the same way and I had to learn how to be flexible in the classroom. In this ethnography I conducted interviews and home visits with three focus students. These focus students consisted of students with special needs, language development, and socio-emotional needs.

It was difficult to balance all of these things for both myself and my students. I would commute daily and keep in mind that my students are eagerly waiting to learn from me, something new. Being a teacher is not easy, there are many hats that teachers wear in and out of the classroom. We are therapists, coaches, motivational speakers, and learners. I took what I knew about my students and tailored instruction to meet their interests. Some interests we both shared, such as memes, television shows, and pets. I used this to help inform my pedagogical practices.

From this experience I learned that the community surrounding my school site greatly impacted the demographics of the school. The area over time had less children to educate, and year after year class sizes decreased. The efforts made by the school district to increase

enrollment created a division of students. The addition of a performing arts school created an increase of enrollment but caused local students to be less of a priority. Students expressed these sentiments to me personally, and this also caused a divide in the classroom. Exploring more into the variables of the environment in which students are educated impacted my instructional strategies.



### **Part A: *Journey to Teaching***

I would first like to start off with the journey of my grandparents, whom were a part of the Indian Relocation Act during the 1960s. Both of my grandparents were born and raised on different Indian reservations in Arizona. My grandmother on the Colorado Indian Reservation (aka C.R.I.T.) located in Parker, Arizona, and my grandfather on the Hualapai and Havasupai Indian Reservation near Peach Springs, Arizona. They both also attended Indian Boarding schools, where they were isolated from their families and different cultures. Each of them had little knowledge of what was beyond the reservation. Only when they married, they were exposed to the urban style relocated to Los Angeles, California. They continued to go back and forth from the reservation while they were adjusting to urban living in the city. From there they were once again relocated to Oakland, California where they decided to settle in the neighboring city of Hayward, California.

This is where my mother grew up in primarily and her upbringing included cultural values of our tribe. She grew up as a lower middle-class student with the dream of becoming a basketball player. However, her father was not supportive of her academic or athletic career and insisted that she settle down and has children. My mother pursued her dream of education and applied herself and received a basketball scholarship at a university. Unfortunately, due to a career ending injury, she was never able to complete her degree.

I would like to say that my mother encourages and inspires me to push myself to my fullest potential. I had a similar upbringing to hers and grew up in Hayward. My mother was a single parent and raised me for my younger years. However, both my grandmother and mother primarily raised my siblings and me to the best of their abilities. It was definitely a struggle to

raise three kids, but somehow, we managed. Education was important to my mother, since she lost her chance to pursue a degree. My siblings and I have always been educated through public schooling and went on to universities.

My mother was determined to make sure that my siblings and I did not succumb to the violence and influences of gangs in our neighborhood. After my mother was remarried to my stepfather, then we moved to a safer area out in Mountain House, California. This was a culture shock for me because there were many cows and a lack of police and sirens. Mountain House is a new development and did not have any schools built at the time. So along with my mother and grandmother, my siblings and I would wake up in the crack of dawn to commute to school in Hayward. We did this until a school was finally built and then we went to our neighbors' house before and after school until our parents returned home from the long commute to Hayward.

I did grow up lower middle-class and had to overcome obstacles regarding my economic status such as food insecurity. I was ashamed when I was in school and received free/reduced lunch. It felt so obvious in the lunch line because there were separate lines for free/reduced lunch and my peers would always ask me why I got free lunch. High school was difficult for me because I had to make new friends, and I didn't really fit in anywhere at first due to my appearance. I identify as Native American Indian, but there weren't too many of us at my school. I always felt left out because there was no one else that I could relate to culturally. Then, I turned to athletics to be social amongst my peers. In return, I made friends and was able to benefit from sports both academically and socially. It turns out that I was athletic enough to be able to travel with teams, which selected me, to enhance my skills. From this I was able to receive interest from universities to be a part of their athletic programs. I found this to be an amazing opportunity

for myself to go on to pursue a degree while doing a sport that I loved. For a majority of my life sports has been an outlet for me to express myself. However, there are pros and cons to be a Division I athlete.

I had many injuries from pushing my body to its limits and meeting the demands of my coaches. I was always used to be the best in what I do, but at this point in my life I felt like a broken doll. My legs were injured constantly, and I couldn't walk for almost a year. Rehabilitation was the most difficult thing ever for me because I had no control over my own limbs. I was so invested in being an athlete that I neglected my academics. From this life changing experience, I decided to become more engaged with my courses and left the track behind me. At my university I found a haven where there were people like me culturally. I began to participate more with the Native American Student Association where I was able to network and gain valuable leadership skills. This club really did expose me to all that Southern California had to offer within my field of study, in Native American Studies. I became aware of the Native American community in Southern California, much like my family and I were in Northern California. These relationships that I was able to make enhanced my academic and professional career goals and allowed me to gain confidence in my own capabilities.

The Native American Student Association (NASA) along with many other clubs associated with Native American Student Programs at University of California Riverside (UCR) showed me that there were other Native American Indians pursuing higher education. I was always exposed to other Native Americans but not in the professional or university setting. I am thankful that I was able to be a part of various student organizations that promote higher education. My journey encouraged me to give back and advocate for higher education within my community.

Again, this club really changed my educational direction and introduced me into post-graduate opportunities such as the CNAI Fellowship at Claremont Graduate University (CGU). I have never thought of anything beyond a bachelor's degree. I was informed of this opportunity by my former Program Coordinator who is an alumnus of CGU. I began to wrap my head around the idea of teaching Native American youth on my own reservation. As I reflected on my own educational experiences, I realized how powerful it would be to become an instructor that children can relate to, since this is something that I lacked. This encouraged me to become the teacher that I always wanted.

For my own pedagogy I believe that a social justice and cultural inclusiveness is vital to the classroom. I plan to enact this in my own classroom by displaying posters on the wall with important figures in history who are people of color. I also would like to display respect for other cultures by incorporating land acknowledgement and introductions. From my experience at my university our club, NASA, was able to implement a land acknowledgement pact to recognize the indigenous land that UCR occupies. I believe that this is important to acknowledge different cultures and the land that we live on. I would implement this into my classroom ecology, which allows a common ground for students to express themselves in a safe and respectful space.

As well as the classroom ecology, I really would like to one day develop more outdoor classrooms that do not confine students in a prison-like environment. I would also like to accurately address cultures in a respectful way. I do recall many times in my own experience that teachers would depict Native Americans as savages and extinct. There were also times where my own identity was questioned and denied due to stereotyping.

Having experienced first-hand racism in the classroom I would like to teach Native American students who struggle to find the balance between white institutions and cultural

values. My grandparents and my mother all struggled with this and it has become a pattern in the community that needs to end. Many are unaware of all the opportunities out there, similarly to the experiences of my grandparents. There is a lack of support and guidance in schools and I had to navigate college applications and deadlines for financial aid all on my own. Education is a necessity and should be encouraged.

Critical social justice will play an important role in my teaching practices. Having learned that cultural knowledge is as significant as any lesson learned. I intend to create a safe and open safe with the expectation of my students to be respectful to one another. Critical social justice takes on various forms in the classroom. This objective specifically refers to implementing critical social justice within content and resources to expand students' cultural awareness. This concept is outlined by Hammond (2015) and emphasizes the provision of resources that relate to students social and cultural experiences. This includes the landscape and history of the local area in which students reside. When students are able to identify with the content, it expands their cultural awareness of themselves and broader social justice issues.

### **Assets and needs**

Academically, given my experience with Native American youth through various social and academic volunteer opportunities allows me to connect with the students. Also, my educational background in Native American Studies and Public Policy gives me a broader range to work with. Some needs of mine are to enhance what I know to be able to properly apply it to my given set of students and be able to adapt to their needs as well.

My learning needs include being able to provide diverse opportunities to participate and for the students to learn. Also, to give clear and direct instructions that can be understood by everyone. I tend to have short and unclear directions due to my classroom expectations of my

students. However, I must keep in mind that reminders are useful. I am very forgetful myself, and I should hold myself accountable to the same expectations of my students. This would be helpful to remind my students of classroom expectations and to be clear from beginning to end. This also requires me to be a consistent instructor and to give global feedback to my students as needed.

A socio-cultural asset of mine includes my upbringing and background allows me to connect with people. Through my various experiences with racism, stereotyping, police brutality, and unfair working conditions gives me knowledge on the realities of societal norms. By attending a diverse school within my journey, I am able to be aware and respectful of those around me. There are students with similar stories to my own and I am able to relate on a personal level with them.

Educators should be inclusive of all despite their background or disabilities. There also needs to be an explicit definition of their socio-emotional investments in their students. The thought should be sincere rather than sympathetic in these situations. I would require that staff and faculty be supportive of one another in situations like these regarding the emotional needs of students. It is also important not to discriminate or call-out students for their emotional needs or concerns that affect their well-being.

Clear and direct expectations and instructions create less confusion and allow class time to be used effectively. Also, the use of a timer is beneficial to ensure that class time is used to the fullest. As an instructor this is something I need to work on, because I place trust in my students and expect them to follow directions. I need to realize that students do not always follow directions and there are consequences to their actions.

I would allow for time to reflect and adjust to students' needs because it is crucial to the effectiveness of instruction. Reflection can be given by students in the form of an exit ticket with them reflecting on the lesson given that day. Assessing my performance as an instructor allows for individual growth. Group dialogue and discussion with other instructors' practices could also benefit my own classroom. I realize that there is always room for growth in order to meet the needs of any given classroom setting.

### **Goals**

1. I will practice critical social justice by providing students with resources to expand their cultural awareness.

An additional goal of mine is to teach Native American Studies or Ethnic Studies in high school. This is an opportunity to teach the contemporary image of the "Indian" which has often been distorted in both history and media. As I mentioned before, in my journey I was often singled out for my race and ethnicity. I do not want my students to feel the way I felt in the classroom and not having my cultural background be respected.

2. Not take up too much space

I have an outgoing personality and tend to talk a lot. I must refrain at times to let the other person speak. This also has to do with the students too, for them to be inclusive of their peers.

3. Have clear and global expectations

My thinking process is all over the place, and I tend to reflect it in my speech and wording. I also like to prepare students for life, and I assume that they will remember a deadline or instruction. I find that it is better to be prepared than not, and I have to

remember that these students are still learning how to learn. I must have the same expectations for all the students so that no one feels left out.

4. Assess students' progress and needs by asking the students questions and providing them with opportunities to share their knowledge with their peers.

Rosenshine (2012) explains that a teacher can ask students direct questions of various levels, instruct students to ask their peer a question, or have their peer answer a question. Various levels of questioning allow students to access the content in various ways. It is often difficult to assess all of the students, but Rosenshine makes it so that a simple question can make all the difference.

As an instructor it is a requirement to meet state standards within lesson plans. These standards act as a guide to the lesson plans throughout the school year. However, meeting state standards and implementing state-required text within a demanding time frame is intimidating and difficult at times. I plan to be organized with my lesson planning and to not be intimidated by my standards but embrace them into the curriculum. Ayers and Alexander-Tanner (2010), share an example of a teacher who implemented a lesson around a state required text with counter-narratives that raised awareness of social justice issues. This is an example of how to create lessons around standards.

As far as assessing students, I would take the time to record their grades and to discuss their progress with them. This goes along with communication with student to make sure that there is nothing restricting them from receiving good grades. It would be ideal for me to have one-on-ones with my students; this is a skill that I learned from athletics. Periodically, coaches and athletes would meet as a checking-in process to bring up anything they wanted to discuss.

I plan to maintain a teacher portfolio with ethnographic notes and quantitative test scores. Ayers and Alexander-Tanner (2010) explain that a teacher portfolio is a mechanism to distill



down students' progress into lists or anecdotal records, which allow the teacher to conceptualize each student's academic trajectory. My portfolio will be organized and include collective data on their scores and performances. It will be an Excel Sheet that includes their names, scores, and comments in individual columns. I find that tables or sheets are easily read and clear. This will allow students to know where they stand, much like Canvas or iLearn.

From my own professors, they have conducted surveys on the class or test as a whole. I had exams with reflection questions, which can properly assess how well the information learned is retained. Also, a survey at the end of the course allows a reflection of your teaching practices and how effective they were.

### **Part B: *Getting to Know My Students***

Honestly, I never quite imagined myself as a teacher. Much like my students, I was not that invested in my education enough to really want to continue my education at first. A majority of my instructors did not resemble me or wanted to get to know me or value my cultural background. In reflecting on my own educational journey, with the fresh eyes and perspective as the instructor, I notice how much time and consideration teachers should put into getting to know their students. I discovered that after talking with them and spending more time I was able to communicate with them better. I also was able to appeal to their interests and find out that we have a lot in common. Throughout this process of gathering data, I was able to have one-on-one conversations with students and visit their homes.

This experience has been humbling for myself as an instructor to really understand my students. By getting to know whom my students are, I am able to instruct them in ways that will stay with them. I understand my role as an instructor, a role model, and a consistent person who can teach them valuable life lessons that they can hold on to. Although my students are in the eighth grade, they have goals and aspirations that are reflective of their individual backgrounds and cultural beliefs.

