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Aly Lopez

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#### Recommended Citation

Lopez, Aly. (2020). *My Journey to Becoming a Critical Social Justice Educator*. CGU Theses & Dissertations, 163. [https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu\\_etd/163](https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd/163). doi: 10.5642/cguetd/163

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Ethnographic Narrative (My Journey to Becoming a Critical Social Justice Educator)

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## ETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE PROJECT/LOPEZ

## Abstract

The purpose of my ethnographic narrative is to illustrate my journey as a critical social justice educator. This narrative is a cumulation of my work as a Master student in teacher education as well as an emerging educator in multiple terms and grade levels. Throughout my work, I have worked with several mentors, over 150 students, and their families. Whether it be a student, a teacher, a peer, or a family member, I gained valuable insight from their perspective and experience in the education system. I learned how many wonderful people exist and are willing to support positive and radical change. I have also learned how much that change is needed in many school systems still that are working under deep structures of schooling. I am motivated and inspired to continue to learn and grow as a CSJ educator.

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## ETHNOGRAPHIC NARRATIVE PROJECT/LOPEZ

## Preface

My ethnographic narrative has truly supported and encouraged my growth to becoming a critical social justice (CSJ) educator. I have learned invaluable lessons from reflection, observations, my students, my peers, the families I've worked with, my mentors, my family, and myself. Each section of my ethnographic narrative explores a specific component of my journey as a CSJ educator.

In this ethnographic narrative I have learned from, observed and interviewed three focus students from my residency placement. The goal in doing so is to create a more meaningful and relevant academic and social emotional educational experience in the classroom for all my future students. One of the focus students will be identified as an English Language Learner, another student will have a significant life experience or event in their life, and another student will either have IEP/504 Plan or in a GATE program. All of my data that I have included in this ethnographic narrative has been personally observed, gathered from mentors, conversations with students and/or families.

My ethnographic narrative illuminates my early teaching philosophy, shines light on my students, dives deep into the community I taught in, and finally expresses my growth, progress, and future plans as an emerging CSJ educator. I have learned rich cultural experience by listening and learning from my students and families. I have moved from theory to practice in dismantling the normality and practices of deep structures of schooling. I have grown immensely as a learner, an educator, and a person. I am deeply passionate about this work and I will continue to pursue it as a life-long learner.

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### My Journey to Becoming a Critical Social Justice Educator

#### **Part A: Early Philosophy and Goals**

##### **Journey to Teaching**

My journey to teaching has been far from typical. I was not an A student and I struggled constantly with learning. I was diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and dyslexia which made it difficult to focus on studying or learning new information. My parents did not approve of either of these diagnoses and told me that they were made up and just to try harder at school. This was so difficult for me to process. From the time I was in first grade until I was a senior in high school, I remember prying every night for a ‘stronger brain’ and for an answer to why school was so difficult for me. I didn’t want my family believing I was lazy and I was investing ten times the amount of time and energy as my peers for half of the grade. I knew trying medication or any means of opening a dialogue about my struggles wasn’t an option, so I continued to struggle until I received my grades in my first semester of university. I was placed on academic probation and I felt defeated and lost. I turned to a counselor that advised me to speak to a nurse practitioner and I eventually was placed on Adderall, a prescription medication for people with ADHD or ADD.

The next semester when I received my grades, I broke down in tears when I realized how much I improved. Throughout my university experience I felt a constant battle between understanding my academic potential with the support of counseling and medication and the disappointment in myself for not being able to be successful without the two aides. After years of trying different supports and ways of understanding my challenges as a learner, I finally found that the combination of consistent exercise, meditation, reflection, yoga, and counseling, was the answer I had been praying for since I was six years old. I was able to stop taking any medication

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and finally felt a sense of deep-rooted self-accomplishment for finding the avenue that worked for me. According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities, “1 in 16 public school students have IEPs for specific learning disabilities (SLD) or other health impairments (OHI), which covers ADHD” (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2019). This fact illuminates my implicit understanding that I will have many students facing individualized struggles in learning and that it is my responsibility to create an optimal space of supportive and meaningful instruction. This also means I will hopefully be able to shine a light for struggling students on the power of determination, motivation, and differentiated curriculum so they feel more empowered even when they are struggling.

I didn't know I wanted to be a teacher right away. I began my journey in university as an English literature student to transition to English education then to psychology then to theatre and finally to arrive at child development. Even when I found the study of child development it was by accident. I was completing my general education requirements and it was an elective course that I chose at random. My first day of class I realized I was meant to be in this field. I fell in love with the research aspect, the field work, innovation practices of child development and for the first time in my life I learned to love school, and overall learning. This was the turning point for my academic and professional career path, it was at this moment that I realized my entire path of struggling academically and in with learning in general was so that I could teach with a meaningful, empathetic, and personally insightful way.

My first job in university was an afterschool program for children ages four to eight who had been diagnosed as being a part of the autism spectrum. It was at this job where I found my ability to communicate so well with students in special circumstances. I remember one student was eight years old and struggled with verbal communication. He had never said a word and was

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able to communicate with sign language. He was the student that no one else wanted to work with because he was easily frustrated and frequently became violent. I worked with this student every week for nine months and I will never forget the moment he said his first word. I asked him if he wanted a cookie for snack, like usual, and as I looked at his hands for the sign he said “Yaz.” I remember looking at him with such teary eyes and being so overwhelmingly happy. For weeks we continued to work together and he developed his verbal vocabulary so quickly I was shocked. This was such an educational and eye-opening in my journey to teaching because it made me appreciate the fact that students need specific support for their individualized needs, but most importantly that once a student finds their personalized avenue of learning their ability to learn exponentially increases. This was my first real life experience and understanding that all students are capable and as teachers it is our responsibility to help them find the way they learn best.

I was so fortunate to be a part of the child development program at CSU, Chico. I was exposed to so many types of learners, intervention strategies, studies, and the beginning of meaningful instruction. I worked with infants, toddlers, elementary school students, middle school students, high school students, and 18-24 year old students. These experiences reinforced my understanding that all learners at any point in their journey are capable and most of them want to grow and learn and may just need a more specified approach to learning.

### **Critical Social Justice**

After I graduated with my Bachelors of Arts in child development from CSU, Chico, I moved back home to Arcadia and was hired as a substitute teacher in the district of Azusa. I am still working in the district as a substitute and I have learned so much in my time there. Most of the students in the district of Azusa come from families that are struggling financially and I have

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seen first-hand how much this impacts their journey in learning. Many times students come to school hungry, exhausted and drained. It isn't until one sees the difference in person that one can truly appreciate how impactful it is to students. As a new teacher I want to make sure that my students are in a space where they feel safe, welcomed and heard. I know that this will take practice to accomplish, but as teachers we have to acknowledge how impactful our students' home lives are to their learning. There are so many factors in our students' lives that have a drastic impact on their learning which is why social justice is such a key component in meaningful and successful teaching. As teachers we have a duty to our students to consistently practice recognizing that groups of race, class, gender, and learning ability are not equal. We have a responsibility to our students to create a space of qualitative equity and a meaningful classroom ecology.

### **Family Background**

Family is what has the most importance, significance, and influence in my personal, professional, and academic life. I am blessed with an abundance of family members who are rich in culture, history and intelligence. My life has been so enriched with my familial background and immense talent. My family is full of published authors, radio singers, professional dancers, university professors, medical doctors, and self-made professionals. The astounding amount of accomplishments are only second to the beautifully historic stories of my relatives and our ancestors.

My grandmother on my mother's side was sixteen years old when she had my mother in Mexico. My grandfather was the mayor of his town and though he never married my grandmother, he always financially and socially took care of his family. At the time my grandfather had already married and divorced three other women and after my grandmother

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moved to the united states with my mother and my aunt, he then had a final relationship with a fifth women and had a total of 17 children. Today, my mother frequently stays in touch with the majority of her siblings and remains very close with them, regardless of the fact that most of them still reside in Mexico.

My grandmother made the decision to move to the United States with my mother who was 11 at the time and my aunt who was 8 or 9. She then met my step-grandfather (my Tata) here in the United States, who was the only grandfather on my mother's side that I ever knew, since my mother's father passed away before I was born. This move was a drastic change for my aunt and my mother because they came from being very well taken care of in Mexico to struggling financial in the United States. My father was born in the United States. His mother was born in Mexico and his father was born in Nicaragua. My uncle is my father's only brother and was also born in the United States. When my father and his brother were growing up they rarely saw their father and their mother was struggling to support her two children.

My father met my mother when she was 14 and was told by my grandmother that she was too young to dance with a boy because she hadn't had her quinceañera, so in his broke Spanish at the time, told my grandmother not to worry because "he wasn't going to squeeze her too tightly." This won my grandmother's affection for my father and their journey began there. When my mom was 16 they began to date, they then married when she was 19 and have been together ever since. I believe it was their struggling upbringing that tied my parents together so well because they started so young with almost nothing and worked unquestionably hard to accomplish their dreams. My mother is now a CEO of multiple fashion labels and my father is a real estate broker and investor.

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My family's background and history plays a significant role in my pursuit of teaching. Growing up there was always a sense of "I want better for you than I had" from my parents and they worked diligently to give my sister and I that life. There was always a strong pressure to achieve in all aspects, but especially in academia. Which was a heightened added stress for me growing up struggling so much in school. So when I finally had my shining moment in college and found my niche it was a defining moment. It is also important to note that in Mexico a teacher is revered to a very high respect, which was consistently expressed by my family. I also have any cousins, aunts and uncles who are in the education field. When I found child development and education I felt that it was my calling. I had this overwhelming feeling of belonging and accepting community from my peers and from my family.

### **Assets and Needs**

An implicit bias that I know will challenge my ability to be an effective teacher to all my students is the misconception that inspiration is more powerful than academic rigor. One of my favorite TED talks is Rita Pierson's "Every kid needs a champion" and she expresses her passion for teaching in a motivating way (Palmer, 2013). This made me so inspired to teach with meaningful instruction and compassion which is absolutely vital, but there needs to be a balance. This one is really important for me to reflect on because when I was in school struggling the only thing I kept searching for was an unwavering inspiration in a family member, in a textbook, in a teacher or in a peer. Just someone that knew what it felt like to be struggling so much and to continue to persevere. As an adult and an approaching new teacher I want to be that champion for my students, but I have to take a humbling step back and acknowledge the need for balance in academic rigor. It may not be simply enough to motivate my students and expect them to be successful because that is what I needed as a support to my challenges. I have to access my

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students individualized and global needs to support the most successful classroom environment for them.

### **Goals**

My goals as a new teacher are to create a successful classroom ecology, be as accessible as possible to my students and families and to teach with meaningful instruction. I will create an environment where my students feel safe, heard, and ready to learn. I will practice creating meaningful relationships, Hammond explains how crucial building trust in the classroom is and that it takes time. “Students will begin to feel cared for when they recognize and experience familiar forms of affection and nurturing” (Hammond, 2015). I will acknowledge and recognize that all students have their own stories and journeys and welcome them to share and celebrate them in the classroom. I will continue my practice in having a growth mindset with respect and understanding of my own biases. I will advocate for meaningful instruction for all students at the school I will be teaching in and I will do my best to create a space that is non-stress triggered and a positive classroom.

My goals as a first year teacher also include being an empowering and uplifting model of positivity for my students. Each day, I want my students to come into my classroom knowing their teacher is excited and inspired to help them achieve their unique level of academic and socio-emotional success. I want my classroom to be a nurturing, safe haven for all my students to experience a calmness and feel abundantly cared for, in a space where they can speak their mind and be heard. There are so many outside factors in student’s lives that can create consistent trauma and I want my classroom to be a space that is meaningfully uplifting, calm, and nurturing.