I strive to give my students the educational experience that I never received in school myself, the experience of learning about history from a perspective unknown to them. I want them to question and challenge what they know and put themselves in someone else's shoes. To be placed in the shoes of the oppressed, of their ancestors, and of their peers. My students are encyclopedias, and experts in their lived experiences.

My eighth graders are conspiracy theorists, actors, and video gamers. They enjoy spending time after school hanging out with friends. My students are definitely pre-teens who are

caught up in the drama of middle-school relationships and the latest gossip on the blacktop. For this part of my ethnography will be about them – my first students.

I have three class periods of eighth graders at Royal Oaks STEAM Academy. In total I teach ninety-five eighth graders alongside my mentor teacher; while I am completing residency. I am transitioning as a teacher, while my students are preparing to transition to high school. We are both going through life changing events that will help us in our individual journeys. We both still have a lot of growing up to do.

My students are between the ages of twelve and fourteen years of age. At this particular school site, it is attractive for prospective students pursuing the arts. Royal Oaks is a part of CSArts, a performing arts school that is competitive to attend. So many of my students commute as far as Downey or Pasadena to attend this school. I see many of my students arrive early to school because of their long commutes. My eighth graders are busy bees that have extracurricular activities based on their personal interests.

However, my students still laugh at the slightest things such as burps or others missing a high five. This shows that no matter how grown up they perceive themselves to be, that they are still kids at heart. They live with their parents, or one parent, or their grandparents, or a combination of relatives. They speak English, Arabic, Hebrew, Mandarin, Tagalog and Spanish, which many of them speak fluently at home to relatives. Some students are reclassified as RFEP or IFEP students from their previous EL status in their younger years. Five of my ninety-five students are a part of the GATE program.

Teaching eighth graders, I had the expectation that they all are capable of eighth grade level work. Once I received background information on my students through the school wide data system, AERIES, and conversations with past and current teachers I was able to understand

the needs of my students. My students are at differing levels of mastery, and in order to meet grade-level requirements they need scaffolding and support. Some students can write beautiful poetry and narratives with ease. I have some students who forget to capitalize at the beginning of a sentence and place a period at the end. My eighth graders are presenting how they plan to proceed on in high school. This stage in their educational journeys determines how they will be taught at the high school level. Because of this I plan to differentiate and play to their strengths of my students in order for them to flourish as students.

My students face obstacles of their own on a daily basis. Their frontal lobes are not yet fully developed, which means that they do not quite understand how to process their emotions (Freedman, 2018). Eighth grade is indeed a transformational stage in their adolescent development. Some students are experiencing obstacles of them and are figuring out what their dreams are. It is important to view my students holistically by identifying their assets and needs, including socioemotional and learning style needs. This stage of adolescent development is integral to a person's educational confidence, sense of belonging, and overall, and their academic journey's end goal. By teaching this age group I am preparing them to become young adults and how to use their education to their advantage in their life goals. I am privileged to help my students along their journey, but to teach eighth grade is a unique responsibility that evokes who I strive to be as an instructor.

## Introduction

This school year I have three focus students. As a first-year instructor I am taking in as much as I can from both my students and my mentor teacher. As a student teacher in residency, I am gradually taking on more responsibility. I also am continuing to build student-teacher relationships with my classes. Through this experience I am noticing how different each of the class periods are in comparison to one another. This goes to show that not all students are the same, so therefore not all students learn the same. I am learning how to be an effective teacher to all of my students: initially fluent English learners, students with special needs, and students enduring significant life events.

Clinically, Focus Student 1 is classified as Initial Fluent English Proficient or IFEP. Focus Student 2 is a student on an IEP, an Individualized Education Plan, to meet her specific needs regarding her diagnosis of ADHD. Focus Student 3 is a student who is diagnosed with depression and multiple other health problems that require her to be seen regularly by the doctor. Each of their stories, experiences, assets, and needs will inform me on how to refine my ability to teach to all my learners. They represent the diverse group of ninety-five eighth graders who I instruct three periods out of the day. They will challenge my multitasking skills to be able to differentiate and scaffold their needs. By differentiating assessments students are building on their own academic skills and can enjoy learning in a way that is useful to them (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 143).

Also, they will reveal my areas of growth where it is needed, teach me how to teach them. Focus Students One, Two, and Three are more than just numbers and data gathered through Aeries school wide database, interviews, and home visits. To me, they are, students who I can relate to and see parts of myself in. They are Sahar, Rosie, and Zoey.

**Case Study 1: Sahar**

*Demographic Information.* I selected a young girl from my first period class named, Sahar, to be my Focus Student. Sahar is a thirteen-year-old eighth grade student of Moroccan descent. Sahar is classified as an IFEP. She learned both English and Arabic early on from her parents and relatives. Sahar took the CELDT in reading, writing, listening, and speaking eight years ago. She scored as “intermediate” in both reading and writing. In both listening and speaking Sahar scored as “early advanced” and these scores justifies her language classification. She is from my first period class and a daughter of Moroccan immigrants. It was a struggle to find a designated EL student at my school site, and there was a very short list of EL students for the entire middle school. None of the listed students were in my United States History class, so I decided to go with a student classified as an IFEP. Through various conversations with my students I learned that many of them were bilingual. I noticed Sahar to be one of my more shy and reserved students in the classroom. Sahar is not one to always raise her hand, but she retains information well and it shows on her tests. I was also drawn to her because of her curly hair, because I too have curly hair and it is rare to find someone with a similar texture to my own. This was definitely a conversation starter for us and led to me asking about her family structure. I was surprised to find out that both of her parents are from Morocco and I was eager to learn more about her.

After a few conversations in class I learned that she is not a morning person. This is a commonality that we have, and it does take us a while to adjust to the classroom. So, my first assumption about Sahar being shy was false. She is quite talkative amongst her peers outside of the classroom. When I had interviewed her, it was after school and she was very talkative during our one-on-one interview. Sahar is in my first period class and is sleepy and groggy in the

morning. However, she is very focused once she is adjusted by halfway through the class period. About this time in the class period we transition into a class activity where she can talk amongst her peers. This is an activity that I consider using often in order to build on the strengths of my students. According to the Sahar's CELDT scores she is proficient in both listening and speaking but can improve on her reading and writing skills.

***Academic Standing.*** Sahar is a joy to have in the class and I was curious about her cultural background. I came to find out that Sahar speaks Arabic at home directly to her parents and other relatives. At an early age Sahar was exposed to both languages and developed a language duality, and the ability to code switch.

I find this to be one of her strengths outside of the classroom, as well as her math skills. Inside the classroom she is able to work both in groups and independently with ease. Sahar's classwork shows that improvement is needed for both reading and comprehension when following given direct instructions. Often directions are not fully understood, and she does not ask for help or clarification from myself, but she would ask her peers. Seeing how she is comfortable with talking to others, I decided to try talking with her in class.

Sahar is classified as an Initially Fluent English Learner, or IFEP. She is capable of completing classwork and homework in the time given to complete an assignment. I would classify her work at grade-level, but she can improve on the quality of her assessments. She scores above average on formative tests and this demonstrates her comfortability with test taking. My student does not need any special accommodations for completing assignments. I believe that after reviewing her assessments that Sahar still struggles with grade level literacy skills because she does not practice enough reading comprehension.

Overall, Sahar is a well-rounded student and is very cooperative to work with. I consider her strengths of speaking and listening when planning structured group discussions. According to Marzano structured group discussions are beneficial for student-lead instruction and ensuring that all students are engaging in the content (Marzano, 2012, pg. 31 – 32). I also take into account that she plays sports and is a team player. Sahar is also the oldest sibling and knows how to take on leadership roles whether it is in the classroom or outside of the classroom. She is also identified as a GATE student who excels in both math and science. This academic program provides support for students with gifted capabilities, to excel in school. Sahar is an exceptional student and can use the support of my teaching to build on her strengths and improve in other areas that are needed.

***Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity.*** Sahar thinks of herself as a good person, and this is something that she would like to continue to be. She would like to continue to practice her religious beliefs and make her parents proud of her accomplishments. She is very knowledgeable of her culture and who she is. She values her culture and views herself as a representation of herself and her family. She often takes trips for months at a time to visit Morocco and relatives. I value the diverse cultures that are represented in my classroom and find ways to integrate their cultural knowledge into the curriculum.

In the classroom I encourage group and pair shares so that students can get to know one another. I appreciate the cultural diversity in the classroom, because I am able to learn more about my students through conversations. A part of my classroom ecology is to respect others and where they come from. Sahar stated, “I always want to be like respectful to people and listen”, and this is a reflection of her own cultural values (Sahar, personal communication, October 31, 2019). Not only that, but also reflective on her CELDT scores as well. I expect my



students to respect one another and this goes for the lived experiences of students that may or may not differ from that of their peers. By establishing a safe environment for students to share in class, creates a positive atmosphere for students to learn.

Sahar has a positive outlook on life and her goals, “Those are my goals. Like has good grades and be a good student”, and she speaks confidently about her future and goals (Sahar, personal communication, October 31, 2019). She does consider herself an academic and is self-motivated as she states, “I believe I can do it”, for students at her age I find this to be refreshing to know that a student of mine is so optimistic about her future (Sahar, personal communication, October 31, 2019). During our interview she reiterated what her goals are as related to academics, “My goal in life right now are to get good grades, so that I can go to a good college, and get a good education. Like I strive for that”, based off of how much she emphasizes her education verbally reflects on her hard work in the classroom (Sahar, personal communication, October 31, 2019). Whenever there is extra credit provided then she will take the opportunity for any growth in the classroom.

A major event in Sahar’s life would be that she has resided in the same area for her entire life. Her life has been stable in the sense that she has long-lasting relationships with both friends and family. I am continuing to learn more about my students, and I find that stability is a key component during the adolescent stage of development. I have witnessed in class that my students are not accustomed to change. Sahar benefits from having both parents in the home and to have a consistent lifestyle provided to her. I can also display consistency in the classroom for those of my students who are lacking that in their own lives. Sahar is also familiar with her family overseas in Morocco and visits them about once a year. Sahar acknowledges both her cultural origins and values by participating in religious gatherings and prayer weekly.

Sahar is a wonderful student and is very influenced by her father. Her parents act as her support system in and out of school. She mentions in the interview that she constantly asks her father for help when needed. Although Sahar excels specifically in math and science, her father believes in holistic learning. Sahar mentions how her father encourages her with rationale for the importance of history, "My dad tells me that you need to know history to be able to go on to the future", and this is a form of cultural knowledge that is passed on from her father (Sahar, personal communication, October 31, 2019). It seems as though her father is an important figure in her life that also motivates her to accomplish her goals. I can describe Sahar as typical in their adolescent development stage and there are no technologies needed for this student. She is a self-driven student who strives for success. I feel as though she has the proper support at home for me to continue to challenge her while building on her strengths.

*Funds of Knowledge, Experiences, Interests, & Developmental Considerations.* I visited the home of Sahar and her family and was able to learn firsthand about her upbringing and cultural background. I was able to communicate in advance with Sahar and her parents about visiting the home. Her father was mostly travelling the past few weeks and the only time they had available to meet was on the weekends. I was only allowed to visit the home with Sahar's father present. This did not discourage me completely but made me realize that a parent values time at home with their children without interruption of guests. I can appreciate the effort that parents make to spend quality time at home and to establish a routine with their children. The rug had a beautiful geometric design full of vibrant colors that I have never seen before. Even being greeted with a bow and handshake was something that I was unaccustomed to. I am thankful that I was able to experience the cultural atmosphere of the home and the supportiveness of her parents. I learned that Sahar is a product of her home environment where

stability, organization, and respectfulness are the foundation. At the end of the visit the parents were appreciative of a teacher coming to their home and they were more than happy to have an input on my educational journey.

Much of the conversation focused on culture and how the parents met after they had immigrated to the United States of America. It was quite interesting to hear their love story and how their paths crossed once they arrived to a foreign country. I learned that each parent grew up in different villages, or areas of Morocco and spoke different Arabic dialects. I can see how there is confusion at times when Sahar responds to her parents in Arabic. Firsthand, I was able to see how Sahar interacted with her parents. She has to decipher between the two dialects when responding to her parents individually. I felt out of place at times when they were discussing in Arabic, because I am unfamiliar with the language myself. I could tell at times that Sahar's mother felt the same way because her English is not fluent, so the interview was mostly with Sahar's father.

I enjoyed speaking with Sahar's father, a college educated man who works as an architect and travels often. However, he makes time to assist Sahar with her homework. I did find the home visit to be insightful and this expanded my knowledge on African culture and customs that I was unaware of, such as the significance of the Moroccan rug that they had in the living room. Sahar is an older sibling and has responsibility over her younger brother. Knowing that my students have diverse roles in the home, informs me about how structured or organized a student is. Sahar has additional strengths in this area of organization, because she has to accommodate to her younger brother's schedule. With the responsibility of being an older sibling comes a sense of maturity for some. This also expands the minds of students to be aware of their surroundings. This awareness is useful in the classroom for their input of their life experiences. I hope to give

my students more responsible roles in the classroom, but also have time for them to be children while they still can.