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Another teaching goal that I have is I want my students to fall in love with learning. I know this is not an easy goal, but it is very personal and important to me. I severely struggled growing-up with my education, because I didn't find the way I learn best until much later in life and I didn't have teachers with a passion to help me find it. If I model my enthusiasm for scaffolding my students' individualistic styles of learning, I hope they find the way they learn best and start to fall in love with learning. I want my classroom to be a space that is full of motivation and academic rigor where students feel a sense of pride and inspired to learn. I want to create a space that is optimal for my students to thrive in every sense of the word.

My biggest challenge with all of my goals will be the fact that none of these goals will come overnight and they will take practice and patience to become successful. Each day, I will continue to improve my teaching and practice by keeping up to date in child development and education research. I will make sure to actively listen to my students' thoughts, needs, and concerns with empathy and a plan to help them achieve success. I will make myself accessible to my students and families. I will seek professional, meaningful, and experienced support from my fellow teachers and administration members. In all of these ways, I can support my challenges as a new teacher and continue to strive to meet all of my goals. I am so blessed and excited to begin my journey as a new teacher.

### **Part B: My Students**

The purpose of my ethnographic narrative part B is to identify, observe, and interview three focus students to create a more meaningful and individualized academic and social-emotional educational experience for all students in the classroom. One of the focus students will be identified as an English Language Learner, another student will have significant life experience, and another student will either have an IEP/504 Plan/GATE status or displaying

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similar attributes of one of those categories. This narrative will include data from my classroom observations, conversations with my Master teacher, conversations with the students, conversations with students' families, home visits, and interviews.

As I reflect on my past experience in teaching and my current placement with my Master teacher, I start to develop more of a richer perspective on my teaching practices, philosophy, and pedagogy. I am blessed to have experienced every grade level from Tk-12th graders from my undergraduate field work and substitute work in multiple districts. This have widen my lens in terms of recognizing the inequities in education for students of color, low socioeconomic status, and significant life experiences. Through my diverse exposure in grade levels and districts, I have seen the inequalities and inequities for these students in the school and in the classrooms. I have also had the privilege to be a part of advocating, genuine inclusive, and progressive classroom that allots each student with the same equity as all other students. In this narrative, I describe my experience in my current Kindergarten placement, in an affluent and highly academically rigorous school setting and classroom. My students range in cultural backgrounds, funds of knowledge, academic levels, language mastery, socioeconomic status, and families. There will be three students of focus in this narrative.

I will discuss each student's demographic information, academic standing, funds of knowledge, experiences, interests, developmental considerations, socio-emotional development, and social identity. I will share my observations from the classroom, interviews with the students, home visits with families, conversations with the students, conversations with my Master teacher, and conversations with the families.

My goal in my observations, reflections, and analysis of the three focus students is to get to know the students and families better, and further my development as an emerging teacher. As

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I recognize my privilege and explicit bias within my educational journey, I reflect on my personal role as a teacher and life-long learner. I aim to use this reflection to widen my lens of teaching with social justice and what that means in my teaching philosophy, classroom ecology and pedagogy.

I understand the importance of positive personal relationships between students, teachers, and families. Students feel a greater sense of safety and in turn become more willing to share and participate in classroom practices, academically rigorous coursework, and begin to build a stronger sense of classroom culture and community. Families feel a greater sense of safety and care for their child in the classroom and more welcomed to be a part of the classroom themselves. As for me their teacher, it gives me the opportunity to get to know the students and families in a more genuine way. As Tomlinson shares in *How to Differentiate Instruction in Academically Diverse Classrooms*, “Teachers who care about their students as individuals make it a priority to find out about the interests students bring to the classroom with them, and teachers who care about differentiation find a way to use these insights to form their planning” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 97). This is such an important understanding as teachers, to recognize that we learn more about our students from our families and the students’ themselves. We can make a personalized and differentiated teaching approach in their educational journey, which will set up our students for optimal success.

By taking the time and care to get to know our students, what they like, their hobbies, who they are, the challenges and strengthens it creates a more meaningful space where there can be true equity in the classrooms. Equity can only begin to take place in the classrooms when teachers really know what their students’ strengthen and challenges are, so they can differentiate in a way that is accessible to all students.

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I know from my own experiences, observations, and developing practice how impactful these student-teacher relationships can be. In these observations, reflections, teachings and learning journey, I hope to connect more with my Kindergarten students and learn how to best support their socio-emotional, physical, and academic/cognitive needs. These observations and reflections aim to create a more meaningful space in my current Kindergarten classroom as well as develop my instructional practices and pedagogy as a developing teacher that I can take with me to any classroom that I teach in the future.

### **Case Study 1: Harry Wong**

Harry is my focus student with an English Language Learner classification. Harry is Asian American boy that recently moved to the United States from China about a year ago. During the home visit, Harry's mother shared with me that his father often travels back to China for months at a time to manage the family's furniture business. Reflecting on this information I cannot imagine how I would function as a Kindergarten, five-year-old in class if my father was in another country for months at a time. I understand how privileged I was to have both my parents with me during this time in my life to share my Kindergarten stories, interests, new learned skills and everything that is so wonderful about the first year of traditional elementary. Harry seems to have great coping skills and often shares that he speaks to his father over the phone and video calls.

Harry is five years old and turns six this school year he is the typical age of all my students in the class this year. Every morning when he comes to school, he is so excited to be at school, share his weekend stories and cannot wait until social play to play Legos with his classmates. He is a social, happy, curious, and kind child. I did not explicitly ask Harry how he

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identifies, but he seems to be a cisgender boy. He comes to school each morning with clean clothing, a warm smile, and a curious attitude, ready to learn.

I chose to interview and observe Harry because our interactions in the classroom have always been communicative and he loves to share his stories, likes, and interests about school and his home life. He often shares how he plays with his toys at home like his vast collection of Legos and toy cars. This is also consistent with his toy interests in the classroom for social play time. As I mentioned, he counts down the time until social play because he is so eager to play with his Lego's that he brings from home. It is nice to see how much his relationships with his friends is uplifted with when he shares his toys and his overwhelming joy.

From my observations and interview, Harry shared that he thinks his strengths include the subjects of reading and building. Every day the students come into the classroom, do their morning routines of unstacking their chairs, placing their backpacks on their hooks, placing their lunch magnet to bringing or buying, and choose a book to read for independent reading time. Each student is at a different academic reading level and read their books in diverse ways due to this fact. Harry reads at a slowly pace and sometimes gets frustrated when the words are not easy for him to read. If I am reading with him we often take time to sound out the individual sounds in each word and it seems to help ease his frustration in developing his reading skills.

Some students picture walk, others sound out letter sounds, others blend letter sounds together, and other read complete sentences to build their fluency. Harry is in a developing reading stage where he is blending certain letter sounds together and reading certain words with more fluency in his reading. We also practice daily morning centers where reading is typically always a center to build on the students reading fluency.

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During my student interview, I asked Harry, “What’s your favorite subject in class to learn, do you like math, reading, science, writing, or something else?” Harry replied, “Uhhh reading!” I replied, “Oh you like reading, how come you like reading in class?” He replied, “I like reading with Miss Keating.” I asked, “Are you good at reading?” He answered, “Yes! Good. I like reading” (H. Wong, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2019).

Reflecting on his reply, I made the connection on how student interest in academic subjects or content areas can positively affect students learning. I realized how even though there are multiple areas in reading where Harry is struggling as an English Language Learner, he loves to learn this important area of study because he enjoys it. This is an important insight as his teacher to bridging his interests to his learning. I have observed how interest helps the students stay engaged and want to learn more across all subjects.

I also know that Harry strengths in the classroom include number sense in math such as counting by ones, fives, and tens because I have been leading small group instruction for math. Harry is expanding his understanding in number sense by working in math lab. Math lab is a school wide program where students attend a math activity/game day that is appropriate and meaningful for their grade level.

Harry finds excitement in learning math through games and engaging activities. Math games that he finds interest in and successfully participates in include Bump and Kindergarten Math Yahtzee. Harry works well with his classmates in these math games, finds them interesting and is an active participant in the activities.

He also loves to build with Legos and building blocks. In the interview, I asked “What is your favorite play time or free choice activity?” He replied, “Legos.” I asked, “Oh you like

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Legos, how come you like Legos?” He answered, “I like to build” (H. Wong, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2019).

I have observed him with Legos and wooden building blocks where he displays a strong understanding of spatial reasoning and loves to create different structures and towers. During my home visit Harry’s mother also shared that Harry has always loved playing with Legos and building with wooden and plastic blocks. She shares her hope that this interest will lead Harry to a successful career in Engineering or something similar where he can share his interest in his work life.

### **Assets & Needs: Academic Standing for FS1**

Outside of the classroom, Harry is social and naturally curious. He is a great storyteller and loves to explore nature during recess time, with his friends. Some of Harry’s areas to grow include speaking and listening. Harry is an English Language Learner and is working on mastering his oral speaking skills and his listening skills. Being a natural storyteller and curious boy, he loves to excitedly share his thoughts and ideas, but usually in a non-consistent or single word responses.

We are working on speaking in whole sentences and building his confidence in doing so. In his writing, he uses complete sentences, so the skill and understanding is there, but he is working on the speaking portion of this skill. He also has a hard time focusing in whole group and small group instruction. He talks to his peers and plays with manipulates or classroom objects around him and misses directions. He is working on more focus, keeping his hands to himself and listening to directions in the classroom. In formative, summative and standardized tests, Harry scores in our middle to high group for math, reading and writing. We have offered him flexible seating options in whole group discussions which sometimes seems to help his

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distractions. I also think as Harry develops his English language skills he will be more engaged. As his teacher it is my responsibility to be explicitly clear to explain all hidden curriculum as well as vocabulary words. I must not assume that all students in the classroom know what the words in the lesson mean and I must make sure to check for understanding throughout for all students. I have been developing this skill in my lessons with my master teacher and my faculty advisor.

### **Assets & Needs: Funds of Knowledge for FS1**

From the interview, Harry shared that he prefers working independently. I asked, “In class, do you like to learn with the whole class, in small groups, like rotations, or by yourself?” He replied, “Um, by myself” (H. Wong, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2019). In my observations of his work in whole group, small group and independent work, I would say he works best in small group. He tends to get easily distracted in whole group instruction as well as independent work. In small group he gets more directed attention and it seems to work best for his focus and learning.

Harry is creative, and working on strengthening his critical thinking and communication skills. The way he shares his ideas, stories and builds with Legos speaks to his creativity strengths. When asked higher tiered critical thinking questions, he has room to grow when developing his responses and working to solve a higher tiered question or problem. In terms of English Language Arts standards, Harry struggles with asking questions about lessons or text and supporting reasons for his responses in reading and writing. The fundamental skills that will strengthen these areas include offering opinions, listening actively, and supporting his ideas and opinions (NGAC, 2010.) I think Harry is struggling with these areas because he struggles with communicating academic ideas in complete sentences and as an English Language

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Learner, with English not being his primary home language it makes sense that he is developing these areas. Harry is excelling in writing in complete sentences, sounding words out and counting in number sense by ones, fives, and tens.

Behaviorally and socially Harry is talkative, loves to share his ideas with teachers and friends, but struggles to focus on academic discussion and can be easily distracted in whole group, small group and independent work. I will continue to work with Harry in a positive redirected way when he gets distracted. I will continue to be explicitly clear in my rationales for lessons to make sure there is a buy in for his focus. I will continue to provide diverse and numerous opportunities for him to share his ideas and support his thoughts with academic language in a safe space.

### **Assets & Needs: Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity of FS1**

Harry presents himself as a happy, curious, intelligent and understanding boy. My master teacher and I collaborate together to create an inclusive environment that affirms his self-concept by actively listening to his stories, thoughts and ideas, providing meaningful feedback and communication. I check in daily with how he is feeling, anything on his mind or anything he'd like to share. My master teacher and I provide meaningful activities for students that learn best with hands on learning that supports his learning style and natural wonder about how new activities work and why they do. These activities include building block, building Legos, tweezers/colorful cotton balls, math manipulatives in math centers, making words with Playdough, obstacle courses outside and many other hand on activities.

In the interview I wanted to know more about how Harry saw himself and if he thought about his adult life in the future yet. I asked Harry, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" He replied, "A Mom!" "A Mom?" I asked. He replied "Oh no A Dad!" I said, "Oh a Dad

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that's what you want to be when you grow up." "Anything else you want to be?" I asked. He replied, "Yes, a firefighter." "Anything else that you would like to be maybe something with building like you like to build Legos? We call those people that build big, big towers and buildings, Architects." I said. "Oh yes!" Harry replied. (H. Wong, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2019). He shared with me that he went to LEGOLAND with his Mom and that he had so much fun on all the rides and creating big towers with Legos. LEGOLAND is a constant and very happy topic in his written and conversations with his friends, teachers and family.

A major event that has shaped Harry's life is that he lives with his Mother and Grandmother while his Father travels often to China. I asked Harry who he loves to share his stories with and who he talks to about school when he gets home and he replied "Um, Mom and Grandma" (H. Wong, personal communication, Oct. 25, 2019). Harry walks into the classroom every morning calm, but joyous. Harry likes to share his thoughts and ideas more openly with his best friend "Bill" in the class. Harry is a little more hesitant to share with other teachers or adults, but when I asked if he likes school, he said yes that he likes to talk to his best friend and build his Legos.

Based on the student telling me his home language is Chinese and my interactions with Mom, Harry goes to Chinese school after school and then goes home where he lives with Mom and Grandma. I do not have data to support information of the family's economic status. I have not observed any atypical behavior from Harry. He seems to be adjusting well to kindergarten in terms of being emotionally able to say goodbye to mom in the morning for the school day, he has many friends that he interacts with and he seems comfortable playing at recess and enjoying lunch time with his friends.

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My data sources for this information include conversations with Harry, conversations with his Mom, with my Mentor teacher, my observations and my interview. There are no known technologies needed for Harry that I know of at this time.

The home visit for Harry was insightful, calm, and friendly. I was graciously welcomed to the family's home building downstairs in the lobby. We took an elevator up to the family's home and we sat down in the living room to talk. There were three people there. The student, his mother, and myself. The family's home language is Mandarin. Both the student and the mother were communicating with me in English during the home visit.

The home setting was calm and organized. The student played with his toy cars, dinosaurs, and watched cartoons on the television while I spoke to his mother. She shared with me that she works as a commercial real estate agent. She also told me that the student's father was away on business. As I mentioned, they have a family furniture business in China. As we continued our conversation, she asked me how the student was doing in class and was concerned about his ability to focus.

This is something the student is struggling with in class, but it is also a developmental stage where most kindergarten students struggle with focus. I assured her that he still completes his work and is communicating well with teachers and peers. We do support his struggle to focus by reminding him to track the speaker, going over clear directions and checking for understanding, as well as scaffolding questions about the class discussion.

The overall tone of the visit was welcoming, warm, and kind. The student shared with me his favorite toys to play with when he gets home from school. He showed me his toy dinosaurs, cars, and rubix cube. I sat down with him for a while as he explained each toy's use and name. It was wonderful to see how excited he was to share with me his favorite play toys.

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### **Assets & Needs: Experiences, Interests & Developmental Considerations of FS1**

During my home visit, I had the opportunity to talk to Harry about his likes and interests. I asked Harry what makes him the happiest in the whole world and he replied, “LEGOLAND!” (H. Wong, personal communication, Nov. 24, 2019). This was not surprising to me because he has played with Legos every day in free choice, social play. He also often writes about LEGOLAND is his free choice writing and orally expresses his excitement about LEGOLAND when he goes with his mother. He has talked to me about his experience when he went to the amusement park and the reasons he likes the park. He explained that there were many sections of the theme park where you can build anything with different colored and sized Legos.

I shared with his mother how much he enjoys Legos and all types of building in class and mentioned that during my interview with Harry, he expressed his interest in building and maybe there could be a later interest in engineering when he is older. Harry mother shared that she would like to see his interest in building link to a career one day.

When I was talking to Harry’s mother, Harry asked me “Do you know this called?” (H. Wong, personal communication, Nov. 24, 2019). He held up a two row and two columned rubix cube. I was surprised to see how focused his attention was on the rubix cube. I realized that Harry could benefit from more kinesthetic activities in the classroom especially during whole group direct instruction. This was an important observation to see as his teacher especially since I know how much Harry has struggled with attention and focus in the classroom.

I can use this to inform my pedagogy by recognizing that students’ interest and kinesthetic activities can have a significant and positive impact on students’ learning. This is especially true for students that struggle with attention and focus. It can be insightful to plan lessons with more movement and student interest during whole group discussion, small group

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instruction, and independent practice. As Tomlinson explains, “Differentiating content according to interest involves incorporating ideas and materials that builds on or extends student interests into the curriculum” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 125).

During my visit, I noticed that the television was on in the background as Harry was playing with his Legos. I asked Harry what he likes to watch on the television and he replied, “I watch animals and Lego movies” (H. Wong, personal communication, Nov. 24, 2019). This response was not surprising, but it did start a conversation about what he knew about animals.

He shared how much he knew about ocean animals, desert animals, tundra animals, grassland animals, and rain forest animals. We have been discussing these ecosystems in class for our science lessons. This was reassuring to hear that the information resonated with Harry. He shared, “A habitat is a home for plants and animals” (H. Wong, personal communication, Nov. 24, 2019). He sang parts of the animal classification song that we learned in class and the chorus of our seven continents song.

Harry played with his toy cars and I asked what they had in common. He shared, “They all roll and this one is Lightening” (H. Wong, personal communication, Nov. 24, 2019). This connected with our classroom lesson on shapes. We learned how some 3 dimensional shapes slide and some roll. The academic language in the lessons we use include “They can roll” or “They can slide.” I appreciated and connected the language he was using to describe his toys. This influences my practice as a developing teacher because I understand how much impact the academic language we teach has on students experience outside of the classroom.

### **Action Plan for FS1**

Opportunities that I can provide Harry to learn and continue to develop socio-emotionally and academically include continuing to be clear in my instructions and rationales for lessons. I

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will continue to redirect his focus and attention when he gets distracted in whole group discussions and direct instruction. I will continue to scaffold lessons with diverse oral and written sentence frames to support his oral language in discussions. I will continue to provide multiple opportunities for Harry to share his ideas and support his thoughts with sentence frames and academic language in a safe space.

I will continue to create an inclusive environment that affirms his self-concept by actively listening to his ideas, stories and giving him positive feedback on his participation in lessons, discussions and class activities. I will check in each day to ask how he is feeling today and if he would like to share anything with me today. My master teacher and I provide multiple activities each day in morning centers as Harry benefits from being a visual and kinesthetic learner.

### **Case Study 2: Noah Patel**

Noah is my focus student that identifies with characteristics that are similar to students with an IEP or a 504 plan. He is a bright, happy and curious five year old boy that loves to talk to everyone about his stories and Ninjago. In class he struggles to stay on task in small groups, focus his attention in whole groups, and be aware of the space he takes up around other students in the classroom, leaving other students to feel annoyed when he runs into them or talks over them.

I think this important to note because I have unfortunately been in other classrooms where teachers try to separate the student from certain peers or not let them play with certain toys or be in certain activities because they believe it will cause a distraction for all other students and not want to have that situation occur. I am so happy and blessed to be in a classroom at my present placement where everyone is included in everything. As Torres and Barber detail, “Not long ago, most teachers, administrators, and researchers agreed that students

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with disabilities were better served in separate classes, programs, and schools. But over the past several decades, there's been a change. Advocates have pushed for more inclusion from a human rights perspective. And researchers have found that when students with and without disabilities are educated in inclusive settings, if there is adequate support, time for teacher planning, and communication with parents, it works to everyone's advantage—academically, socially, and emotionally. According to researchers George Theoharis and Julie Causton, “the best way to provide quality education for students with disabilities—and all students—is to increase marginalized students' access to the general education classroom, where the best curriculum and social opportunity are often provided” (Torres & Barber, 2017, p.2).

My master teacher and I have built such positive and strong rapports with each student that there is a great sense community in the classroom and every student is helpful and supports each other. I have seen what a difference this makes for all students when they want what is best for everyone instead of only worrying what is bothering them. It is so powerful to be able to see this in a kindergarten classroom and imagine how this foundation of empathy will impact the rest of their lives.

Noah's language classification is English Only. He speaks English at home and at school. His family speaks English and Tigrinya at home. During my home visits Noah's mother told me this was their home language when they moved from Africa to the United States. She shared that most of her family moved to the United States, but some family was still in Africa. I shared that some of my extended family lives in Mexico and in this conversation I believe we created a deeper connection. In simply sharing a piece of information from both of our family's lives we created a sense of understanding and connection. I thought this was so meaningful and showed

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me what a difference taking the time to share and connect with families can make in my role of a teacher.

A major event that has shaped Noah's life is that he is an only child and many adult family members that live with him who support his positive socio-emotional and academic development. I asked Noah, "Who do you talk to when you get home from school?" He replies, "Daddy and brother and Uncle" (N. Patel, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019).

Noah walks into the classroom every morning excited, talkative and joyous. Noah shares his thoughts and ideas more openly with his friends in the class. Noah feels comfortable to share with other teachers or adults as well. He has many friends in his class as well as in other classrooms. This speaks to his strengths in creating positive relationships with other children his age. From the interview, Noah stated, "I like groups, with working friends" (N. Patel, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019). He shared that he works best in group work. I have observed his success in group work as well.

I do not have data to support information of the family's economic status. The atypical behavior that I have observed from Noah are challenges with attention and focus. He seems to be adjusting well to kindergarten in terms of being emotionally able to say goodbye to mom in the morning before school starts, he has many friends that he interacts with and he seems comfortable playing at recess and lunch time. My data sources for this information include conversations with Noah, conversations with his Mom, with my Mentor teacher, my observations and my interview. There are no known technologies needed for Noah that I know of at this time.

### **Assets & Needs: Academic Standing for FS2**

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Noah has expanding verbal skills and excels when he can collaborate with his peers. When he works independently, he struggles to stay on task and is distracted easily. For completed work, Noah is still developing his appropriation in sizing when writing, drawing, and filling in blanks. I chose to interview this student because he has an animated personality and struggles with focus and attention in class. The student has shown challenges in staying on task in and outside of class. His mother has shared that Noah has the same challenges at home when talking to family members and working on practicing reading or math practice. In class, Noah has demonstrated strengths in math and reading.

Noah excels in mathematic academic standards that include number sense and English Language Art skills that include reading fluency. I asked Noah, “What is your favorite subject in school? It could be anything like Math, Reading, Writing, or Science.” He replied, “Reading.” I reply, “Oh reading, why do you like reading?” He responds, “It helps me learn” (N. Patel, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019).

Noah has specifically has shown advanced academic strength in number sense, counting from 1-100, counting by ones, twos, fives, and tens. He has also shown advanced academic strength in reading skills that include blending sounds and reading aloud with bridging fluency. Noah’s challenges include writing skills that include differentiating between capital and lower case letters, spacing his words in sentences, and writing neatly. Noah also struggles to color without scribbling in large strokes when using crayons and colored pencils. Noah is developing his fine motor skills with coloring, drawing in pencil, and using tweezers for fine motor development. Noah excels in building skills when using wooden blocks and Legos.