She practices an organized faith of Islam and values her families' customs. I can appreciate the value of cultural representation in the classroom. Not only that, but the accuracy of that information that is presented to my students. I would love to get input from my students on what their history interests are, so I can incorporate multiple perspectives on the topic or event.

Sahar travels to Morocco often to visit family and has a sense of pride of her ancestral roots. This pride is displayed by the way she carries herself confidently in the class and speaks Arabic openly. It is important of knowing your student beyond their data, gathering this information through conversations and with their families, as opposed to making assumptions based on observations. Actually, making space and time for dialogue during my home visit allowed the opportunity for the Sahar and her family to be heard and share what they are comfortable. This allows me to be informed by human connection and bring that into the classroom, building the teacher student relationship that all else rests upon. (El Yaafouri-Kreuzer, 2017, p. 24).

She is proficient in speaking and listening according to the CELDT and has been building on the remaining literacy skills. She is the most comfortable when speaking in pairs rather than groups, and the lesson has structured pair shares that she will benefit from. This activity also strengthens both her listening and speaking skills. She also participates in basketball in her free time after school during the week. This is another activity that she engages in to practice her mobility skills. Sahar appears to display typical social-emotional and typical child development as observed both in and outside of the classroom setting on a daily basis.

**Action Plan.** Since Sahar is very proficient in English, and academically high achieving, her goals focus on growth in the areas where she has shown potential in. Sahar is identified as a GATE scholar and excels in both math and science. I will work with Sahar on improving both her reading and writing skills. I will use the written assessments and rubrics to measure how much she has improved. My goal for Sahar is to have her articulate her reasoning clearly on paper. This will be beneficial for her goals of attending college when filling out applications.

This plan will differentiate for her academic rigor while supporting her reading needs. I plan to provide her with diverse opportunities to meet the standards and build on her reading comprehension. It is a goal of mine to reach grade-level comprehension skills. Tomlinson states, "While performance tasks certainly can be differentiated (in any way except alteration of the learning goals the task is to assess), the openness and duration of products likely invite greater attention to student readiness, interests, and approaches to learning" (Tomlinson, 2017 p. 143). What I interpret from the author is that the outcomes of differentiated tasks are greater than we even know. By differentiating assessments students are building on their own academic skills and can enjoy learning in a way that is useful to them. A strategy in the classroom that I use to meet her language needs is to provide word banks and also have them search for context clues to support their understanding of the definition provided. Within history academic language is often used and I am figuring out how to expand their academic vocabulary.

What Sahar needs in regard to understanding history content is to have the content appeal to her interests. Also, from Tomlinson I was able to find methods on how to differentiate for my diverse classroom (Tomlinson, 2017). I am implementing new and fun ways to assist my EL students. I like to include student-choice in my class as well. Through a conversation that we had, I learned that she enjoys Kahoot and Quizlet, academic online resources. I can use these

resources to gameify parts of the lesson to peak the interests of students. This is a fun way to check for understanding, and I can assess whether or not the content was retained. I believe opening up to games will encourage them to invest in their learning experience. I like to include student-choice in my class as well.

Both Sleeter and Flores Carmona state, “Practices of testing are far more than technologies for providing information. Rather, they carry with them a range of implicit values or ideologies. Through the broad institutionalizing of testing procedures, there is a shaping of cultural values. Practices of assessment do not so much reflect the nature of the individual as they construct the individual in their terms, and thus shape the cultural milieu” (Sleeter & Flores Carmona, 2017, p. 1). I personally have been struggling with the use of assessments to boost retention. I think after reading this I have a better understanding to use assessments consistently. These assessments at the eighth grade should be scaffolded to make sure that information is retained. The more I practice using assessments, the more I will learn about my students. By trying different types of assessments, I can be able to determine an efficient way to properly assess my students to be able to gain data that I need for state purposes. The use of Kahoot! in the classroom to check for understanding at the end of a unit. Having a study guide that is content based but uses sentence stems to help guide the students is also a useful assessment. This information can show me how information is retained and what proves to be effective or ineffective. I have been introducing self-assessment tools and getting the students into the habit of looking over their work prior to submission in order to hold students accountable for the quality of their work. I will continue to encourage Sahar to self-assess and to review her work before submission

Through my interview with Sahar, I discovered new opportunities to differentiate for her language needs. According to Garcia and Kleifgen, we cannot assume that the educational needs of bilingual students differ from those who are monolingual. The process of which the bilingual students learn is significantly different, and I have witnessed this in my own classroom. Whether it is from how they form a sentence or to how their speech patterns differ (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018, p.3). I notice that Sahar takes longer to read and write and requires additional support in the classroom. A strategy in my classroom that is used is sentence stems. Specifically, for those who struggle with writing in English, sometimes need these provided to start them off. I realize that this is considered as equity in the classroom by bringing bilingual students up to grade level with their peers. I plan to encourage student choice and take into consideration for their likes and dislikes when it comes to learning the content. I also plan to converse with a Sahar on a monthly basis to further discuss how to differentiate and move forward with giving them assignments with the proper scaffolds to meet her needs.

### **Case Study 2: Rosie**

*Demographic Information.* Rosie is diagnosed with ADHD and has difficulties at time staying on task during class. Rosie is a student in my first period United States history class. She is a student with special needs, which requires her to have accommodations. Rosie has dealt with a health issue that periodically paralyzes her face. This has impacted Rosie's speech and ability to speak properly. Rosie's IEP accommodates her speech and writing needs complete assignments without sentence structure support and lack of focus. She is also to be seated close to the board and teacher to ensure that she can listen attentively and read what is on the presentation.

For my focus student, I interviewed Rosie, she is a thirteen-year-old eighth grade student and a daughter of Cuban immigrants. The selection of Rosie was based on our first interaction in the classroom. Upon our first encounter we conversed and had similar interests in fashion, movies, and food. She also sat close to the teacher's desk and would familiarize me on the classroom ecology, as well as the school's connection to the performing arts. She helped me transition as a new addition to the classroom. Rosie had also transferred from another school in a neighboring school district. This transition adds a thirty to forty-five-minute commute to and from school.

Rosie is a student with a disability and is a late transfer to the school site. Rosie is classified as an RFEP, and her first language is Spanish. Her accommodations include language supports to be put in place for her assignments. She is a hard-working student who is raised with religious values to be a good person.

*Academic Standing.* Rosie is active in the class and her strengths include asking questions and clarifying instructions. Inside the classroom some areas of growth include working on the quality of work that is submitted and processing content knowledge. Much like her peers, she can improve on her historical literacy skills of annotating and evidence-based writing. She shows enthusiasm in class when learning new content by eagerly raising her hand in the air with excitement to ask a question. We had an interview after school to discuss some interests and goals of her.

After interviewing her, I can infer that she can grow outside of the classroom by reviewing school material at home and spending time going over quality of homework. There is definitely potential for growth, but there is also a need of academic support in order to meet the criteria of her IEP. Her IEP includes seating and extended time accommodations. There are times



that individual aid is needed, but she is hardworking by taking the initiative to ask for assistance when needed.

The student is classified as an RFEF, and her first language is Spanish. Rosie is bilingual in both Spanish and English. Overall the student performs proficiently on formative, summative, and standardized tests from what I gathered recently. On the most recent test on the founding documents, she scored twelve out of fifteen. On formative and summative assessments, she often struggles on following directions and writing full and complete sentences.

The student feels optimistic about school and feels that there is room for self-improvement. I can infer that she feels this way because she commutes daily and is often tired. There are times that her assessments lack quality, but she is aware of the at most times she is overwhelmed, “oh my gosh I have so much work and I’m tired and it upsets me”, this can affect her positive tone (Rosie, personal communication, September, 27, 2019). The student remains humble and hardworking to be able to complete tasks and assignments given to her. As mentioned, Rosie struggled with her classwork in the sixth grade. Unfortunately her parents were unable to assist her, “my parents are Cuban and they learned a certain way so when I do my homework, let’s say, I don’t know, science they are not going to understand or be able to help me because they were taught a whole different way, or they haven’t even been taught that subject. So, when I do ask, I have to be pretty sure that like my parents will know it, but like half time they do not know” (Rosie, personal communication, September 27, 2019). This was indeed the turning point for her and affected her ability to succeed in school. Rosie is aware that she needs to ask questions right away in class if something is not fully understood. In the subject of United States history, her parents are unfamiliar with the content, so Rosie often stays after class for further clarification. However, she has a love for language that I believe reflects her

bilingualism. Having immigrant parents put emphasis on hard work being associated with success. That background in particular leads her to believe that her future will be bright if she prays, works hard, and has a career.

She places academics as a priority above her personal interests. Rosie notices that having an education is valuable, because of her father's educational experience. Her father emphasizes education for having a good life. This idea is projected in Rosie and reflects on her positive demeanor upon entry into the classroom.

*Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity.* Outside of the classroom Rosie enjoys singing and acting, which she considers some of her strengths as well. She is enrolled as part of the performing arts program provided and is striving to become an actress. This is a goal of hers that she hopes to achieve one day through hard work and practice. Amongst her peers she is delight, especially in her conservatory class, or acting class. I often see her at break time chatting with her peers and enjoying conversations. She is well liked by the staff from what I gathered from her other teachers as well. She is a pleasure to have in class all across the board.

Rosie is loved and supported by her family members both in and out of the home. She lives with her parents and is the only child living in the home. Through our conversations it is prevalent that she loves her family very much and spends a lot of time with them. She regularly attends church with her family, and also engages in family bonding. She enjoys spending time with her family at car shows on the weekends. This support from her immediate family provides a supportive family structure for her to have in place.

Rosie is aware of the extra time that is needed to complete assignments in comparison to other students. She takes advantage of this provided time to comprehend the content. In fact, she hardly uses the extra time accommodation because she takes the initiative to seek assistance from

the beginning. So, she often asks questions to clarify anything that was misunderstood. Rosie takes more time to process information that is given at a time. She is introverted at times and considers herself to be shy. Yet, she is able to work well with others when asked to work in pairs or groups.

Every day I greet students on the way into the classroom and I am able to see how students are feeling based off of their demeanor. Students can either high five, hug, or fist bump on the way in. Rosie is positive and cheery upon entry into the classroom on a daily basis. She is always smiling and prepared in class. For participation, students are to have their laptops charged and have the necessary materials for that day. I do not need to redirect any misbehavior in class, because she works well with her peers and is on task.

Her disposition is always friendly and identifies strongly with others in the class who are of Hispanic heritage. As I walk around the class I listen in on conversations and observe group discussions. Based off of what I observe in class, she bonds with other Hispanic students in the class by discussing cultural food and a common language.

During my home visit with the family I could feel the sense of nationality of their Cuban heritage. The décor highlighted their religious values of Catholicism, with images of Jesus Christ on the wall. I joined them for dinner, and they shared their love of their culture through food. This was both delicious and exciting to have authentic Cuban food in their home.

Rosie's self-concept is based on religious values of how you should live your life, "I think that I am a lot of work in progress and I have to see things through" (Rosie, personal communication, September, 27, 2019), with that she sees her life as a journey where she has a certain purpose that is given to her. She expressed that her parents support a structured lifestyle, which incorporates Christian values. Her identity is based upon the perception of others. As long

as she lives her life in the way that she was taught then others would view this as well. However, there is an assumption that people are brought up with the same values as her. So, my interpretation is that when people do not view her as a good person then that is going to reflect on her self-image. I can say that our classroom encourages an open mindset that is free of biases. So, we do not reinforce religious values in class, but we do reinforce the class expectations. The class expectations somewhat align with her own values. Also, we give positive feedback and gestures in the classroom to promote positive behavior.

The student is interested in both singing and acting, which is primarily why she chose to attend a school that is farther away from home. Rosie also views herself as self-motivated when asked who or what motivated you, “Myself? My parents? I don’t know. Well, like I always tell myself things like, ‘Come on you can do this!’ ‘It’s gonna be a great day.’” (Rosie, personal communication, September 27, 2019) One day she hopes to be successful and be a good person, “My goals, just to have a career. To study. To learn. To grow. Just to be a good person in general. Be respectful. Like along those lines to do what I’m supposed to do.” (Rosie, personal communication, September 27, 2019). It is also nice that she is aware that she has options, and that success means something different to her. To her success is based on the character of a person by how they carry themselves in their daily lives and treat others.

Some events that influenced Rosie are the academic decline in the sixth grade and the late start to the current school year in the eighth grade. She realized that her parents cannot help her with everything and had to become self-reliant when it comes to school. She expresses love for her parents by stating, “my parents, they work really hard to take me where I am and I appreciate that”; she realizes that they have struggles and that she needs to “step up my game” (Rosie, personal communication, September, 27, 2019). Both of her parents are present and involved in

her life, and also serve as influential figures. I would also say that God or Jesus Christ is very influential in her life as well. She is a devout Christian who attends church regularly with her family.

Rosie is still adjusting from starting three weeks later into the school year. She is comfortable in own class but is still uncomfortable in the school. It is different from her previous school and she is still adjusting to it. The support that she receives seems good yet limited. For example, the school is limited on instructional aids which then requires her to leave the classroom frequently to group work. I would say that the student's development is typical after reviewing her classwork. However, she is struggling with an illness that paralyzes her face that limits her muscle growth and development in her face. My data came from a interview that was recorded.