Noah struggles to stay on task when initially directed to work independently, in small group work, and in whole group instruction. In my observations, Noah has demonstrate a strong

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sense of creativity. He writes stories independently with originality and creativity. He struggles in critical thinking with new academic material. I ask Noah “What do you like to do when you are not at school?” He replies, “I like to play. I have a car named Lightning McQueen and Jackson Storm” (N. Patel, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019).

### **Assets & Needs: Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity for FS2**

He was so excited to show me all of his toys. He shared, “I love my cars they all have the names from the movie” (N. Patel, personal communication, Nov. 20, 2019). He loves to share his toy car stories with teachers and his peers during school time. Seeing him interact with his toys and what he loves gave me an insight to all his writing prompts and what his interest are. This also gives me a better understanding of his free time social play choices of puzzles.

Socially, Noah has many friends that he plays with at recess, and lunch time. He communicates well with his peers and is a social student in the classroom. Behaviorally, he struggles to stay focused on academic work and whole group discussions. During the interview I wanted to learn more about his self-identity and if he thought about his future adult self yet. I asked Noah to think when he is older, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” Noah explains, “When I’m 100 years old, I talk to people. And when I talk to people I just talk” (N. Patel, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019).

I think Noah has a hard time adapting to the expectations and norms of school life. I know his mother has discussed his concern and wonders if he is developing atypically. Noah is a bright and very excited young boy. I think he may just need more time, patience, and practice in developing his familiarity with school norms and making friends. He is so eager to be a part of every conversation and be included and just needs to practice the way he approaches his peers so they and the future students in his class want to include him. It breaks my heart to see when some

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students in class find his approaches overbearing or too strong, so we have weekly discussions about fairness, the golden rule, and being inclusive that are typically covered in Mojo teachings that are a part of class Dojo. I think these circle time and class discussions are so important to not just Noah, but all students to develop empathy and understanding for all people. I have seen that other students are more patient with him, and he is practicing how he approaches his peers and friends.

### **Assets & Needs: Funds of Knowledge for FS2**

From the interview, I asked Noah, “When we do social play, when we get to play inside, what’s your favorite thing to do?” He asked, “What’s social play?” I reply, “When we have free time.” He responds, “Oh. I love Bingo. It’s my favorite thing” (N. Patel, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019). Instead of asking questions or inquiries, he asks for quick responses and wants to know how to find the correct answer. Noah excels in communication skills, he speaks quickly and with a lot to say. He articulates his wants and needs orally to the teachers and students in the class. He also demonstrates strong communicative skills at home.

Noah struggles with writing skills like differentiating between capital and lower case letters as well as flipping numbers like three, seven, and nine. In my observations, Noah struggles in these areas because he lacks a mastery in fine motor skills like pincer grasp and is transitioning from a palmar grasp. In terms of English Language Arts standards, Noah is still developing skills that include asking questions about lessons or text and supporting reasons for his responses in reading and writing. The fundamental skills that will strengthen these areas include offering opinions, listening actively, and supporting his ideas and opinions (NGAC, 2010.)

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The home visit for Noah was welcoming, insightful, and warm. I was greeted by the street where I parked by car and then escorted by the student's sister to the family's home. We entered the family's home, and we sat down on a couch in the living room to talk. There were initially five people there. The student, his mother, his two sisters, and myself. Later on the student's father arrived home from work, and we were also able to talk. The family's home language is Tigrinya. The student's mother and father moved from Africa to the United States about twelve years ago. The entire family communicated with me in English during the home visit.

The home setting was animated, clean, and organized. The student loved sharing stories, toys, and read-aloud books with me. He sat down next to me to read aloud two picture books. His mother asked me about how he is phonetically sounding the words out in the book. We talked about how the students are learning the phonetic sound of the words, and each letter sound has a gesture. I also shared that some of the words will not make sense when he reads them phonetically, so we learn and practice these words as "sight words." Noah showed me his puzzles, train toys, car toys, and books. His mother shared with me that she works in retail customer service sales, and the student's father works as a civil engineer. She asked me how the student is doing in class and shared her concerns about his ability to focus and stay on task. I shared that he is still developing his focus and staying on task skills, but he works well with everyone.

The overall tone of the visit was friendly, welcoming, and warm. The student's mother made me some tea and served some sweet treats. Noah shared with me his favorite toys to play with when he gets home from school. He showed me his toy cars, his puzzles, his trains, and his books. I sat down with him for a while as he shared with me what each toy does, the names of

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the toys, and the reason why he loves each one. It was wonderful to see how excited he was to share with me his favorite play toys. It was also nice to have a chance to meet the whole family and talk to Noah's parents for more than a few minutes before and after school.

I shared with the family that I grew up going to school in the same district as the student. This helped us talk more openly about the school environment. I shared that my family chose this district due to the positive reputation the school district has. Noah's mother shared with me that the family also chose to move because of the same reason. Noah's mother shared how much Noah enjoys school and talks most of the day about his teachers and friends.

When I entered the family's home, Noah was climbing down the stairs and excitedly greeted me. He asked if I wanted to hear his books. I sat down next to him on the couch. Noah shared, "I read a lot, every day, all my books" (N. Patel, personal communication, Nov. 20, 2019). He followed his book's text with his finger to track the words. He also used the skill "Picture Power" to help him find the main idea and supporting details of the stories. This information was helpful to know that he is using the skills and strategies introduced in class when he reads at home. This lets me know that they are useful and help support his learning.

### **Assets & Needs: Experiences, Interests & Developmental Considerations for FS2**

A surprising interest that Noah shared with me was, "I like singing the school songs" (N. Patel, personal communication, Nov. 20, 2019). In class we often sing songs about the seven continents, eight planets, five oceans, alphabet, and animal classifications. There are many songs that students sing throughout the day, and it is so useful to remember facts in different lessons. This is a practice that my Master teacher introduced me to, and I believe it is a great way to cross academic disciplines in the classroom. The songs are able to tie components of music, English Language Arts, and Science together in a resourceful way for students to remember.

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As CASEL SEL Trends: Integrating with Academics (2018) explains, “Aligning with English Language Arts, mathematics, and science standards. A major focus at both levels has been to strengthen instructional practices to align with the higher demands of the Common Core State Standards in ELA and mathematics and the Next-Generation Science Standards. That means encouraging more student engagement and infusing culturally responsive teaching into all classrooms, working closely with the Responsive Classroom model” (CASEL, 2018, p.3). Noah asked me, “Do you want to see my ninja moves?” (N. Patel, personal communication, Nov. 20, 2019). This is a common question he shares with me in class and does not surprise me during the visit. Noah’s mother asked me what Noah’s fascination with ninjas was about. This did surprise me because he loves to talk about, read about, and see picture-book of ninjas daily in the classroom. I explained the books that we check out from the school library and that many students find the NINJAGO book series funny and exciting. I think this conversation was important for Noah's mother to realize there was an educational component to her child’s interest, especially when he comes home from school daily, discussing ninjas.

### **Action Plan for FS2**

Opportunities that I can provide for the student to learn and continue to develop socio-emotionally include continuing to be explicitly clear in my rationales for lessons to make sure there is a buy-in for his focus. I will continue to redirect him when he gets distracted in whole group discussions. I will continue to provide diverse and multiple opportunities for him to share his ideas and support his thoughts with academic language in a safe space.

I will continue to create an inclusive environment that affirms his self-concept by actively listening to his stories, thoughts, and ideas, providing meaningful feedback and communication. I check in daily with how he is feeling, anything on his mind, or anything he’d like to share. My

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master teacher and I provide meaningful activities for students that learn best with hands-on learning that supports his learning style and curiosity about how new activities work and why they do. As Tomlinson shares, “When students know they can propose ideas for tasks and projects and believe you’ll help them find a way to expand their own interests, there is a much greater sense of shared ownership for learning” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 104).

I also think the class circle time and class discussion that we have weekly really help Noah in his socio-emotional development and making friends. I think he struggles with timing and how he approaches trying to be included in social play activities with his friends. Typically all students include him immediately, but some students do often say that they feel uncomfortable with his tone in voice and that he struggles to keep his hands to himself. It is never out of anger or frustration, and I think Noah is simply still developing his self-regulation and communication skills when there is an activity that interests him. This is the main reason why the class discussions are so vital to all students’ socio-emotional development.

### **Case Study 3: Katherine Lee**

Katherine is a five-year-old, Asian American, Kindergarten girl. Katherine is the focus student I chose to interview for her significant life experience. She is an English Language Learner that moved to the United States this year from China. She lives in the local city where she attends school and lives with her older sister and Mother. Her father is living in China as he works to support his family in the United States. Again I reflect on how this impacts Katherine in her life socio-emotionally and across all areas of her life. How does this affect her worldview? How are her experiences and emotional development different than a student whose parents live in the same country together?

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Katherine demonstrates a strong work ethic in the classroom across all curriculum disciplines. In my observations of her at the school, she has displayed a determined attitude when learning new skills, strategies, and lessons. When she struggles with new curriculum she continues to work independently to practice the fundamental skills to develop the new academic material. She is developing her confidence in asking for help and sharing her thoughts to teachers and friends. She is attentive to classroom discussions and actively listens to instructions. She is respectful of all classroom norms and routines inside the classroom. Katherine is developing her own voice in the classroom and needs consistent scaffolding when sharing her thoughts and ideas.

### **Assets & Needs: Academic Standing for FS3**

Katherine has emerging skills in mathematics, writing, and reading. She is developing her English oral language skills when communicating her wants and needs in the classroom. In mathematics, she has a strong understanding of counting numbers one to a hundred, writing out the numbers one to ten, and orally counting the numbers one to twenty. She excels in writing neatly when writing words, sentences and numbers. Katherine has mastered the skill of naming all letters in the alphabet, correctly identifying all sounds for each letter, and identifying the difference in capital and lower-case letters. She has bridging writing skills that include sounding out letters in words she does not yet know. She excels in spacing between words in sentences, using capital letters to start her sentences, and using periods at the end of her sentences.

Katherine's language classification is a level one English Language Learner.

She is developing her oral communication skills. Katherine is a part of our emerging academic groups in reading, writing, and mathematics. She performs in the emerging scale for formative testing in reading, the bridging scale for writing, and mathematics.

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Katherine collaborates well with all students in her class and does well in group work. From the interview, I asked her “In class, do you prefer to work alone or in groups?” Katherine explains, “Do groups. Because that’s lots of people” (K. Lee, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019). She is also confident when working independently on mathematics. She needs support when working on reading and writing independently. Katherine completes work that is written neatly, words in sentences make phonemic sense when read aloud, and drawings that excel grade level standards. She completes all tasks, assignments, group work and independent work as directed.

In the interview, Katherine shares, “I like drawing.” I ask, “That’s wonderful, what do you like to draw?” She replies, “Fish” (K. Lee, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019). She shares creative stories aloud with teachers, other school staff adults, her Mother, and her classmates. She develops her critical thinking and communication skills as she develops her confidence in articulating her thoughts, opinions, and ideas aloud in class.

Academic areas that Katherine is still developing include speaking and listening. She is an English Language Learner and is working on mastering her oral speaking skills and listening skills. Katherine struggles to openly share her thoughts aloud and tends to use single or double word responses. As she continues to develop her speaking skills in whole sentences, she will improve her writing in complete sentences. In terms of English Language Arts standards, Katherine struggles with asking questions about lessons and text in reading and writing. The fundamental skills that will strengthen these areas include offering opinions, listening actively, and supporting his ideas and opinions (NGAC, 2010).

### **Assets & Needs: Socio-Emotional Development & Social Identity for FS3**

Socially, Katherine is a kind and compassionate student that makes friends easily. She is closest to one girl, Amelia, in the class and spends most of the day by her side, inside and outside

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the classroom. I asked Katherine, “What is your favorite thing to do during recess?” She responds, “Swings.” I asked, “What is your favorite free play choice inside the classroom?” She replies, “Barbies. They pretty” (K. Lee, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019). Behaviorally, Katherine excels in listening attentively to teachers and other students. She is a responsible and respectful student inside and outside of the classroom. I will continue to be explicitly clear in my rationales for lessons to make sure Katherine is evident on the how and why of each new lesson and skill in the classroom. I will continue to provide diverse and numerous opportunities for her to share her ideas and support her thoughts with academic language in a safe space.

### **Assets & Needs: Funds of Knowledge for FS3**

The Home visit for Katherine was informative, warm, and insightful. There were four people present during the home visit. The focus student, her older sister, her Mother, and their neighbor. The family’s home language is Mandarin. The older sister helped with translating during the home visit to decrease the language barrier. The family moved from China to the United States two years ago. The older sister learned English growing up in China. She is currently twelve years old and in seventh grade. The focus student’s father often travels back and forth from China to the United States for his occupation. The focus student’s Mother works from home.

The home setting was clean, quiet, and calm. The focus student and her Mother showed me around the home and highlighted the student’s favorite places to play and draw. I brought the family sweet bread and the Mother prepared snacks for me before I got home. We sat down together at a small student table to talk about how the student likes to play after she comes back from school, and how artistic she is.

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The overall tone of the visit was calm, collaborative, and educational. The student spent most of the time drawing as the older sister, her Mother, and I spoke.

We exchanged stories of our upbringing. I shared that I grew up in their current neighborhood and my sister and I went to the schools both of the girls are attending now.

### **Assets & Needs: Experiences, Interests & Developmental Considerations for FS3**

Katherine displays a self-concept of a calm, curious, and kind five-year-old girl. In the classroom, I create an inclusive environment that affirms her self-concept by actively listening to her stories, thoughts, and ideas, providing meaningful feedback and communication. I check in daily with how she feels, anything on her mind, or anything she'd like to share. My master teacher and I provide meaningful activities for students that learn best with hands-on learning that supports her learning style and natural wonder about how new activities work and why they do.

A significant event that has shaped Katherine's life is that she moved from China to the United States earlier this year with her Mother. In the interview, I asked, "Who do you talk to about school when you get home?" Katherine shares, "Mom" (K. Lee, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019). She walks into the classroom every morning, calm and curious. Katherine shares her thoughts and ideas more openly with her best friend, Amelia, in the class. Katherine feels comfortable to share with other teachers or adults. She shares aspirations of the future; I asked: "What do you want to be when you grow up?" She shares, "Doctor" (K. Lee, personal communication, Oct. 31, 2019).

I do not have data to support information on the family's economic status. I have not observed any atypical behavior. She seems to be adjusting well to kindergarten in terms of being emotionally able to say goodbye to Mom, for the school day, she has many friends that she

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interacts with and seems comfortable playing at recess and lunchtime. My data sources for this information include conversations with Katherine, conversations with her Mom, with my Mentor teacher, my observations, and my interview. There are no known technologies needed for Katherine that I know of at this time.

I shared a photo of myself when I was the focus student's age, and the Mother of the student showed me baby pictures and videos of the student. The focus student's Mother shared, "She loves to sing!" (H. Lee, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2019). I learned how much the student loves to sing, dance, and perform. This was new and surprising information for me to learn since Katherine is usually shy in class. We often use a class microphone to share thoughts, comments, opinions, and ideas in a whole group discussion, and Katherine has yet to feel comfortable using the microphone this school year. This new information of her loving to musically perform may help in the class as a buy-in to using the microphone and helping her feel more comfortable with participating in the whole group discussions. I asked the focus student's Mother, "What does she like to do when she comes home?" (A. Lopez, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2019). She replied, "She draws" (H. Lee, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2019). During the home visit, Katherine drew multiple pictures on blank paper with a pencil and crayons. Her Mother explained, "Every day she draws; hours and hours" (H. Lee, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2019).

This information was not surprising to me as Katherine loves to draw and create art in class. We have social, free play every day at the end of our school days, and she always chooses to draw and color. Her Mother shared how much of the day, Katherine spends drawing and coloring. I think this is useful as an educator to know because it tells me it is something that she truly enjoys and not just a distraction away from school or peers in her class. It has been a worry

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of mine in the past because Katherine is naturally more reserved in social play, and I wondered if her choice to draw reflected her comfort levels of playing and communicating with her peers. I now know she is genuinely interested in drawing and can maybe suggest that all people that choose to draw during play time, do so at the same table so they can verbally and visually share their creations with each other. This will hopefully make Katherine feel more comfortable to share with her peers.

The focus student's Mother showed me around her home and emphasized the areas that the focus student loves to play. She shared, "Here, she runs up and down, up and down, every day" (H. Lee, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2019). This was new information to me as an educator because Katherine typically prefers to play inside and chooses activities that are not as physical as running. I can encourage her to run at recess times and during our weekly obstacle course.

I asked Katherine what her favorite play activity is when she gets home from school and initially, she shrugged while looking down at her drawing. I told her how much I liked her drawing and asked if this was her favorite thing to do. She shook her head. I wondered if she would like to show me instead of telling me. Katherine nodded, grabbed my hand, and took me to the section of the home where she keeps all of her toys. Katherine picked up Barbie dolls and smiled at me. Katherine shared, "Barbie's" (K. Lee, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2019). Her Mother responded, "She loves Barbie's, dolls, and makeup" (H. Lee, personal communication, Nov. 21, 2019). The interaction between Katherine and me was significant to note because in class, she often shrugs goes to talk to a Mandarin-speaking friend.

This interaction that we shared helps inform my practice and my ability to support her emotional and academic growth by learning a new communication skill. When she isn't

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comfortable with the language she can physically show me in the space and then we can follow up with language. This way she feels comfortable sharing with teachers and peers that do not share her home language. She can also feel more confident practicing her English vocabulary and speaking skills in the classroom.

### **Action Plan for FS3**

Due to Katherine's emerging speaking skills it would be meaningful for me to incorporate language strategies in her daily school routines. Examples of language strategies include: sentence frames on the board for speaking support with whole group discussions in lessons, sounding letter sounds out in books, blending sounds with the broken apart word, and being mindful of pairing her with an expanding student in speaking skills that she is comfortable with to help her feel more confident in participating with the whole group. I will continue to provide a safe space for Katherine to feel a willingness to share her thoughts and ideas.

I think she is also developing her confidence in making friends and branching out to all students in her class instead of just one or two girls that she is the closest to. Typically she walks in every morning running to hug me and two of her closest friends in the class. She has become very sad around recess or lunch time some days and verbalizes that she misses her Mother. I often ask if she'd like a hug and typically sing her a small song during these times. It cheers her up immediately and we go find a friend of hers so she can play at recess or social play. I let her know each time that it is understandable to miss the people you love and always make sure to validate how she is feeling instead of just creating a distraction. I think this has strengthened our student teacher relationship and hope she finds safety in knowing that I am there for her when she feels sad. I also want to make sure that she feels safe and comfortable with her peers and that she is willing to talk and play with her friends and not just with other adults.

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When creating an action plan for all students I think it is important to understand that there are “three dimensions of student variance guide planning for differentiation: readiness, interest, and learning profile” (Tomlinson, 2017, p. 83). Tomlinson discusses the three main ways that teachers can best differentiate when lesson planning. Each dimension describes in detail how each of these three variances make a strong positive impact on student learning and optimal success. I think it is important as a developing teacher to recognize that each student’s dimensions of variance impact the academic standing and socio-emotional well-being.

### **Conclusion of Case Studies**

Studying and learning from all three of my focus students has been such an important part of my emerging teacher development. Throughout these case studies, I have learned so much from my students and families and find it a privilege to have had the opportunity. I feel that I have grown and expanded my teacher’s perspective in terms of socio-emotional learning, building community and creating meaningful instruction. I am excited and inspired to create more meaningful relationships with all my future students and families.

## **Part C: Community**

### **Community Demographics**

The Southern California community I currently work in, Arcadia, California, is also the same community I grew up in. My parents purchased their first home in this city when I was two years old, almost 25 years ago. My sister was 7 years old at the time and my parents had now been married for 13 years. Before they purchased their first home in the city of Arcadia, they had rented in other Los Angeles County cities including Los Angeles and El Monte. I share this as a part of the community context because 25 years ago the city of Arcadia looked and felt very different.

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According to City Data the city of Arcadia is estimated to have 47% or 27,638 male citizens and 53% or 31,161 females. The community in Arcadia is reportedly made up of 62.5% Asian, 21.9% White, 11.8% Hispanic, 2.8% Mixed, 1.3% Black, 0.3% American Indian, 0.2% Native Hawaiian, and 0.2% other identified individuals. Over 90% of the adult population in the community has a high school diploma or higher education. The common languages spoken in the community include English, Mandarin, Cantonese, and some Spanish. Of course, this is not an extensive list of all language spoken in the city or households (CityData, 2020).

The city has six elementary schools, three middle schools, and one high school. The elementary schools range from student populations of around 500-700 students k-5th. The middle schools range from student populations of around 750-700 students 6-8th and the high school student population of 3,306 students.

Arcadia is mostly, if not all, suburban with a city life that includes the Santa Anita Mall, the Santa Anita Race Track, and expansions made in the last ten years to the mall for high end stores and shops. The city is also well-known for its nationally renowned Arboretum with the city's infamous peacocks. These famous city landmarks bring in tourists to the city and drive the economy among locals as well. People's interactions are typically that most people keep to themselves in the city and in their residencies, but gather harmoniously in parks, community events and gatherings.

### **Housing & Resources**

Today Arcadia, CA has a population of 58,207 in the city. The city has a quiet, suburban feel in the residential part of the city where most of the citizens own their homes. These homes currently have a median value around \$1.1 million compared to the median amount of the entire state homes of around \$475,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). According to USA.com the median

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value of homes in Arcadia were estimated around \$830,000 in 2014 and have seen over a 100% increase since 2000. USA.com also reports that median household income is \$80,147 and has grown around 42% since 2000. Among the citizens that rent either apartments, condos, or rooms in homes in Arcadia, the estimated median rent was \$1,570 in 2017 (CityData, 2020). Arcadia homes averaged \$1.7 million in 2016 and was the fifth most expensive housing market in the country (Business Insider, 2016). According to the world population review, the overall poverty rate in the community is 9.47%.

The community in Arcadia is typically quiet in the inner resident part of the city, but it does have many resources available to the community members. I have lived in the community for over 20 years, speak with my neighbors occasionally, and partake in the neighborhood events which are common and numerous. The city often promotes free park music events, the 626 night market, breakfast with firefighters, coffee with police officers, welcoming citizens to council meetings, vast religious gatherings across multiple religions and forms of celebration. The 626 Night market is a massive outdoor event where food vendors from the 626 area code (San Gabriel Valley) come together to sell to and gather with their local community. The events are for all ages and gather a huge crowd of people. There are often musical artists, magician and other artists that preform at these events. They are held ten times from the months of May to September. The city also provides a bus for the elderly population to get to hospital appointments, go grocery shopping or visit relatives for free or \$1 a ride depending on the person's ability to pay (they will not deny you a ride if you do not pay).

Arcadia has an abundance of assets in the community. The city highlights an importance of volunteering throughout the city. On the city website there is a list of local organizations that people can be a part of for volunteering. These organizations include the police department of

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Arcadia, the fire department of Arcadia, the city library, the city museum, the city recreation center and many more. The city website is also current with city news and updates their website regularly for the community members. The city also has multiple public parks, access to WIFI in numerous public locations, and a low crime rate across the city.