*Funds of Knowledge, Experiences, Interests, & Developmental Considerations.* The parents of Rosie have experienced an extremely different school experience, because they attended school in a communist country. In particular, Rosie's parents did not learn history in their educational experience, and it is a subject that is unfamiliar to them. U.S. History is not a subject that she can seek assistance from her parents, and she takes advantage of the time in class to ask questions. However, both parents support Rosie's goals and are present in the home. By taking the time to make a home visit and to discuss how they support Rosie is reassuring for me. This can also allow me to manage my time in class and to assist her with this specific subject of United States history.

Rosie is a faithful person who practices organized religion of Catholicism, and this influences her optimism and concept of being kind to others. These are fundamentals that are introduced and practiced in the church. Overall, Rosie's goal is to be content and a good person

to others. She is helpful to assisting her peers as well during class time and group discussion.

Rosie enjoys singing and identifies singing as something she excels in. She is the only child still in the home, with an older sibling that is significantly older than her by over a decade.

Rosie is bilingual in both English and Spanish and she often speaks Spanish in the home. She first learned Spanish from her parents and then learned English. It is an asset in the class to be proficient in multiple languages and enhances her language processing skills. According to El Yaafouri-Kreuzer, he states that culturally and linguistic families have a lot to offer and recognizing the parents and home depth of knowledge can help us as educators to partner with them to plan for our students' success (El Yaafouri-Kreuzer, 2017, p. 22). I can use this information to incorporate history from different cultures and how that influenced United States history. I can view Rosie's language classification as an RFEP, as another form of knowledge that she possesses. This informs my pedagogy by re-evaluating how directions are presented and incorporate directions both verbally and visually.

Rosie has verbally expressed that she enjoys learning about history and it is one of her favorite subjects. There is anticipation to learn more about the more eventful topics of history that are relatable to the life experiences of a thirteen-year-old such as, the break-up between the American colonists and King George. She is engaged in the drama of a break-up given her background in theater, she liked the exaggeration and dramatization of the Declaration of Independence. Rosie appears to display typical social-emotional and child development based on my interactions with her in and out of the classroom.

**Action Plan.** With Rosie I have full support from her parents, and I plan to utilize this to my advantage. I plan to send home student surveys to help me get to know Rosie better as a learner at home. She is already a self-driven high achieving student, so I plan to build her literacy

and quality of her work. I plan to meet with her weekly to check in on her understanding and concepts of the material learned in class. I plan to use break time after third period to have a one-on-one conversation about her interests and comprehension of the content.

To build on her literacy skills I will provide her with vocabulary word banks to keep for her reference when reading historical texts. Since this is a major component of our curriculum it is best to prepare her with vocabulary, so she is able to interpret historical texts. This plan is appropriate to the needs of her IEP with providing additional language supports.

The following question helped me align Rosie's goals with assessments, "Is it necessary to teach the skill given the age, grade, and developmental level of the student?" (Torres & Barber, 2017, p. 138). I selected this question from the reading, because I plan on differentiating her assessments to meet the accommodations of her IEP plan. I have struggled to both understand and meet this competency in my lesson planning. The reading further mentioned resources and practices on how to address this question. I feel as though it is necessary to meet students' needs by understanding them holistically. This question furthers my understanding of this given competency, because I need to first get to know my students. By researching the individuals in my class can give me a better insight on how to structure my lessons overall. I do this in the classroom through Bell Work, which is a short writing prompt that they respond to in their notebooks. The prompts vary from the lesson of the day to how they spend their weekends. Also, Aeries is very helpful database system to use and organize significant information about the students. Knowing my students and keeping up with their interests can inform me of their individual goals in life.

In *Educating Emergent Bilinguals* it states, "Thinking of these students as emergent bilinguals has important consequences not only for them, but also for teachers, policymakers,

parents, the language education profession, and U.S. society at large (García, 2009). The use of the term emergent bilinguals allows us to imagine a different scenario.” (Garcia & Kleifgen, 2018, p.5). Rosie’s primary language is not English and speaks more than one language, I can integrate the use of reading, writing, and speaking in English throughout the day while teaching. This will allow me to also support Rosie’s language needs and provide multiple opportunities for her to continue developing the English language in diverse ways. This will prepare her when she is outside my classroom and as they move on to the next grade level. Rosie will be able to use what I have taught them and apply it to their daily lives.

### **Case Study 3: Zoey**

*Demographic Information.* My focus student, Zoey, is a thirteen-year-old eighth grade girl of Puerto Rican and Columbian descent. She is a shy young girl with extremely curly hair who dresses like she came straight off of the runway of New York fashion week. I would describe her look as very euro-punk with a girly twist. Her outfits are a great expression of her artistic style. Similar to myself, Zoey was a late addition to our U.S. history class. We were both learning the routine of the classroom and supported one another. I noticed that she was often absent and not turning in assignments. After going into our Aeries system and reading a note from the office that she was hospitalized. Also, when progress reports went out she was in danger of failing and her report required a parents’ signature that was never returned. In the process of getting the permission slip signed to conduct a home visit there was a lack of communication with her mother. It was very difficult to get in touch with them in general and I took that, as they must have a lot on their plate at the moment.

I think that Zoey can use a confidence boost in her life, because she is often ignored or bullied. This was very upsetting to find out in our interview that others bully her for her



appearance. She is a beautiful young girl, with plenty of promise in her life. However, she is constantly stressed out with her busy lifestyle. She admits to feeling depressed and suicidal and seeking help. There aren't many people that give her attention or acknowledge her feelings. I can infer based off of our interview, that she wants to be heard by the people in her life who are supposed to love her unconditionally. Zoey's emotions aren't a priority, but those of her older brother are. I've learned from classroom discussions that Zoey is bilingual in both English and Spanish. Zoey's language classification is an EO, or English only, student. This means that her first and primary language is English. However, I would also classify her as a Standard English learner, or someone who is continuously learning English (cite). This classification is based upon her writing samples in class and her speaking patterns.

Zoey is quite mature for her age and she is aware of cultural differences from having previously lived in India for two months. She has been transferred from many schools before and is used to adapting to her environment. She was transferred two weeks into the school year to the current school site, and after my home visit I got a better understanding about why Zoey transferred. El Yaafouri-Kreuzer (2017) states, "I always feel apprehensive at the possibility of transitioning a student from a sheltered newcomer classroom into mainstream programming in the middle of the school year. The move will have one of two outcomes for the student: he or she will sink or swim. Sometimes a home visit helps inform the decision to transfer" (p. 24). I found this statement to be true with Zoey, because I now understood how much acting impacts her life. Acting professionally is a goal of hers, and our school site provides a performing arts program, which can support her and her life goals. I learned about how her parents are supportive of her late transition into school, by adding a daily commute to school on their list of things to do. However, the author, El-Yaafouri-Kreuzer (2017), suggests that students who are transitioning to

a new classroom environment, either sink or swim. Which is the case for Zoey that she is struggling to transition, and she failed the class according to last quarter's grade book.

I plan to provide opportunities for Zoey to work with others to increase her productivity. Also provide the student with a reflection journal of her own, because she enjoys writing. I would like for her to be able to write down her feelings and share with me if she would like. All I would do is acknowledge those feelings to make sure that her voice is heard.

***Academic Standing.*** Zoey is brilliant in the classroom by staying on task and following directions. However, she has been at a failing grade for the past two progress reports. The only downfall is that she is hardly in the classroom. I have yet to see Zoey every day of the week. Her absence is a significant concern of mine because it greatly affects her grade in the class. Outside of the class she finds joy in acting in theater productions. Although she is shy, I find this to be one of her strengths when it comes to acting. Formative assessments show that Zoey is at grade level. A summative assessment in writing is her strong point. She is able to write complete sentences in paragraph and essay formats. At this time, I am unfamiliar with her standardized test scores since she recently moved from a different school.

Despite her shyness, Zoey works well in groups. She is not as vocal as others but nonetheless speaks her mind. Zoey admits that she often struggles to pay attention in class, as a result working independently is not always the most productive for her. Group discussion and collaboration is encouraged in the classroom and proves to be helpful for Zoey to catch up on her late or absent assignments. Overall, she is a smart and independent but has a short attention span. This is common among the class as a whole. I think her awareness of this can help me in the future to incorporate quick informal assessments to check for understanding during a lesson. The student's work is lacking overall due to her many absences from the class. She completes the

work given to her when she does attend class. However, online assignments seem to be the most effective for her since she is absent most of the time. Zoey is very knowledgeable and has a great awareness of her surroundings. She likes to be challenged academically and is a hard worker. For example, when given choice on assignments she usually picks the creative writing option. Given that she is shy it is hard to communicate at times because she is quiet and mostly keeps to herself. It definitely takes time for her to open up to others.

Zoey primarily has difficulties with historical literary skills when it comes to retaining and interpreting content. We often in class ask guiding questions, annotate, and use evidence-based writing. In particular, her evidence-based writing needs improvement and references need to be made on assignments.

Currently her struggles are surrounded by her class presence and preparedness. If we can work on those two things first then, we can begin to focus on the quality of her work. The overall data suggests that she is more than capable of doing the work, but her emotional state restricts her from feeling like she matters.

***Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity.*** Zoey is shy and reserved in the classroom. I have observed her in class, and she is quiet and does not volunteer to answer questions. She does participate when instructed to talk in pairs or groups. Through a one-on-one conversation with Zoey about her progress report grades she had expressed signs of depression due to other students bullying her. She has a small friend group of three other students. It took time for her to make friends upon her late entry to the school itself.

Zoey views herself as a good person who is working towards her goals. However she is aware that her feelings aren't validated by her parents, "like I feel like I am put second and my brother is put first, but my dad has always been there for me to like defend me" (Zoey, personal

communication, October 15, 2019). She recognizes her shyness interferes with her ability to communicate with others, “it’s kinda hard for me to grab friends and like meet like popular, like completely like - whatchamacallit , non-shy friends” (Zoey, personal communication, October 15, 2019). Our class environment encourages students to talk with one another, but I can see how this may not be completely beneficial for her. She may feel lost in the voices of other students with their outgoing personalities. Using positive affirmations and emphasizing that the instructors care about or students creates a warm welcoming and environment for students. She aspires to be the happiest person that she can be, by simply doing well in her studies and acting performances. After coming from a sheltered non-religion based private school with a small population, “there’s only like eight middle schoolers in the entire middle school class”, she is currently experiencing a culture shock attending a public school (Zoey, personal communication, October 15, 2019). This “culture shock” of public school is something that she is unfamiliar with and is having trouble adjusting to the school. In particular the class sizes and course load of a full six periods a day are very demanding for her while she balances her extracurricular activities.

In her past schooling experiences one teacher stood out in particular, Ms. Clarke, “I have this teacher at my old school, and her name is Ms. Clarke. She’s been a pretty strong female role model at least in like the teaching business for me, because she got diagnosed with like stage three breast cancer I think, and that was really hard for me.” (Zoey, personal communication, October 15, 2019). She is still in contact with Ms. Clarke and really connected with her at her previous school and influences Zoey to this day, “She influences the things that I do in life because I feel like our sweetness is the same and she shows love and affection the same way that I do. And also, its just the way how like no matter what she would do things” (Zoey, personal

communication, October 15, 2019). It seems that school has always been a challenge for Zoey, but she doesn't necessarily impact how she feels. She is already feeling depressed and stressed without the weight of school on her shoulders. This leads me to believe that the student is indifferent when it comes to school.

Based off what I learned from conducting this interview Zoey is least successful in school due to her relationship with her parents. In particular, her mother favors her eldest son who is significantly older than Zoey. Zoey spent time living in India for two months as part of an academic research. She is aware of cultural differences and the stress that Americans carry on a daily basis and was able to articulate the differences between living there and here. She seems optimistic about the future given that she finds it difficult to be heard at times. The comfort level at school is nonexistent, she expresses that she is often bullied at times and finds joy outside of school. Friends from her previous schools support her as well as Ms. Clarke. At the school site there is a school psychiatrist whom she speaks to regularly. It is atypical of her to be extremely critical of her when it comes to self-reflection. At times in class we do self-assessments, and she will critique her work in a way that is almost like she is putting herself down.

*Funds of Knowledge, Experiences, Interests, & Developmental Considerations.* My students all come from different cultural backgrounds and I can appreciate the cultural diversity. Zoey's unique cultural background makes her who she is, and as a student in my class I value her responses. I consider her perspectives as cultural funds of knowledge, and after getting to know her better through our interview and home visit I was able to learn more about her strengths in the classroom as well as her weaknesses.

Zoey finds joy in writing from what I gathered from our one-on-one conversation and going over her Bell Work. Also, through conversations in class, she likes to be challenged in the

classroom and take on rigorous assignments. Zoey has experience living in a different country and is appreciative of diverse cultures and traditions. She is bilingual in Spanish and can process information rather quickly in comparison to her monolingual peers. Zoey is also taking Mandarin as a language elective to enhance her linguistic skills.