### **Problematize the Issue**

There is a dense history of the city that began over 100 years ago in 1903 when it was officially founded by Elias Jackson Baldwin also known as Lucky Baldwin. According to Arcadia History Society, the city was originally known for its “lawlessness and political turmoil” (2020 Arcadia Historical Society). Around 1910 the city transformed dramatically as its business, land, real estate and streets took on a more urban feel. There were many ranches and large lands that turned into smaller divisions as raising chickens for meat and eggs became the focus in the markets. Around 1920 the poultry industry was so impactful that the men who owned and made major profit from these businesses had the most say in policy and civic influence (2020 Arcadia Historical Society).

In more current years the high school has seen conflict with the mascot being an “Apache.” This was an important part of my research in the city. I have spoken to my family members and many colleagues who have also grown up in the city, many who attended Arcadia High School. The common response is how the mascot should not be changed in anyway because it is a part of our city’s history and a fond part of their high school memories during sport events. I did not attend this high school, but I know if I did, I would support the changing of the mascot. I have grown up going to certain sports events while my sister attended this high school, and remember the shocking racial slurs that they attached to “supporting their sports

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team” which I can’t believe were not radically amended but actually encouraged and seen as school spirit.

In *The Native American Mascot Controversy: A Handbook Hardcover* (2010), King discusses the bridge and considerations that should be made when teaching tolerance in education specifically referencing sport mascots and personal bias that may play a role in stereotyping, conscious or not. King urges educators that we should reflect with courage and challenge the norms of our or other communities that use these images without regard to other people’s worldview.

Across all research engines that I have searched, along with my personal upbringing and experience in the city, the common highlight has been that Arcadia schools are top ranked schools in the nation. I have always found this fascinating growing up in the community. I have seen a major push on rigor in the school and in the households. In my personal experience I have not found this major focus on high rigor to be beneficial in my educational journey.

I felt extremely isolated for not being the top scoring grade in the class throughout my educational experience in the city. I have dyslexia and ADD and my teachers had me tested for special education because they did not know how to teach me or ask how I learned best. They mentioned multiple times to my family that I was just going to be a student that barely passes academically but will be fine. This was devastating to my family that has worked so hard to give me the opportunity to attend, in their eyes, the best schools so I could be successful and couldn’t understand how I was barely passing my classes in school. This made me even more secluded from my fellow peers in my grade level and made to feel like I didn’t belong in the school at all. I saw the world differently, I got lost in books, questioned everything that my teachers taught me, and had a wild imagination that often lead me to frustrated teachers and worried parents. I

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was fortunate after my middle school I was able to choose to attend private high school with small class sizes and more diverse teaching styles. I learned how I learned best and was able to navigate with a more personalized approach to my education.

### **Community Events & Community Members**

Arcadia has many community events surrounding the school district as well as the entire community. I researched two Arcadia Unified School Board meetings. I was able to virtually watch these two meetings in a live stream on YouTube. I learned so much about the community and the school district in these two meetings. Both meetings began with the pledge of allegiance and were called to order as they followed the agenda of the day and what was agreed to be discussed for that day. There were discussions about distance learning, virtual teacher trainings, high school spirit week, virtual parent trainings, meals being served, budget, graduation, custodial and security work, trainings for drivers, and plans to utilize the district's bond.

When discussing distance learning the board members brought up how teachers have been experimenting and creating new and inventive ways to teach all learners. They discussed how some teachers are teaching live lessons, using applications like Zoom and FlipGrid to create live and meaningful instruction. Other teachers have given out hard copy work before the closures and are communicating with families weekly and usually daily. In our own classroom, we have been teaching the students live using Zoom and FlipGrid in multiple subjects like reading, writing, and mathematics. We have also been communicating with families daily and are giving families options on when to log on their child virtually during the day if the morning or afternoon session would be best for their home life and work situation.

Another topic that was discussed was how to continue professional development trainings for teachers regardless of the school closures and the reality of COVID-19. They discussed how

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the trainings have become virtual and many professional development trainings have been accessible via live stream with question and answer sessions from guest speakers to feel as close to in person as possible. They have created virtual documents for teachers to sign up for the profession development trainings which they are interested in.

### **Services**

The board also discussed virtual trainings for parents, specifically for students with special needs. They discussed potential trainings for how to cope with COVID-19 reality as well as how to get their children to thrive. They also discussed virtual coffee meeting where the parents can talk amongst themselves with other families that are going through similar situations. Finally they discussed an addition questions and answers session for all families, educators, and learners to be a part of.

The board discussed the Arcadia high school ASB spirit week. The high school students were able to come up with creative and versatile ways to demonstrate their school spirit regardless of them not being able to at the school. I was in awe of the imaginative way that the students came together to celebrate and acknowledge their school pride. The students held a special theme for each day of the week and used social media to stay connected virtually. Students played Minecraft on Monday, had twin Tuesday using screenshots, had relaxing Wednesdays created Tik ToK Thurs, and held a watch party movie night on Facebook Friday. The Arcadia high school ASB also came up with a way to hold virtual elections for Spring student counsel and held their preliminaries online. The ASB is also doing their part to support local business in advocating for Arcadia community members to order take out or get delivery from the many of our local business.

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The board also discussed how the meals are being dispersed for the students and families. On a typical day, there were 3,200 meals served daily when schools were open. After the closures, they were able to immediately serve four hundred meals a day, and today they can serve 1200 meals a day. They are discussing moving to a three day a week plan where students will be given enough food for the entire week. The goal here is to minimize social contact and interactions during our global pandemic. The board members also discussed concerns about food availability. The company where they source a majority of their meals are running low on pre-packaged meals, so the staff have started to prepare meals for families.

The board discussed how custodians are still working daily, and providing daily security checks and site reports for very specified schools. The district is also providing training for any drivers of the district. These trainings are being made available via Google classroom in a virtual setting.

The board also discussed plans for the high school seniors in terms of their graduation and grades. There was discussion about whether or not to move to a pass/fail grading system or to keep the grade scale the same for all students. The concern was for younger students when they want to apply to college how this might affect a freshman three years from now. There was also discussion about what to do for the seniors graduation. Multiple options are being discussed that include: doing a virtual gathering, or an in person graduation at a later time.

I was surprised by the amount of involvement and work being done from everyone in the community to support each other in this pandemic. Community members, students, teachers, families, administration and council members are working in collaboration with successful and frequent communication to create the best scenario for all people in the community affected by this pandemic.

### **Response to the COVID-19 Crisis**

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The response to the COVID-19 crisis was quick and overwhelming. There was information coming in from the media and the news updating the public on the COVID-19 crisis. Teachers were asked to prepare emergency materials for students and families in case of a closure. When this conversation happened, our principal let us know that it was very unlikely to occur, but if it did occur, there was going to be minimal to zero notice before having to close the school. This conversation and preparation happened about two weeks before the closures. We had one school site meeting where teachers were able to collaborate and ask questions with other teachers and the administration. During this time, many of our families were extremely concerned and voicing their concerns daily and sometimes even hourly with our principal. It was a very overwhelming and uncertain time for everyone. Later that day, after the school site meeting, the Kindergarten team met to come up with an emergency plan where we discussed options for our students and families. We planned to give out hard copy materials like workbooks, reading books, and writing supplies. At the time, we did not believe that we were going to be needing the resources and felt that it was just a precautionary measure.

A few weeks later, it was the Friday of the school closures, I remember teaching an art lesson in the morning and feeling a strange vibe with the administration and the other teachers of the school. During our lunchtime there was a general announcement made that we might be closing our school and no further information was given at the time. Before lunch was over, it was confirmed that we were closing our schools for two weeks. We had a very limited amount of time to plan as a Kindergarten team what we wanted to give our students to take home with them.

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We asked ourselves what the students would need most to be successful and tried our best to come up with answers to potential challenges that come from being away from school. We quickly gathered workbooks, writing journals, reading books, science project resources, student access codes for programs that can be accessed online like Epic books, and Prodigy for Math. When the students came back from lunch, we were able to practice logging onto the online applications using the classroom Chromebooks so the students would at least be exposed to the online resources, and hopefully support their ability to access the content at home with help from their family. I know that my school offers to rent out Chromebooks to any student or family that needs technological support. I am not aware of how we as a school are specifically supporting students and families that do not have Wifi access, but I am aware that private companies have been giving free Wifi access due to the COVID-19 crisis.

As a district, we are serving students and families with meals daily and providing them with opportunities to ask questions, gain information, and communicate with other families as well as teachers and administration in a virtual setting during this pandemic.

On a personal level, this has impacted the way I am able to communicate with my students and families, the way I'm able to teach my students, the way I plan with my mentor teacher, how I balance my school assignments, my clinical setting and my home life. The changes have been drastic and consistently updating, which has been overwhelming to cope with. Even within this ethnography, the closure of schools and events have impacted my ability to talk and gain the perspectives of other people in my community. Losing that face to face connection with my fellow teachers, administrations, PTA members, families, and community members has been a difficult transition in my journey as an emerging social justice educator. I

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believe the foundation of social justice work begins with that genuine human connection that we share with each other.

### **School Site Research**

The school is in Arcadia, California. It neighbors two local Arcadia churches and surrounded by a residential neighborhood that includes homes and apartments. From the outside of the school, there is a beautiful green lawn that leads to the front building where the front office staff and principal are. There are also heavy metal gates that protect the entrances from any uninvited visitors. Each of these entrances has a buzzer system that connects to the front office intercom so that the front office can allow recognized personal and visitors to come in. From the main street, you can also see the school's big playground and a massive green field that is used as a multi-purpose playground for the students. Once inside the school, there is a very welcoming feel as person all over the school greets you with a welcoming hello and a smile. The majority of the walls are decorated with student work and inspiration quotes, which provide the school with a warm and colorful addition to the majority of the white walls across the campus. Most classrooms have space for a teacher desk and ample seating and desk area for the students while other classrooms are much larger and seem to be double the size with the same amount of students to that classroom. I know that our Kinder classroom is one of the biggest classrooms on campus as it housed the student restrooms for all four Kindergarten classrooms as well as our T-K classroom. I also know that some teachers change grade levels and need to change classrooms, but I am not sure how the classrooms are prioritized in respect to the size of the class. I believe its mostly chance on who gets the bigger classroom instead of being based on need or the amount of students in the classroom.

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The school's reputation is a friendly environment with high levels of collaboration among teachers, families, students, as well as community members. Most of the elementary schools in the community have a reputation of high academic standards that is mirrored by the high academic expectation from the families. Growing up in this community, I have experienced this in my own household as a learner, in my schools as a learner and in my classroom as an educator. I think our school does a very good job of providing social-emotional support for all students. In our Kindergarten classroom, we have bi-weekly lessons from our social-emotional curriculum. From these lessons, students learn how to acknowledge and name their feelings and how to share with others how they are feeling. I think this is a very important addition to our classroom that I never had growing up in this community. It amazes me the level of social-emotional intelligence that I see from my Kindergarteners due to the school's commitment of student's social-emotional well-being.

### **Personnel**

In response to the COVID-19 I was not able to attend the events or speak to all the members of the community that I had planned to incorporate in my ethnography. I was able to interview my mentor teacher about the school and community as well as her experience as an educator in response to the COVID-19 crisis. She gave her perspective on the community that we serve as "being affluent in some areas and mix with vulnerable populations in other areas" (C. Smith, personal communication, 2020). She mentioned how in general, the opportunity is far greater in this community compared other communities that she has worked in. She mentioned that "the parent involvement has been outstanding" (C. Smith, personal communication, 2020).