After visiting Zoey's home, I was able to observe some of her cultural funds of knowledge. Both parents are artists and display their art in the home. It was amazing to see their work and how it represented their culture. Art is a great tool for self-expression that can be used in the classroom. For example, Zoey's mother identifies as Rastafarian, or an African-centered religion that developed in the Caribbean (McAlister, 2019). Most of her art reflects her identity as a Rasta woman, and her art is displayed proudly throughout the home. Zoey appreciates choice in the class and artwork can be implemented in assignments so that they can express themselves. As an instructor I can appreciate the various ways my students learn and provide them with multiple and diverse opportunities to contribute to the class (Pollack, 2017, p. 24-25). Both of Zoey's parents work full time and attended universities. It can be assumed that a person with a degree has a steady income, but this is a common misconception. Both parents work full-time and commute to work. This reflects how education is perceived to be beneficial, but we should acknowledge that education is a privilege. I need to recognize Zoey's individual goals in order to be a resource to her. It also includes me being transparent about my knowledge, but to be open to doing research myself so that I can better support Zoey in both her academic and social goals.

In the home I noticed a large white board in the living/dining area for homework and household chores. I can appreciate how organization tools and strategies were used in the home, but not all students are fortunate to have structure in the home. Yes, students do have unspoken

responsibilities in the home but lack accountability. In the class we implement accountability in the classroom ecology. Most of my students struggle with this and these are life tools that are useful in their success. I can continue to be that place of structure and organization so that they can have a model to reflect on.

Zoey's Father values education and believe that it is very important. This is a valuable resource to have someone in the home that is available to assist their student in their coursework. The parental support is apparent in the home, but especially with the father. For a female, having a strong male role model in her life is beneficial. There are students in my class who come from a single parent household and may not have the supports set in place for them to go home and ask for assistance. I can improve my instruction my providing more opportunities for students to get help by offering times for tutoring during the week.

Also, during my visit I noticed that Zoey cooked dinner with her mother, but Zoey often cooks for herself. Given that both parents are occupied with work, Zoey is independent and often cooks on her own. She is the only child living in the home and is reliant on herself. I can take into consideration that students are independent and may have to cook for themselves. I can also speculate that this is a cultural norm for her and her family. My students may not have consistent meals throughout the day and might be hungry in the classroom.

She is an aspiring actress and appreciates the dramatization of historical events learned in class. Zoey is very expressive and creative in her writing from what I have gathered through her writing assessments. Not only that, but Zoey is also capable of participating in her assigned table group effectively by staying on topic and takes the opportunities provided in class to collaborate. I would classify Zoey's social-emotional development as atypical due to the consistent signs of depression and anxiety. She often is missing class due to medical anxiety attacks where she is

admitted to the emergency room. Zoey's mental and physical health is both in jeopardy from what she has told me. According to the on-site counselor Zoey is having difficulties in four out of seven classes. Her absenteeism is a primary concern of mine that I plan to address by communicating with her parents to ensure that she does not fall behind.

Since she is often bullied for her appearance, she is not so confident in herself and has low self-esteem. The lack of confidence is evident when Zoey refers to herself as, "a ugly and terrible person". I have witnessed her sulking and display low energy as she enters the classroom on a daily basis. However, she has typical adolescent development displayed through behavior and her interaction with other students in the classroom when instructed to engage in class activities.

**Action Plan.** Zoey's action plan consists of both emotional and academic supports put in place. This will require that I keep in contact with her parents and keep and utilize their expertise in their child's needs. I foresee that there may be complications with her absenteeism, but I will keep a report on how she is doing from here on out.

I plan to meet with Zoey and check in with her on a bimonthly basis. Through our few conversations she is dealing with a lot of emotional stress. I plan to provide her with a place in the classroom to be able to complete her work. After discussing with Zoey on what her needs are, we have concluded together that reminders and communication is key. This will be followed up by communication with her mother to discuss possible solutions to what Zoey is dealing with both academically and emotionally. I will include her mother's feedback and revise her action plan as needed.

I also plan to work with the school's tutoring program to adjust her tutoring times so that she will not miss history class. This is the one class that she is completely failing and yet she is



missing this class the most for weekly tutoring. I plan to prepare a survey for her to fill out daily, one that reflects her emotional state and well-being. Also, I intend on sending home weekly reports on her assessments and productivity.

Academically, as an instructor I will need to assist her by checking in on her during class time. I plan to check in on her progress on classwork while I rotate from each table group. I will also offer tutoring sessions during and after school. I will encourage and make tutoring a priority for her to take advantage of. After discussing both her strengths and needs in academics, she admits that history is her least priority. This is in comparison to her other classes and subjects that she often forgets that she has homework or unfinished classwork to work on. The class has both a Google Classroom page and Remind app that are used for students to access and reference material and assignments. I plan to use these resources to assist her with keeping up with her assignments. It is evident that her interest in history is lacking but I plan to continue to learn about her interests in order to increase retention of the content.

Overall, with the support of both Zoey's parents and my mentor teacher I believe that this action plan will be successful. I primarily put emphasis on Zoey's socioemotional and academic development. For the second half of the school year I will focus on her needs in organization and time management, while continuing to build our student-teacher relationship. During class time, I will also take time to focus on her progress on classwork. Zoey is a very occupied teenager in need of academic and emotional support.

### **Concluding Thoughts on Case Studies**

Overall Sahar, Rosie, and Zoey all have similar self-concepts that include being a good person. I am thankful for these three students for offering their time and personal narratives for me to write about. Also, I am appreciative that my students value this the most when they reflect

on who they are. Each student represents what I am to encounter for the remainder of the school year. I hope that this process was as beneficial to them as it was to me. I was able to learn valuable and meaningful information about how to instruct my students.

This experience has also informed me on how to further improve my classroom ecology. I can continue to provide a safe learning environment and provide emotional support for all my students. Throughout this process I was able to speak with other veteran teachers at my school site and received valuable advice. I was able to gain insight on how my focus students behave and perform academically in their other classes. This information helped me put together the action plans for each of my focus students. Also, this let me know where some of their strengths lie. Some students excel in science and others excel in their extracurricular activities.

Seeing how much they differ from one another; I came to realize how this would be true for the years ahead of me. Each year and each student will be different from the one prior. As an instructor it is vital for me to be able to adapt to my surroundings and be open to try new things. Also, it is important for me to take the time to know my students. After this experience I wish that I witnessed the beginning of the school year to be able to see their growth and progression. However, my each of my focus students are representatives of the diverse class that I have and how I can grow my instructional practices to meet all of their needs both academically and socially.

Reflecting on this journey so far, I can relate it to my own education experiences from college. Since this is my most recent experience that I can draw from I look back and see that school wasn't for everyone. Others have strengths in different areas that they are interested in. Right now, my eighth graders are very uncertain of themselves, which is normal for them in this stage of their adolescent development. Overall, this uncertainty will take time to develop self-

identity and confidence. My students are considerate, fragile, and young teenagers. They are knowledgeable about Disney channel shows, Fortnite, and Mario Kart. They are enjoying their youth and like to make references to current trends that I am not aware of. My students are fun and caring to one another, and the class atmosphere is similar to a family. For example, my students check in on one another and express their problems too. They rely on each other for help and to keep up with all the new gossip.

Sometimes I have to remember that my students have other interests and priorities other than school. In their young lives they have already experienced many obstacles and hardships. At this moment in their educational journeys, it is really important for me to listen to them. I can provide the time and security in class for students to express themselves freely. This is my new family until the end of May, Room 29 with all ninety-five of my eighth graders.

## **Part C: Surrounding Environment**

### **Section 1: Community Context**

*Demographics.* Everyday I make my way to my school site, eager to greet my students upon arrival. My school site is in a small city right off the highway. If you drive too fast you might just pass it by. The city also neighbors a mountain and is located in the center of its county. It is one of the smaller cities within the county and has cultural diversity. The city is known as “the city of health”, for its medical institutions. The city itself was named after a Mexican corporal, and with its Mexican origin encouraged a high population of Mexican Americans to migrate to the area (City History).

In fact, as of 2017 the total population of the city itself was 21,757. With half of the population of Hispanic descent there is a dominant Hispanic cultural presence in the city. Such as street names, restaurants, and school names. All of these examples of Hispanic heritage are prominent in the community. The next highest demographic is white or Caucasian, then Asian follows. The lowest demographic is African American in this region. However, it is important to note that this city has plenty of commuters from the surrounding area that also adds to the cultural diversity of the community.

This is an urban community with connections to both industry and medicine. The city itself is neighboring a mountain and the local highway. The highway itself divides the city from the “highs” to the “lows”, as the locals refer to the separate areas that are based off of socioeconomic status. The “highs” are located by the mountain and are associated with a high socioeconomic class status. This region is lush with greenery with homes that resemble one another. There are local parks that are clean and friendly. There are residents who regularly go either on a morning stroll or jog as a part of their daily routine. I often drive by bicyclists, dog-

walkers, and joggers on my way to my school site. The area is known for the retirement community and golf course; this populace in particular is reserved to mingle with nonresidents. There is a distinction between residents and nonresidents that can be easily picked up on. There are many characteristics of the city that I am still unaware of, but residents are familiar with these and usually avoid conversation with me once I begin to ask questions. Whites and Asians, who can afford the real estate, mostly populate the “highs”. My school site is indeed located in the “highs”, yet very few of my students reside in the surrounding area.

The “lows” is located on the other side of the highway, further from the mountain. This zone is older and associated with lower income families. This is where most of the Hispanic and Black population resides and the homes are closely packed together.

The dramatic shift between the “highs” and the “lows” is quite baffling to witness. It is really like night and day the way the zones contrast from one another. The residents are aware of this division of the city and often refer to the zones when stating where they reside. It is unfortunate to have this obvious division of the have and the have-nots. It is reflective in the students' sense of school pride, or lack thereof.

Both the agriculture and health industry impacted my students and their families. The area is known for citrus output and medical institutions. Many of my students rely on these industries for income and resources. Given that half of the community is of Hispanic descent, Spanish is widely spoken as a secondary language to English. Over time the demographics changed, and other ethnic groups flocked to the city and introduced many new languages to the area. However, both English and Spanish continue to be spoken on a daily basis throughout the community. I have witnessed this whenever I go to a local restaurant or store that these two languages are frequently spoken.

***Housing & Resources.*** The city has multiple forms of housing such as duplexes, houses, and apartments that are available to my students and their families. The “highs” have a lovely array of two-story homes and retirement apartments to offer. In the “lows” you will see more duplexes, one-story homes, and apartments. There are many amenities such as entertainment, food, shopping and medical. However, these categories have very few selections to choose from. The city has medical centers, but not a hospital with an emergency care facility. The favorite amenity of my students is the skate park located next to the local high school.

The community has a variety of faiths that are practiced, but there is no central community center like a YMCA or Boys and Girls Club. There is also a lack of contraceptive and women’s care facility such as Planned Parenthood. Also, there is no movie theatre or other form of entertainment for the youth. I believe having resources and facilities readily available would benefit the well-being of the community.

***Problematize the Issue.*** Over the past fifty years the community has experienced some changes that greatly affected the residents. There is a history of gang violence in the area that was very prominent in the 1970s and 1980s. This was a major challenge for the residents in the area and affected the cost of living. The gang violence further divided the city and created conflicts with surrounding cities and gangs. This gave the city a reputation of a being violent and dangerous. In a discussion with the head football coach of the local high school, he mentions that this harsh reputation made it difficult for students to feel safe in school. It was a combination of an unsafe environment and a booming housing market. That this once family-town became gang territory and not ideal for families to settle.

Over time the gang violence decreased, and the city put retirement housing in place to attract older residents. Also, the overall cost of living increased significantly since the 1970s and

this caused wealthier folks to migrate closer in hopes of getting a job in one of the two major industries in the region. The lack of families moving into the area caused schools' population to decrease as well.

In response to the decreasing enrollment in the school district, a performing arts school was built to increase enrollment. So, students began to commute from far and wide to attend this prestigious performing arts academy. Now the school district serves students in and out of the district's designated borders. However, this has caused resentment of students and their families in the community. Students who reside in the "lows" are now competing to go to school in their own district. Resources are allocated to the performing arts school rather than the local high school.

Also, the city is considerably small in comparison to the neighboring cities and has much less amenities to offer. Most of the time my students have to travel to the next town over to be able to enjoy things such as the mall or the movie theater. For my students, the city has little to offer them in terms of extracurricular activities. There are sports and clubs associated with the school district, but there are not any other outlets for them. As mentioned, the city lacks a central community center where children can play and engage in age-appropriate activities. These activities may include arts, sports, and tutoring. Students are not proud of where they come from, and this is reflective in the lack of school pride shown at my school site.

## **Section 2: Community Events & Community Members**

*Events.* In the small community that is connected with other surrounding cities. You can almost drive right past it on the way to the school. It is in between larger cities that are more well-known. However, the community has annual seasonal events for residents such as Independence Day Celebration & Fireworks, Halloween Howl, and the City Tree Lighting

Ceremony. These larger gatherings are community-based and are open to the public and are considered traditional for its annual reoccurrence.

During my residency I was able to attend and research two school-related events, a volleyball game and a Teacher appreciation luncheon. I was invited to a volleyball game by one of my students and attended after school. I too have a love for sports, and it was enjoyable to watch students engage in extracurricular activity. The atmosphere was light and fun, but not so competitive. Both teams were rather small and had at least three players on the bench. The warm-up was short as well, with volleyball a thirty-minute warm-up is routine, but the players had only about ten minutes to warm-up. There were a few parents and students in the bleachers supporting their respective teams.