Together we have been working to create a meaningful distance learning setting for our students as we experience the effects of this crisis together. We have been learning to navigate

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Zoom, FlipGrid, Google Meet, and create live virtual lessons every day of the week for our students. The school has continued to have weekly school site meetings where we can all meet via Zoom and collaborate as a school. Across the board, all of the teachers have come up with an adaptive plan that works for their students and families. An example of these plans includes whole group instruction with all the students live in Zoom for a couple of hours at a time. Another model includes recorded lessons that are posted to the students google classroom. It has been inspiring to see the collaboration and unity within the school and among the teachers, administration and families. The community's theme is "better together," and she mentioned how the staff teachers, educators, administration, and community members really do collaborate and communicate well to create a more unified community.

I was able to speak to a PTA member before the school closure about different PTA events that were planned to occur, and she also mentioned how involved the families are at our school site and across the school district. She mentioned, "how excited most families are to participate and volunteer for school and community events" (A. Shan, personal communication, 2020). She continued to explain how it is a blessing to have so much support from families and community members interested and involved in helping one another. She told me, "it really makes a difference when there is so much genuine care in the community" (A. Shan, personal communication, 2020). It has also been my observation that there is a true community to help students thrive and give students diverse opportunities to be successful as the whole child and not just academically.

### **School Mission/Vision & Demographics**

The school's mission and vision aim to work together with students, teachers, families, and the community. One of the school's slogans is, "Better Together," where the goal is to

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collaborate for everyone's success. In the mission statement, it is clear they want to foster an education for the whole child in terms of social-emotional well-being, physical development, cognitive development, and a pursuit in academic growth for success. They do specifically mention creating an environment and community for all students development in reading, writing and critical thinking to be a successful and contributing member of the local and outer communities. Having the opportunity to be a member of this community for a school year I can gladly say the collaborative goals are truthfully being represented and accomplished. I have seen how the school staff, teachers, parents, and families work together to create an environment that is best for the learners of the school. Some specific ways that they do this is by being vocal, transparent, and informative on their school website, their weekly newsletter, as well as individual newsletters from specific classroom teachers.

As a whole, the school does a very good job of networking families by creating wonderful events throughout the school year like: coffee with the principal, muffins with Moms, dances with Dads, and several other types of events where parents are encouraged to attend and support their child as well as network and get to know other families. An example of how this school unifies their teachers is by providing snacks throughout the teacher lounges and lunch areas with sweet notes attached sometimes to brighten up people's days, or just to extend an acknowledgment of gratitude for the teachers' hard work. This is a small yet meaningful act of kindness that I believe really embodies the care for the school staff and teachers at the school. The school also does an outstanding job of keeping their teachers informed of every and any new information via email multiple times a day. Having discussed this with multiple teachers, I have heard both sides of this being an asset as well as a challenge where some teachers really

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appreciate the transparency as other teachers may feel overwhelmed with the number of emails coming throughout each day.

According to Public School Review, the ethnicity and gender demographics of the student population has not changed much over the last five years. Sixteen years ago, when I attended elementary school in this community, it was still pretty similar to the demographics of today. Currently, the student population is 64% Asian, 19% Hispanic, 9% White, 3% Filipino, 3% two or more races, and 1% Black. Even sixteen years ago when I was in elementary school, I can only recall three Black students from my time in kindergarten to my time in Fifth grade in the whole school. Throughout my time in my elementary school, my Kindergarten teacher was Asian, all of my other teachers were White, and I never met a Black or Latinx teacher at my school or even in my middle school within the same community at the time. Today, in my current school setting the majority of our students and families are Asian and most of our school personnel, teachers, staff, and administration are White women.

In my experience growing up in the community from the age of two until the end of my middle school educational career, I would say the majority of teacher relationships were White female teachers and majority of my peer relationships were evenly split between White and Asian students. My family worked and saved their entire lives to provide my sister and I the maximum opportunities available to us. I have had the privilege to choose if I would like to continue my educational journey in the public sector or transition to private high school. At the time, my parents felt there was a diversity gap as well as too many students to teacher ratio in the public school sector for me to be successful as a learner. Not only did I not really see or interact with diverse teachers, students, and/or families, but it was not even a conversation piece at school. This is also true today in the community. I have not seen an addition of ethnic studies in

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any of the classrooms I have been a part of or observed. I think ethnic studies would be such strong support to all learners in developing their own world view as well as recognizing and appreciating the cultural differences in others. As discussed in *Rethinking Ethnic Studies*, “Ethnic Studies benefited students in observable ways: They became more academically engaged, did better on achievement tests, graduated at higher rates in some cases, and developed a sense of self-efficacy and personal empowerment” (p.15).

I always struggled academically and didn't really feel connected to the community around me because I didn't have teachers, friends, or other families from my similar cultural background. I also felt very overwhelmed with the amount of the students in my classes. I remember in sixth grade, we had a Math class of forty-eight students with one teacher. This was a struggle as a student as I felt invisible during those forty-minute blocks of Math. It wasn't until the last month of school that the teacher knew me by name, which at the time broke my heart and made me feel defeated in the educational system. Looking back through a teacher's lens, I'm surprised she learned my name because this was not her largest class. This was only one of six classes that she taught that year. I know this is only one teacher's story from an educational system sixteen years ago, but I'm sure the same issues occur in classes across the nation today. What happens to teachers when they cap student size does not exist? How do teachers have a chance of being effective much less extraordinary, when the odds are stacked so far against them? More direly, what is this telling our students? This idea really makes me think about Love's conversation about thriving and an educational system that isn't even set up for students to survive. “A life of survival is not really living” (p.10).

### **Classroom Reflection and Ecology**

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I would describe our classroom ecology as one where we feel safe, heard, seen, respected and acknowledged. As educators, my mentor teacher and I hold circle weekly with the Class Dojo application and watch dojo video with the students about social-emotional learning and needs. There is also a social-emotional curriculum at my school site that is taught in a more concrete lesson bi-weekly specifically about feelings. I think these components are the foundation of our classroom ecology especially in our grade level (kindergarten). My students are still learning to navigate socially and emotionally in the home life and school life around them. It is here where they begin to recognize and reflect on how they feel, why they could be feeling that way, what can we do when we have big feelings, and how do other people feel and why. There is a high level of trust and respect in our classroom. The students may have abrupt and harsh reactions to other student's behaviors as the process of learning and growing with each other, but they recognize how their actions affect others and are quick to either apologize or come up with a solution for both parties.

The demographics of the students in my class have changed a bit from the beginning of the school year due to students moving and no longer being a part of the classroom. At the beginning of the year, we had a class of twenty-five Kindergarten students (now 23) coming to our class from all different backgrounds, culturally as well as academically. At the beginning of the school year with 25 students, sixteen were of Asian descent, four were of Indian descent, two were of Caucasian descent, two were of Hispanic descent and one was of African American descent. Of the two students that moved and are no longer in our classroom one student was of Asian descent and one student was of Caucasian descent.

Linguistically the students in the classroom shared wonderful linguistic assets. The students' home languages include English, Mandarin, Bengali, and Tigrinya. From the 25

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students at the beginning of the year, ten students identified as English Language Learners in the classroom. The majority of our English Language Learners home language was Mandarin. Three of the English Language students in the class are classified as a Level 1 English Language student and the other seven are classified as a Level 2 English Language students. None of the students were identified as GATE, having a 504 plan or an IEP. From the three other kindergarten classrooms we had the most English Language Learner students, but not by a lot. Most of the other classrooms had at least six or seven students classified as English Language Learners.

Some of the students had never attended school before, some had already moved schools, some attended preschool at a different school, and some attended preschool at our school. These differences really spoke to the diversity in social-emotional development, academic knowledge, and comfort levels of being in a classroom and school environment. Some students understood and smoothly transitioned between classroom norms, while others took a little while to adjust to the differences from their home lives. I think it is important as an educator to really acknowledge where your students are coming from not only academically, but social-emotionally and culturally. How can we make a true connection with our students if we don't put in the time to get to know them? This was really important to me from the beginning of the year as I spoke with families, visited some of their homes, and began making genuine and positive relationships with both my families and students alike.

As a community and more specifically as a school we are privileged and have an abundance of resources for our students and families. More specifically in the classroom, the resources I have available include Chromebooks with a one-to-one device to student correspondence, a doc camera, a projector, and journey's curriculum complete sets. There are also many activity

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resources given from my Master Teacher and other teachers, a vast amount of supplies and materials: printer paper, limitless printing ability in the front office for all teachers, writing supplies, construction paper, art supplies, reading materials, glue and scissors, whiteboard, large brainstorming sheets, headphones per student, and a large classroom. All of the classrooms in our school have similar resources and access to resources.

In our classroom, we have a teacher's assistant that rotates the kindergarten classroom each day for one hour in each classroom. I think this is rare privilege for most elementary school classrooms in other schools and has been so helpful for us as a teacher and for our students to have more teachers in the room per student. I think the only area that I would say may need more attention is our student to counselor ratio. We have over 700 students and one certified counselor on our campus. This is an alarming number and statistic for our school, yet more alarming is the state average is 803 students to one counselor. I think this is an area that should have more attention and is swept under the rug across the state and the nation. There is so much need socio-emotionally for all of our students in such a high academic success-driven community. I think this needs to be changed in all our schools to support our students' needs. I think as an emerging educator, this is something that can be focused on in the classroom as well with care and intentional classroom ecology practices. It may not be possible to hire more certified counselors to each school to truly support the needs of hundreds of students, but it is something that I can mindfully be aware of and meaningfully plan for in terms of social-emotional well-being and classroom ecology for my current and future learners.

### **Part D: Reflection and Growth**

This year has been full of growth, reflection, challenges, accomplishments, and surprises. I am so blessed to have worked with so many wonderful colleagues, brilliant mentors, and

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amazing students that filled me with inspiration, awe, and so much light. It is bittersweet to come to a close of my journey as a resident teacher and Master's student. I have grown tremendously as an educator and as a learner throughout the process. I am so grateful to have developed a new appreciation and lens into the terribly harsh as well as the outstandingly brilliant wonder of education and the endless branches it possesses. I recognize that I am a forever learner and will continue to grow and develop as an educator and learn from my students each year in this calling.

### **Classroom Ecology and Teacher Presence**

I have learned so much about creating a true classroom ecology with all my students and modeling teacher presence in the classroom. This is an area where I initially struggled to move past the ideology and actually move into meaningful action in my classroom of residence. I knew and understood the five-layer of establishing respect for students and their learning were: naming and modeling expectations, supporting productive learning with culturally responsive practices, tapping into students funds of knowledge, and never lowering the academic rigor, support and scaffolding all of my students to have them demonstrate their ability and brilliance, but I was fixed in a growth mindset that I wanted to move into a growth action.

I learned to lead circles in classrooms with students where they shared personal stories, accomplishments, fears, and goals. I learned to create meaningful and lasting relationships with my students and families that I will keep close to my heart forever. I developed an awareness for my students' culture, home languages, and personal interests to include in our daily, weekly, and monthly lessons and curriculum. It was creating an environment where students felt safe, valued, recognized, and that they had a place in this classroom to be and celebrate themselves.

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

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Content and curriculum were both areas that I grew quickly confident in, since I love literature almost as much as I love being as prepared as humanly possible. I dove into every curriculum and resource I could before I even stepped foot into my residency classroom. I believed preparing in this way would make me a more prepared educator, and my students would be so much more prepared and ready for their next grade level. In doing the work, I humbly realized this was far from the truth. I needed to meet my students where they were, use authentic assessment to establish where they were, and create curriculum and lessons that were meaningful and student-centered. Those were not something I learned from a text, YouTube clips, observations, or anything other than experiencing it for myself. I had to see, hear, listen to, and learn from my students before I could teach them. I learned to really lean into student interest, curiosities, frustrations, goals, and culture.