I spoke with another staff member, Martha, who worked in the career center on the high school campus. Since I travel between two different school sites it was refreshing to be able to speak to someone outside of the classroom. I was also able to speak to a parent I the bleachers. By speaking to these members of the community I was able to gain a better understanding of the community.

My conversation with Martha gave me insight about the students who reside in the community. Martha stated, "This is a great place, but it is so small", and this was the conversation starter. She has been living in the area for about ten years and she has seen the city grow since then. She mentioned how the crime rate has decreased and how students are struggling to find productive ways to occupy their time due to the lack of extracurricular activities provided by the school. Since the recent decrease in enrollment many extracurricular activities have been cut due to budgeting.



Similar sentiments were expressed by the parent of how they are searching for extracurricular activities for their student to get involved in. However, the parent was mostly struggling with this due to travel. The parent mentioned, “this is my first game too, but I probably won’t make another game since this is my only day off”, I could understand where they were coming from since I am rarely able to attend my students’ extracurricular activities. The parent also expressed how it is difficult to support their student with extracurricular activities that are far from home.

The second event I attended, the teachers’ appreciation luncheon, was at the High School. The First Baptist Church hosted this event. To my surprise the members of the church who provided the monthly luncheon were former educators. It was nice to have others in the community show appreciation for teachers. The event was in the school’s cafeteria and we all self-served and mingled amongst the members of the church. I spoke with an elderly woman who was an educator for thirty years in the school district. She was able to encourage me and give me advice on my first year of teaching. She was shocked that I was a teacher and not a student! It was a lovely conversation on how to improve the community’s morale by expressing support for the families and employees in the area.

I also unknowingly spoke with a member of the school board who is also a member of the church. He was extremely kind and put emphasis on supporting our underserved black population in the district. He mentioned that, “What the High School needs is a BSU (Black Student Union), because we used to be the example for other schools to create a BSU of their own”, I was surprised to find this out about my school site. I was also excited to know that there was support from a district member to emphasize the inclusion of Black students’ needs. A majority of the district’s population is Hispanic, and he sees the need to improve our schools to

motivate students of color to go to college. He has been a part of the community for over thirty years as a police officer and educator. He too agrees that the community is supportive, “but we need to encourage the youth to continue the legacy of Duarte and put it on the map”, it was an enjoyable conversation with him and nice to network.

*Services.* To my knowledge the school has partnerships with the local hospital facility and Think Together. The small city neighbors a prominent research hospital and there is a wonderful internship opportunity for students. The internship is available for students in good academic standing who have a desire to research and work in a lab. This is an amazing opportunity for students to serve the community in cancer research in the future.

Also, the Performing Arts Center, or PAC, is the center for students to show off their talents. The community also showcases their own theatre productions there as well. The school promotes community family movie nights for students and their families to attend.

Think Together is an after school-tutoring program for students. The program provides a safe space for students to gain additional support to become college bound. This program strives to provide equity in education and to equip schools with solutions that transform teaching and learning. There is no Boys & Girls Club in the city that is currently active for community use.

*Problematize the Issue.* Since there is not a Boys & Girls Club in the area there are few constructive outlets for students that are community driven. There is no Planned Parenthood or community hospital in place either. The population is mostly elderly folks therefore the community prioritizes their accommodation needs. There are community events that are lacking such as community cleanup days and Farmers' markets. I am not quite sure why these events or resources are not in place, possibly due to the surrounding larger cities that have these resources.

It may be the lack of demand for these resources because of the average age of residents in the community.

According to Teaching Tolerance, by adopting comprehensive programming designated to promote social and emotional competencies is a great way to support students at risk of bullying (Van Der Valk, 2013, p. 4). I agree that after school programs, or other community resources for at-risk youth is essential for the socio-emotional growth of our students. This would be beneficial for my eighth graders especially as they are transitioning into high school.

I know through my conversations with community members that few students utilize the resources. This is because many students in the district do not reside in Duarte. Anything that students and their families use, or attend is related to the school. The PAC is accessed by students and their families, because of the many students who are also dually enrolled in the Performing Arts School. It is a requirement for students to perform or participate in a school production.

***Response to the COVID-19 Crisis.*** My school responded to the COVID-19 crisis by sending out an email first to teachers and staff on Friday, March 20, 2020. Then, in a separate email sent out an announcement to parents and guardians later that same day. There was also an emergency district board meeting that day via Zoom to discuss how to proceed with the COVID-19 crisis. This was the last day of our scheduled Spring Break, and a two-day grace period was to be put in place for teachers to make assignments for the next two-week period. As the new information came about the district continued to send emails updating teachers and staff on the next steps for instruction. Over the course of time, we as a school site agreed to provide packets of work every two weeks until further notice. Once the governor declared that schools were to be shut down for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, we then transitioned into full virtual distance learning.

Thankfully my mentor teacher and I were able to address this briefly with our students before leaving for the Spring Break. We spoke to each class period of the possibility of not returning to the classroom, and we had a short lesson on how to access Google Classroom, Hangouts, and Meet. These were possible tools that were introduced to students in the case that we did not return, which we did not.

The delivery of the news of the pandemic was light and positive, we focused on the historical aspect that we are living through a historical event. We also compared it to other events that we learned from last semester. With the news of us not returning to the classroom we had to communicate this virtually over Google Meet. For those who were unable to get the news personally from us, they got an email sent to their parents. The news was also posted on the school's and district's website.

Community leaders put in place support for the homeless people in the area. Our school participated in a hygiene drive to support homeless women, which provided hygiene care packs for distribution. Similar acts of kindness have spread throughout the community. The school also provides free meals to students on a weekly basis. There has also been support from city hall to encourage social distancing for the sake of the community.

My school is addressing the needs of vulnerable populations by doing weekly check-ins with students and providing resources. The school site has agreed to teach asynchronously and be mindful of the inequities that our students are facing. My school site has provided Internet hotspots and chromebooks for students who lack accessibility. The problems of Internet accessibility for underserved population have been more apparent in these recent times. Watkins agrees that the issue of Internet accessibility has grown more complex over the years. Watkins states, "Access varies in terms of type of connection, including broadband, mobile, and high- or

low- capacity networks”, and this has been something that we as a school did not necessarily prepare for (Watkins, 2018, p.23). However, Internet companies were able to support students in need of Wi-Fi and hot spots in this time of need.

On a personal level, this pandemic has greatly impacted me. I would say both in a positive and negative way. It has impacted my clinical portion of my graduate program but has also provided me with the opportunity to be the change in education. We do not know much of what is to come out of this crisis, but we know that things are not going to be the same. I see myself as part of adapting to the new environment around me that has change drastically over a short period of time. This also brought to light how inequitable education is, and this has been a struggle for my students. This moment has created the space for mental health to be on the forefront and not stigmatized.

Our normal is no longer, and there is the sense of slowing down from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. In order to survive we need to work and go places on a time schedule and routine. This is what I have known and been taught in my own educational experience. I now have to teach students how to not be too consumed with the expectations of society, because this pandemic has shown that we are all human. Meaning that we are all living specimens that are trying to survive despite the obstacles. I feel though as of now educators should teach more life skills and become a center in the community structure.

### **Section 3: School Site Research**

*The School Site.* My school site I located by a mountain and has a beautiful view of the. The school itself was once primarily located on the base of the mountain, and more recently the school expanded. The school was once only an elementary school, and in the past few years the school expanded to the main street and created a middle school campus. The two campuses are

referred to as the upper and lower campus. The higher campus serves the kindergarten through fifth graders. The lower campus, which is closer to the main street, serves the sixth through eighth graders.

The school is indeed located on a slope of the mountain and is slanted. The school is outdoors and has a distinct division of the two campuses. The main office separates the upper and lower campuses. Also, since the lower campus is newer the classrooms provide a visual distinction between the campuses. The classes located above the main office have an older look to both the exterior and interior of the classrooms.

My school site has an upstanding reputation in the community. I had conversations with the parents of my focus students and the responses contained nothing but praise. Since the school is located in the “highs” of the city, the occupants are more affluent. Daily there are many people that I see enjoying the outdoors on walks and jogs. The houses surrounding the school are considered to be prime real estate for those who work in the surrounding industries that the city provides. To say the least the area is considered to be safe by the locals who live in the highs.

The school also offers an impressive program for the performing arts that makes it a selling point for people to migrate to the city. The staff and teaching personnel at my school site have all informed me of the school’s reputation of being a “parent’s paradise.” At first, I wasn’t quite sure how to interpret this information, but with my time at the school site I have witnessed this myself. Parents are eager to provide their students with an education that can also prepare them for their future goals. With that being said, parents are very hands on at my school site and have an active role on the campus. Parents are the backbone of the school and have a great influence on the school’s policies.

Among the students the morale is positive on the lower campus where my classroom is located. I do not venture much to the upper campus, but the school overall has a positive tone. I observe students and their interactions with both their peers and staff on a daily basis. Because I do so I can observe that the students are comfortable with communicating with their peers and authority figures on the school site. I often at times have students voluntarily come to my classroom before school or at break time.

Through many conversations with my teacher colleagues there is a consensus among them that the school is both welcoming and proficient in how things are done. Whenever I run into a fellow instructor the conversations are positive and helpful to instructional strategies. The morale amongst teachers and staff are also positive from my daily observations. Overall the school provides incentives for students, teachers, and staff to keep morale high. This is in the form of fundraisers, assemblies, and friendly competition to gain class rewards.

*Personnel.* Over the time that I have spent in the classroom with my mentor teacher I have gathered valuable information about both the area and the students. My teacher colleague has been very helpful in my transition to the school. Through our conversations I have gleaned that the area is affluent and has a bit of an elderly population. Also, that our students mostly commute to the school from different cities. The students are hardworking and eager to learn. My colleague has also assisted me in how to accommodate both the academic and emotional needs of our eighth-grade students.

Teaching eighth grade is quite unique, in that our students are transitioning to young adulthood. It also makes me more aware of their emotional needs and support that I can provide as a teacher. I discovered that my students often want to be heard and acknowledged, so even if it is a small gesture such as a greeting it does impact how they feel about themselves. I personally

feel like my students are struggling with their self-esteem from what I read from their bell work journals. This is a low stake writing exercise to enhance students' writing skills. Some of my students take this opportunity to write down their feelings and problems.

From discussions with my school's principal I was able to gain some insight on the school's policies and structure. The school is quite organized and there are rules and regulations to follow. The three-strike cell phone rule, where students who are written up for cell phone usage during class time. School policies are unfamiliar to me and I assumed that all schools' policies are the same. My administrator explained to me that this is not the case and that our school site has distinctive regulations that differ from the other schools in the district. By familiarizing myself with school policy this has improved my approaches to discipline in the classroom. There are multiple routes to take when it comes to discipline and it was eye opening to see the various ways to handle discipline. My administrator always made me aware of the supportive resources that the school provides such as free and reduced meals, on-site psychologist, and after school programs. Having access to information like this it was helpful to assist and direct my students to the appropriate resource.

Everyday I greet the crossing guard, Daniela, and she ensures the safety of students of the morning and afternoon traffic of drop-off and pickup. Daniela is a mother of three and a resident of the area. From our interactions I have gathered that school staff is few. The district has difficulty retaining reliable staff to fulfill the needs of all the school sites. Daniela mentioned, "The kids are okay I don't have problem, they are better than my kids", and we laughed in unison. It is true that the students rarely give us anything to report on. It is nice to know that I see a familiar face everyday, but it is also concerning to know that her duties are many as a yard duty, crossing guard, and lunch employee. Also, she has made me aware of the lack of janitorial



staff, which makes the campus appear unclean. The concerns are valid in my opinion given the school's reputation. The students are good for the most part, but the campus deserves to be well staffed in order for the school to properly function.

*Problematize the Issue.* Some of the school-wide norms include the binary gender pronouns that students are to go by. In my time at my school site I had a few students come out to me about being gender non-binary. With respect of their gender identification, I take it upon myself to address my student, as they prefer. I understand that this is a sensitive issue for many, but I believe some consensus should be made on the matter. To further avoid confusion or resentment of the student who is transitioning.

Another school policy that is unspoken is that parents can receive accommodations for their students without the proper documentation of an IEP or 504 plans. When I earlier referred to the school site as a "parent's paradise" is meant that parents, specifically helicopter parents, use scare tactics to get their students accommodations. As if they are exempt from the state's process of accommodating the needs of students through testing. I have found this difficult to address with my eighth graders and their parents and guardians when it comes to this. I feel as though if there was more teacher-guardian communication a plan can be made more easily. Instead, parents and guardians go to administration to force accommodations for their student without addressing it with the teacher. Teachers spend a good amount of time with students on a regular basis and can support a parent or guardian's choice to reach out for additional support.

The school is one-to-one where each student has access to an individual chromebook. It is the responsibility of the student to bring the chromebook with them everyday and be prepared. The students are also provided with a school email that gives them access to the school's

Internet. However, the use of technology is not equitable for students who do not have access to Internet at their home.

The school has a small population of English Learners (EL), so the resources are few. There are a few instructional aids that assist EL students during class. Other than that, there are technological resources to assist students and instructors to translate material. At the moment there are no additional resources or supports that are in place for LGBTQ+ students. At the middle school there are quite a few students who are out and are comfortable with sharing their gender identity with others. Other than consulting with the school counselor, students have limited options for LGBTQ+ support. I believe it to be beneficial to students and the school to have support on-site for those who are transitioning with their gender identities.

Similarly, students with significant life experiences have the option to talk with a counselor or school psychiatrist. There are also options of independent learning that takes place at home. For example, I have a student who opted to transition to independent study in order to meet her emotional needs and maintain therapy sessions. The school does well with providing students with a public education that they can handle. However, I have yet to identify the supports in place of McKinney-Vento students who are homeless. As far as I know there are no supports in place for these students.

For students with special needs there are classes for students who are not yet in general education. These designated classes are available for students with severe disorders that are unmanageable for a general education classroom. Instructional aides are also available for students with special needs who are transitioning to a general education classroom setting. Additionally, transportation is provided for students with severe special needs to ensure that they can get to school.

#### **Section 4: School Mission/ Vision & Demographics**

*Demographics.* The school is dominantly Hispanic or Latino, Asian, and White. There are less than four percent of Black and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students who attended the school. The school is majority male, but the difference between male and female is six percent. The total of Limited English Proficiency, or LEP, is about thirty percent overall. Which other languages that are spoken by students are not provided, but from my experience in the classroom the dominant language is English. This seems to be throughout the campus that English is spoken and known by the students. (R.O. Elementary)

From my research there is no concrete data about the staff, faculty, and administration that can be obtained at this time. Since the COVID-19 outbreak it has been difficult to retrieve that information. However, from my observations on campus and conversations with administration, mostly females work on the campus. There is a variety of instructors and other personnel of Asian, White, Black, and Hispanic or Latino descent.

*Mission/Vision.* The Mission and Vision for the school has developed over the years. With the surrounding area continuously adapting to the changing economy, so did the school. The school was once an elementary school and then later added a middle school campus, or “lower campus”. With that, the school had to adept its original mission statement to reflect the new added campus and the neighboring housing development. The school adopted its name from the housing development nearby. Below is the school’s Mission statement:

“Welcome to the Academy! Here at the Academy., students will engage in science, technology and mathematics instruction which is built through engineering disciplines and embedded in creative arts. At the core of our mission is S.O.A.R (**Solve** problems wisely, respect **Others** and myself, have a positive **Attitude**, make **Responsible** choices).

Our curriculum and our entire community is encouraged to participate in the academic and character development of all our students, and thus providing them with life-long skills that will help them become successful contributors to society, preparing them to be agile and competitive in this modern day and age.

#### *WHAT IS STEAM?*

With an emphasis on post-secondary readiness, the **STEAM** (SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, ENGINEERING, ARTS, and MATHEMATICS) curriculum will prepare students for college and beyond, while producing environmentally literate and cultured students. The Academy will develop students' creativity, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving skills, building confidence to deal with 21st century needs." (The Academy Mission and Vision statement)

With this statement, the school puts emphasis on the sciences and arts. It also includes the school's mission of S.O.A.R. this core concept is encouraged throughout the district. This information can be found on the school's website. The Mission and Vision of the school is also displayed throughout the campus such as the main office and classrooms. It is mandatory for all classrooms to display the S.O.A.R. mission for students to refer to.

The Mission and Vision statement helps foster a positive and collaborative relationship with community members by reaching out to the community and being aware of the surrounding demographic. The Mission and Vision statement is friendly and welcoming to the public. It endorses the development of students to be well rounded and competitive in the surrounding industries. With the connection to the surrounding community, the school's name, both the

community and school are tied to this Mission and Vision statement. This creates a reputation that is succeeded by the students, or future innovators of the world.

The inclusion of technology in the curriculum is greatly beneficial for our students considering the school's demographics. According to Watkins, "Several quantitative studies suggest that black and Latino teens are quite active when it comes to the use of, for example, social and mobile media", this suggests that black and Latino students thrive in a technological learning environment (Watkins, 2018, p.20). In my opinion, the shift made to STEAM-based curriculum is proving to be beneficial for the students in my classroom.

Since the S.O.A.R. expectations are posted in the classroom it is a main part of classroom ecology. The school provides incentives for students and teachers to display acts stated in the mission statement. There are quarterly assemblies and opportunities for teachers to nominate students who demonstrate these expectations.

*Problematize the Issue.* According to the 2018-2019 CAASPP Test results in English Language Arts and Mathematics data of students meeting or exceeding the State Standard the school thrived in English Language Arts. In comparison Mathematics had thirty-eight percent of students meeting or exceeding the State Standard. In English Language Arts the school received fifty percent (The Academy SARC). This data somewhat contradicts the school's Mission and Vision statement of STEAM and emphasis on mathematics and sciences. There is mention of creative arts and communication, and one would think that the data would reflect a lesser percentage in comparison.

The recent shift to STEAM curriculum is an attempt to improve the scores in mathematics and sciences. The school is creating a curriculum to meet the needs of the students

to be progressive 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. In this day and age, it is expected that students are well equipped and well-rounded for the workforce.

On campus there is a Parent Teacher Association, or PTA, that is active. This organization promotes community involvement and fundraisers for the school. The strong presence of parent involvement creates a positive relationship between the school and community. However, the PTA primarily consists of local parents who reside in the surrounding area. In the recent years the school's population has grown due to the construction of a Performing Arts school. Meaning, that the school's population no longer reflects that of the community itself.

This is problematic to meeting the needs of the community and students, which greatly differ. Students who commute to campus daily do not have the opportunity to be involved in community events that are not during school hours. As a result, the school rarely has events outside of school hours. This makes it difficult for community members to be involved or support the school and its goals.

On campus those who thrive the most are the academic achievers and social butterflies. It is also known throughout campus that students who attend the Performing Arts School are the high achievers in comparison to the students who are non-affiliated with the performing arts school. Those who challenge authority and are not academically successful are least likely to thrive. From my interactions with students the favored treatment of Performing Arts School students seems to cause a divide of students who are non-affiliated. There is a social stigma against students who are not associated with the Performing Arts School. This divide has increased in the recent years and students notice how the Performing Arts School is known as the

“better school”. The students who identify with the Performing Arts School, are deemed to be high achievers and come from a higher socioeconomic class.

### **Section 5: Classroom Reflection**

*Ecology.* My classroom ecology is student lead and welcoming. The students are in table groups to be able to collaborate with one another. I have made the effort to be relatable and personable with my students. For example, on my desk I have a few of my favorite things such as the color green, Warriors pennant, and Disney photos. I like to share with my students some of my interests to encourage them to be natural in the classroom. In our classroom we worked from the beginning of the school year to have a growth mindset, or an open attitude, to be objective to events and philosophies in history (Hammond, 2015, p.112). Also, my students and I go over digital literacy, or the foundational skills that are required to participate in technology-driven classwork, this is important to go over with my students because we have a STEAM-based curriculum (Watkins, 2018, p.25). We go over how to responsibly use technology in the classroom and how to search for reliable academic websites.

The classroom space offers flexible seating for students and the specific grouping of students make it possible for students to participate. I would say that my classroom feels like home, since I have taken the efforts to create a warm and welcoming space. For my students they would say that it feels like any other classroom, but the space makes it so that students are able to access the necessary tools in the classroom. The walls in the room display student work and add a personal ownership for students in the classroom.

We do have a routine upon entry into the classroom. First students enter the space and are greeted by the mentor teacher and me. Students check for any papers that are placed on their way in then proceed to their seats. From there we have a presentation with a morning agenda and

bell work that the students complete independently until instructed to converse with their peers. Work is turned in on a daily basis to the “Student Center” where each period has its own tray.

Along with routines we also have a reward system put in place for each class periods. There is a point system put in place where all class periods compete with one another to try to win the reward at the end. The rewards vary from a donut day to movie days depending on what we have time for in the schedule. This friendly completion keeps students motivated to stay on track during the class period. Students are rewarded for transitioning to new activities and staying on task. Also, for keeping noise levels down and minimizing side conversations. All in all, my students are rewarded for behavior in the classroom and for participation.

Every month there is an assembly that highlights individual students' achievements either academically or socially. However, for my students in my classroom we have our own way of acknowledging one another respectfully. As a class the expectation is that once you walk through the door, you enter as a historian and leave your biases at the door. Meaning that we are looking at the topics and events from a historical point of view. I also take the time to model how a respectful conversation looks like. As I model and demonstrate I provide an example and non-example of my expectations to the students in order to make myself clear to my students.

To support my students' socio-emotional growth I implement daily check-ins. There are multiple ways to do a check in with students like greeting them at the door or having students write down how they feel. With the written portion we either do a bell work exercise or an anonymous drop box. The box has what students feel and is symbolic to rid themselves of unwanted feelings.

The classroom seating is a group and I utilize the groups as min-restorative justice circles



to have students share amongst their peers. Then the discussion will be taken to the whole class so that students can share aloud and be validated for their feelings. This activity also helps with their adolescent development by encouraging students to display self-expression.

Part of my classroom ecology is to prioritize accountability. By having a class rewards system, I am holding the students accountable for one another. Also having individual conversations with students about their academic performance reinforces individual responsibility. For example, if a student does not turn in an assignment, they are individually responsible for filling out a "late slip" and state a reason for why their assignment is late. There is also an "absent slip" to fill out in the case where a student is absent. I am preparing my students to take ownership of their actions for when they move on to high school. My students are becoming young adults and are gradually taking on more and more responsibility in their lives. Also, there is a class calendar online that links everything that we did for the day. It is updated daily and stays on Google Classroom until the end of the quarter. Students are directed to first check the class calendar before asking the teacher what they missed for that day. This also reinforces individual responsibility for students. By having students check on their own also maximizes class time so that students do not interrupt instruction.

***Demographics.*** My first period class primarily identifies as gender binary, or female and male gender pronouns. I have two students that identify as non-binary and are in the process of transitioning to their preferred name. The class is very diverse with students who come from a Hispanic, White, Asian, and African heritages. The class as a whole is proficient at speaking and writing in English from the interactions and assignments that I have gathered thus far. However, I am aware of my students who are either classified as IFEP or RFEP and require additional support in the classroom regarding language.

First period has five GATE students, two 504 students, and three students with IEPs. Each group requires specific accommodations that are in their individual documented plans. The GATE students require challenging work that will allow them to further their learning. I differentiate for them in the class by assigning advanced reading. My GATE students are capable of reading at a higher-grade level and making critical connections. I promote higher order thinking by including questions that probe their minds to make historical connections to the present day.

Students with 504 and IEP plans usually require additional time or support on assignments. For these students I provide reading at their designated reading level and sentence stems for question responses. The questions are more surface level and do not go in depth to make deeper historical connections. However, the questions still meet the grade level standards and do not overwhelm my students who need more time to be able to make those connections.

Each class period is different and has different needs. My second period is rowdier and has more students with 504 and IEP plans. Second period requires more direct instruction and guided practice in class. There is also an increase in males in the classroom and they are often off task and engage in conversations about their personal interests in sports and video games. My second period is full of cliques and best friends that take time in class to chat about what was the latest gossip on the blacktop. Second period requires more physical movement and structured group work to ensure that classwork can be done.

Third period is after break and they are loud upon entry. This class period has more GATE students that need challenging work as well as voice and choice. Many of my GATE students like to create visuals or write short stories. This is my most talkative class, and at times

it is difficult to keep them on task. However, most of the discussion is academic and they each want to share their thoughts and ideas, which causes uproar of voices mumbled together.

*Problematize the Issue.* In the physical space of my classroom I have the use of a Smart board, computer, two breakout rooms, supply room, two whiteboards, electrical outlets, and flexible seating. The electrical outlets are strategically located throughout the classroom for students to be able to charge their devices. I utilize a majority of my resources, but I feel as though I could use the whiteboards and breakout rooms more. The breakout rooms are used primarily for gallery walks and displaying student work. I am still experimenting with possible ways to get the most out of this amazing resource.

I also have access to paraeducators who assist my students with IEPs in the classroom. I purposefully place students with IEPs in a location where the instructional aid can sit with them comfortably. The PTA is another great resource for supporting us with fundraisers for needed supplies. With the COVID-19 crisis I think these support systems should focus on providing students with chromebooks and Internet.

## **Part D: Reflection of a Social Justice Educator**

### **Classroom Ecology & Teacher Presence**

*Establishing a baseline of respect for students and their learning.* Throughout my first year of teaching establishing a baseline of respect was always expected, but I struggled with establishing a baseline for students' learning. Having been introduced later into the school year put me in a place where I was trying to adapt to the already established classroom ecology of my mentor teacher. With my mentor teacher there was a baseline of respect already established for both her and I. However, my late arrival to the classroom motivated me to grow as an educator and allow myself the time to establish my own respect for students and their learning.

My strengths in this area are conversations and compromise. I was able to make my way around the classroom and talk with almost every student in each period. My efforts to create relationships with each student made it possible for me to establish a baseline of respect with them. I primarily focused on being likeable yet disciplined with my students, but at times found it difficult to balance this.