As Charity Parson mentions in her article, “In order to be sustained, inquiry must have an origin, and there’s no better place to begin than with the students’ questions, interests, ideas, and concerns!” (Parson, 2018). All of these areas gave me a new perspective on access to learning and achievement that was unique and genuine to my students. I learned that developing this connection between curriculum and instruction was not a “one size fits all” equation that I could master from a text or even another mentor or colleague, it is special to each class and each student. It is learning how to be culturally responsive and representative of our student population in our instruction that promotes engagement and motivation for success.

I have also grown in my ability to differentiate instruction in each lesson. Being in a kindergarten classroom was a wonderful experience where I learned to create lessons that were meaningful and rigorous for each student. Sometimes that meant grouping small groups in diverse ways, and sometimes it was as simple as leveled sentence starters in the scaffolds of each

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lesson. Sometimes it took me thinking that I had the lesson planned and tiered perfectly then completely failing where I realized that my students needed something totally different in the moment and changing it in real-time. I believe that educators can truly teach, engage and motivate our students if we are willing to make changes in the moment regardless of past notions or preparations and take the time to acknowledge the assets and needs of our students in the moment. By taking these steps, I have also learned a lot about creating measurable goals. When I began my residency, I thought I knew how to create content objectives and language objectives with ease. I quickly realized my lesson plans and my detailed and precise objects were both actually quite vague and in need of serious reconsideration. I lacked the know how of considering the assets and needs of my students in creating these objectives and just stuck with the standards with an attempt of scaffold for emerging, expanding and bridging students

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

I have learned so much about instructional practices in my summer Emergent Bilingual course this last semester. Throughout the program, I have learned so many valuable better instructional practices and one I am especially proud of developing is recognizing my students abundant funds of knowledge that they bring with them to the classroom. These funds of knowledge or cultural wealth could look like speaking multiple languages, cultural background, life experiences and many other assets. I have learned to meet my students where they are and celebrate their culture in the classroom.

Other instructional practices I have developed include differentiating instruction, connecting curriculum to real-world examples, promoting student-centered learning, and using assessment that drives instruction. Throughout my years as a substitute teacher, in my pre-teaching and as a resident teacher, I have observed and practiced many styles of differentiation

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with grades K-12th. I have seen how valuable this practice is in affirming my students' assets and scaffolding their needs. It is such a joy to witness students having that “aha moment” in an area of study they felt extremely challenged by. Through planning and implementing differentiation, these moments occur more often because we learn to create meaningful lessons that serve and speak to all of our students and are created with them at the center. This practice includes a lot of planning, grouping, partner talks, discussion, student choice, and most importantly student voice.

Another practice that I have seen make a significant difference in my students learning and engagement is planning and implementing student's voice. A question I have asked myself throughout this program and reflected on is “When students have been socialized to listen more than they speak how can we provide space for them to speak and have a voice in the classroom where they feel recognized, valued, and heard? This could look like partner talks, discussion in small groups, whole class or having choices in their learning, work, and assessments. I believe instructional practices is an area of education that I will always strive to improve and develop as I meet new teachers and students every year. I would love to continue developing my ability to celebrate culture and cultural wealth in my classroom for all my students in the future.

Another area I have developed in my educational journey is how to create meaningful and measurable content and language objectives. I began to identify what students need to know for the language objectives, how to create engaging tasks, and build from students' backgrounds. I reflected on this a lot from the readings in my course work, observations, lesson planning, and teaching because I know learning objectives have always been something I have been working to improve. I always ask myself what is the purpose, why does this matter, is it interesting, does it get students' excited, and how accessible am I making this to all my students? When reflecting

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on these questions, I learned to clarify and improve my objectives to become more accessible for my students and to create more meaningful and relevant language objectives that connect and build to my students' backgrounds. This shifted my perspective on creating these objectives in a meaningful and powerful way.

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

Academic rigor and assessments are still areas where I am developing my expertise. I feel confident in my ability to use the common core standard to create meaningful content and language objects that support their assets, and needs of my students. I think I will be developing and mastering the best ways to forms these objectives for the success of all my students for the rest of my journey in education. I think this is an area that will always be changing and growing in my personal educational journey. I feel similarly with using assessments strategically, authentically, and diversely.

I have learned that meaningful, authentic and valuable assessments have several "musts" to be implemented successfully for our students. As Garcia explains "The intensity of testing means that less time is being spent in challenging and creative teaching or teaching subject matter that is not tested" (Garcia, 2018). Authentic Assessments must promote student learning, must include diverse learning opportunities, must be student centered, must drive instruction, must provide students and educators with meaningful feedback, and finally must help learners develop skills to self-advocate and become responsible for their own learning.

I have also learned how intricate planning and assessments can be. I especially think this is true for our emergent bilingual population. As Garcia mentions, "These include (1) the power of assessments, (2) the difference between language proficiency and content proficiency, (3) the discrepancy between general language performance and language-specific performance, (4) the

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validity and reliability of the tests for emergent bilinguals, (5) the fit of the assessment to the population, and (6) the match of the language of the test to the language practices of the students” (Garcia, 2018).

Assessments must have a clear purpose and rationale. In a class this semester, I posted in a discussion about assessments, how when a grade level assessment did not make sense for my students I redesigned the assessment where it was clear, prepared, and directly tied with the lesson objectives for the unit and lesson. I think this is important to remember when we assess across content and being intentional of how we prepare our students with making hidden curriculum known, adjusting lessons in real-time, and genuinely driven instruction with assessments. I also reflected on how much language and literacy support there lacks in general content instruction. I must be aware, clear, and consistent about the language access before worried about the content sinking in. This is something I continue to practice and work on.

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

I am proud to say that I have done extensive and hard work in exploring my positionality, my personal bias as well as starting my journey as an anti-racist educator. I know there is still much work to be done and that I am learning and growing each day with research, community building, raising awareness, having brave conversations, and continuing to teach with a social justice approach. Looking back on when I started my Master’s program I did not know much about being a social justice educator and much less about being an anti-racist educator. I feared having difficult conversations with colleagues, friends, and families because I was uncertain how the conversations would go and that they would turn into arguments without meaning or that I would say something that did not come out right. I struggled to avoid these conversation about

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representation, equity, fairness, class, language, power, and justice because I did not want to be seen or labeled as aggressive, loud, or angry.

I am so grateful that I have done this work with my critical social justice warriors and done my own self-reflection work where I have realized the labels do not matter and even if they did, I am aggressive. I am aggressively passionate about critical social justice reform and equity in the classrooms and communities I serve. I am loud. I am a loud and proud Latina that dances to Latin music, beams in rich colorful jewelry from Mexico, and speaks in two languages as loud as my ancestors that came before me. I am angry. I am angry that my fellow Black and Brown peers, family members, friends and students are not treated with the same love, dignity, or even equal existence, than me because I “look white.” It angers me that as Delpit describes the realities for so many Black people as simply “Thankful that I’m Black and breathing” (p.134). This is such a sad reality to reflect and resonate with. How much of my skin color has given me so much opportunity and taken so much away from others. This was a really difficult concept and reality to work and reflect on for me.

I have felt glimmers of extreme racism and prejudice for being Latina from both the Latinx and the White community because I didn’t seem to fit into either “category” well enough to represent the group. I identify as Latina, my Mother was born in Mexico and my Grandfather on my father’s side was born in Nicaragua. I have a deep love for my culture, the language, the people, the spirit, the food and the land. I have never seen myself or identified my culture as a White person, but that does not change the fact that many people perceive me as White and I am awarded many privileges with this wrong assumption to a certain extent.

I remember working on my undergraduate degree and being in a general requirement math course that I had to pass to receive my degree. I had a professor who did not require paper

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homework and seemed to be a decent, well-educated family man who had been teaching for well over 15 years. I had an A in the class thus far and was doing fine until I had a question regarding an equation in the textbook. I casually walked up to him after class as I had seen many of my classmates do before to ask him about the question I had. He cut off my question before I could finish my statement and asked me my name. I responded "Aly." He asked me, "Aly what?" I said "Aly Lopez" He said "Well of course you don't get it; you're a Lopez. You have a textbook? Read that if you even bought one." He finished this sentence as he walked away from my shocked expression and paralyzed body. It was the most surreal moment of my adult life up until that moment. I kept coming up with possibilities of what he could have meant or maybe I did not hear him correctly or maybe something is really off in his personal life and he was lashing out. In the next few weeks that followed my grade started to drop and drop until I was no longer even passing the class. I went to countless office hours where I was met with the same "read the book" response and never given any explanation as to why the quality of my work had not changed and yet I had fallen from an A to a D within a few weeks.

I scheduled a meeting with the Dean who explained to me that grades are at a teachers discretion for quality of student work. I was livid and I felt completely powerless. I refused to quit. I never missed a single day of class nor did I ever neglect my assignments and constantly did extra credit. My grade never changed from a D. This was more than just a grade or even a matter of racism this was a class I needed to graduate. This moment in my life felt like every single opportunity that I was about to have as a first generation college graduate was about to be ripped away from me for my last name. I was placed on academic probation and had to redo the course with the same instructor because he was the head of the undergraduate math department. I completed an entire other class of his with the same tenacity, grit, and perseverance in my heart

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never missing and always doing extra work. Again, I was graded with a D. I was beginning to lose hope and I never once even mentioned this to my family who were across the state from me at the time because I know how much my diploma means to them. I must have met with the entire math department several times along with the Dean until I made them realize I am not going away or standing down. I was going to graduate no matter what. I finally had the Dean agree to allow me to take the course with another professor grading my course work as I enrolled for an extended and unplanned semester. I worked just as I had in the past two courses and was finally given my well-deserved grade to finally graduate with my degree in Child Development. That experience was one of the most defining moments of my life. I learned what it felt like to have opportunities robbed from me, but the will and tenacity to never falter underneath the hate. I believe it was this experience that sparked a fire in me to be a part of the educators that create a safe and equitable space for all learners. I was inspired and motivated to create positive and radical change because I experienced the need for it.

When I began my journey in my Master's program, I was eager to be apart of educators that believed in the same mission as I did. I was so excited to learn, grow, and begin teaching with these new perspectives and better practices. The more I leaned into lectures, novels, documentaries, and spoke with people that have lived through oppression their entire lives, I was no longer afraid of having the brave conversations with my family and friends. I welcomed them with calm, informed, and passionate discussion. I am no where near where I want to be in my anti-racist work as an educator and learner, but I am proud to continue to work everyday to become more aware, present, and vulnerable. I will continue to learn alongside my mentors, peers, and fellow teachers in raising awareness and including powerful, and culturally rich

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lessons and curriculum that has commonly been silenced in the past. I will celebrate all of my students backgrounds, culture and spirits in my classrooms.

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## Conclusion

In my journey of creating this ethnographic narrative, I have learned so much about my students and my development as an emerging teacher. I have recognized my privilege and explicit bias as an educator and a lifelong learner. I am so privileged to have the opportunity to observe the students, other teachers, learn from my students, other teachers, and all the families I have met and had the chance to get to know. Through this educational journey, I have learned what my students are like at school and at home and used that information to help support their educational as well as their socio-emotional development in the classroom.

I am so grateful to all my mentors and families that have connected with me and been a part of my learning journey. They have supported my understanding of how important community is in the learning environment as well as a collective working together for the optimal success of each child. It has been wonderful interviewing each student and learning what they like, what challenges them and how to better support their challenges in the classroom. I hope to continue these observations, interviews, family visits, and building real teacher-student-family relationships each year that I teach in the future. I now understand how valuable each step is in creating a genuine sense of community in the classroom, a safe space for learning and building a collaborative and inclusive classroom pedagogy.

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