My areas for continued development would be in being a "warm demander" and creating the baseline of respect for students' learning. Since I took my first year as a student teacher to focus on respect with and for students, I would like to continue developing a respect for their learning. Some ways that I can accomplish this is to ask students what they want from their learning experience, or what topics would they like to focus on in the unit. After this experience I learned that students come with diverse backgrounds and funds of knowledge. Each student has individual learning goals that they wish to achieve. In the competencies matrix this was

something that I often revisited, but had trouble executing. In my lesson planning process, I would reflect on each student in each period and their needs and strengths in the classroom. I can continue to build assess students' strengths and needs in the classroom with the use of self-assessments to provide accurate information of where they stand (Marzano, 2017, p.22).

*Setting and demonstrating expectations.* In this area I have grown tremendously in comparison to the beginning of the school year. At first, I was hesitant to come off as strict or stern to my students, but I learned that many of my students need structure. My students need structure, routine, and organization from me as their teacher so that they can be productive in the classroom. It took practice and reflection to be able to set and demonstrate my expectations of students. In the beginning I was relying on the assumption that students had a similar educational experience as I did. I assumed that all students wanted to learn, and history was their primary subject of interest. This was not the case for many of my students who had a large interest in the performing and fine arts. For my students their "conservatory" or art classes were their priority, and all other subjects were not quite as prioritized.

I took the time to observe my mentor teacher and continue practicing both setting and demonstrating expectations. I threw my assumptions out the window and gave explicit and clear instructions. This was a new experience for me, and this practice challenged me to home in on the content and standards. I had to interpret the standards and chunk the content to present to my students (Marzano, 2017, p.30). I worked on modeling activities and assessments with students and took time to walk through the assessment in class with step-by-step instruction. Also, with classroom management and ecology demonstrated what a safe (e.g. chairs pushed in, keeping paths clear in case of emergencies, etc.) and clean classroom environment looked like. There

were many instances when I would give both example and non-example of how to come in the classroom and maintain it.

During the second half of the school year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic our school site gave teachers the autonomy to create the expectations of our students considering the manic state of the world. This was a trying time for myself to really reflect on the socio-emotional state of my students. Knowing that my students need structure and routine, I recorded a video stating and demonstrating expectations of an online learning environment. Many of the expectations were similar but needed to be adapted for the online platform. The process was new for myself and my students and keeping that in mind I emphasized the flexibility of distance learning. I tried things that I have never tried before, and my students were seeing resiliency and adaptation from me. This was a humanizing experience for my students to see me make mistakes and learn from them. They saw that I was trying to adapt to this new sense of normal and make the best of it for them to still have a good educational experience. Also, this was my chance to establish a clear expectation of students coming directly from me and not my mentor teacher. I took this on and plan to continue setting and demonstrating expectations to encourage students to be confident in their work and to continue to set the bar higher for themselves.

*Supporting productive learning with culturally sustaining practice.* I work diligently to check in with students daily. I use routines to check-in with students, whether it is greeting at the door, walking around during Bell Work/Agendas, or listening in during discussions. I make the effort to ensure that students feel both seen and heard in the classroom. I also make the additional effort for my focus students' academic and socio-emotional needs. Such as Zoey, who meets with me monthly to check in on how she is doing socially, academically, and emotionally.

I often walk around the classroom and use proximity to involve all students and hold them accountable. I make it a point to stop and talk at each table to check in with students. I use these strategies to enhance my relationships with my students, which have improved my instructional practice overall (Marzano, 2017, p.68). I plan to continue to be a resilient, professional educator who actively seeks advice in order to improve my practice.

*Using knowledge of students to anticipate and limit unproductive behaviors.* Moving forward I plan on creating appropriate consequences for students and ensure that I do not allow myself to get too frustrated and seek to punish rather than to address the issues and give restorative consequences. I realize the error in my ways and use reflection as a practice to improve my instruction (Marzano, 2017, p.41). I plan to anticipate gaps in the lesson to ensure that all classes receive the same rich lessons. Since each period differs from one another, I am not as consistent with the lesson throughout the day. All depending on timing, interruptions, and my energy level can cause the lesson to not be as insightful as another class period. I will practice coming up with a plan of action to keep on track with the lesson. This can be done instead of rushing through the lesson and sacrificing clarity and checking for understanding.

I also plan to focus on reflecting on what is grade-level appropriate behavior and what is non-negotiable behavior, versus what can be redirected appropriately without punitive measures being implemented. I would also like to provide students with more opportunities to be teachers and/or experts in the classroom. This can be done through strategic project-based learning, which I had the opportunity to enhance my knowledge by taking a class on project-based learning.

*Harnessing instructional cohesion and intensity.* I have worked at improving specific aspects of my teacher presence. I improved at reinforcing positive behavior and using her tone to

deliberately communicate positivity and productivity within her classroom environment. I plan to continue to work toward developing cohesive units with measurable objectives that can be met within a single class period. I will utilize the DOK wheel to help her build upon each lesson throughout the unit for students to meet the intended learning goals and be successful in their formal assessments.

### **Content Knowledge to Promote Access, Learning, and Achievement**

*Developing facility with the curriculum.* I utilize a variety of rich resources in my lessons which appropriately challenge my students. I seek resources and ideas from other educators and colleagues when I need support. I have also turned to social media platforms and connecting with various educators nationwide.

I also take into consideration the interests of my students and look for multiple resources to access the content such as images and videos. When planning for CalTPA I kept in mind the needs of each of my focus students. Rosie needed sentence starters and additional guidance embedded during class to complete assignments. She also benefitted from being able to easily access content through media such as images, audio, and videos. Planning for CalTPA helped me to always to consider the needs of all my students and to be flexible with the content.

I use my knowledge of students' learning levels to ensure that the lessons are challenging enough for our higher learners while scaffolding and moving at a reasonable pace for our learners who struggle. I plan to continue bringing creativity into my lesson planning to meet my students' needs as well as my own. I find the joy in teaching to incorporate various ways of learning to keep the content fresh and exciting.



*Aligning curriculum and instruction with measurable goals.* Moving forward I plan to continue to work on her use of state standards when planning curriculum and ensure that it is aligned with individual student's goals. This can be done by collecting data in class and student's 504s and IEPs. I also want to focus on implementing cross-disciplinary lessons with other teachers. I have enjoyed learning about project-based learning and the flexibility to collaborate with multiple subject areas. This is something that I can see myself implementing at a future school site. I can also consider reaching out to teachers from other contents to tie our unit with their past or current units of study to help students see how their various classes connect.

During my student teaching I struggled with unit design and planning. Specifically, creating a cohesive and creative unit. I need to continue working on unit design and improving on this skill. I plan to be proactive in asking for support more, and a direct example of my growth is the work that I had prepared for CalTPA Cycle 2 submission. I thought strategically about making direct connections between the three lessons that I planned for the unit segment by asking myself the three planning questions: How will I help students engage in structured practice? How will I help students examine similarities and differences? How will I help students examine errors in reasoning? (Marzano, 2017, p.43). For the remainder of the semester I improved on this skill with co-creating a unit on the Civil War. My strengths in creativity and seeking for assistance with other instructors really benefitted my additional needs in unit planning.

### **Instructional Practices to Promote Learning and Engagement**

*Making productive learning accessible.* I constantly make connections to prior learning. I also give students opportunities to reflect and see how current content lends itself to past

lessons/content. I use technology to support student's learning and to enhance the content. Throughout the school year I have used a variety of tools to scaffold for students and has improved on my usage of guided practice & modeling. I am reflective and can both identify and acknowledge when something in the lesson did not work. I use this strength of mine to continue to get stronger throughout the day because I am constantly reflecting and adjusting my instruction.

Another strength of mine is the ability to manage multiple elements in a lesson and develop multi-modal lessons with considering learners' needs. I take full ownership of the classroom and an active facilitator of student learning. By the end of the school year, my objective writing improved tremendously. I often think about how to implement measurable power verbs and have the activities be driven by them. Also, to utilize the assessment for my students to meet the intended learning goals.

***Using instructional practices to grow students' knowledge, skills and understanding.*** I plan to continue to improve my instructions and make sure that they are clear and explicit. Part of this is anticipating where students may struggle and plan for that. I also plan to continue to work on consistently differentiating for struggling and advanced learners. Voice and choice could be a wonderful way to help with differentiating. Especially with my English Learners who need additional support. Working and interviewing my focus student Sahar, improved my instructional practices to grow students' knowledge by providing more voice and choice. I would also like to continue developing my modeling and think alouds for students. Moving forward, I plan on pairing both modeling with strategic think-alouds, in order to help my students, understand my thought process as an expert historian. This will allow my students to follow and

get comfortable with this practice. In addition, I will consider the ways in which I can demonstrate appropriate and increasing rigor. This will be achieved through strategic planning of cohesive units.

### **Assessments to Inform Instruction and Promote Learning**

*Identifying and met students where they were academically and socio-emotionally.* I use a variety of tools to assess student learning. I assess the data to drive future instruction and plan for reteaching. I have provided feedback and allowed students to re-do assignments which has helped to encourage students to read the feedback. I use technology to assess students informally and it creates excitement and boosts retention by pausing between questions to address areas that students struggled. I experiment with new assessments regularly, and this has been beneficial for my students. I also use technology on a regular basis, and always assign closure exit tickets, specifically with the TILT ticket that I employ. I give students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their learning as well by providing voice and choice. I consider this area to be a strength of mine, because of my significant involvement in grading and assessment development. I give quality, positive and constructive feedback, which aids students in retention and strategic practice that is distributed over time.

*Using assessments strategically.* I plan to continue to find creative ways to ensure that feedback is being read and addressed by students and their families. In order to boost retention with assessments, I have students revise their work based on her feedback. I plan to continue to work diligently to provide individual feedback on each students' formative and summative assessments. I also plan to use my strengths to use assessments to build off one another and use them in backwards planning to design cohesive units.

## **Social Justice Dispositions to Promote Access, Learning, Achievement and Future Opportunity and Success**

*Growing self-awareness* A strength of mine is having a well-developed understanding of social justice issues and how they impact education. I am especially aware of my own growth and consciousness and seeks ways to incorporate similar growth and consciousness for students. My voluntary participation in academic conferences (presenting) indicate my commitment to growth in this competency but also to ways in which she can contribute to the growth of others in education. Also, reaching out to other indigenous educators in the surrounding tribes for resources to decolonize the education system. I am a reflective educator, who only wants what is best for students. Since the closure of school sites, I had to take on consistently communicating with students and parents. This improved my communication with parents/guardians and has made a stronger effort to learn about my students as people beyond the classroom as a result. This has also improved my rapport with students.

I plan to continue to use these strengths in my future teaching practices. I am aware that wherever I go will have its own challenges and obstacles to overcome. I am a resilient person who never gives up. I also think that that mentality kept me motivated throughout this program. I can relate this to the one hundred-meter hurdles, where you need to carry the starting momentum to the finish line. Each hurdle requires you to stay in rhythm to make sure that your lead leg gets over faster and faster each time you go over a hurdle. Saying all of this to say, that I take these obstacle head on and keep my balance of life and work in order to complete the goal of educating my students.

***Raising consciousness.*** I plan to continue to connect with families, households, and the community in order to learn more about the world that impacts my students' social justice dispositions. This school year has really taught me not to make assumptions about students and their motivations. This was originally an obstacle that I created for myself when starting at my placement. Once I created relationships with both parents/guardians and students, was I able to create a clearer image of what my student's backgrounds consisted of. This experience was eye opening for me and allowed me to learn from my students as well.

***Sharing power and tools.*** As an ongoing practice, I plan to focus on creating allyships with parents/guardians in order to ensure that I am helping my students succeed to the best of their abilities and with the support of their families. With the current state of the world now there is no escaping the oppression face by people of color. I plan to use my overall strengths as an educator to create a pedagogy that is adaptable to my students' needs. I learned that taking time to have a conversation about our feelings is important for students to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom. To also prioritize our individual well-being and take the time to engage in self-care activities.

## Conclusion

Now I am proud to say that I am a critical social justice educator who is eager and ready to decolonize education. With the abundance of knowledge that I have gathered throughout this first-year of student teaching, I now feel confident in my abilities to execute these practices in the classroom. I recall my first week of student teaching and it was something foreign and unfamiliar to me. I spent most of my day commuting to and from my school site to teach my wonderful eighth graders. I looked forward every day to greet them on the way into the classroom. I know I appreciated the high fives, low fives, and hugs at the door. Reflecting now, my students appreciated this too even though it was never explicitly said.

What we previously knew to be the normal classroom is no longer. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic classrooms have been replaced with online learning. I look back on my experience and miss my students dearly. I can only hope that one day that they too will look back on their eighth-grade year with their student teacher Ms. Green. I am happy and grateful to have this experience, because I never knew I could be a teacher. Now not only am I a teacher, but I am preparing the next generation of critical social justice warriors!

I also have a new appreciation for educators at all levels. I had the opportunity to converse with many educators and it feels nice not to be alone in the fight to social equality and equity for our students. I will continue to be the change that I hope to see in the world one day, and to continue the journey of a lifetime learner.

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