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My Life Long Dream: My Teaching and Educational Journey

Karla Torres Hernandez

Department of Education, Claremont Graduate University

July 16, 2020

Dedication

To my students, never give up on your dreams and always trust your own strengths. To my family and friends, your constant support has driven me to become the best teacher I can be and make you proud. To my parents, thank you for being such supportive and encouraging parents.

You have always pushed me to follow my dreams, and I am forever grateful for your selflessness, encouragement, and love. Because of your emotional support and consistent meals throughout these past 18 months, my success as a future teacher has become attainable.

Abstract

This ethnography follows my journey teaching kindergarten in the Ontario/Montclair neighborhood in San Bernardino. Its purpose is to understand the macro and micro levels of the community to inform my teaching practices and support my students and families. On a micro-level, I conducted case studies on three specific students. Data analysis of in-home interviews, personal interactions, and assessments allowed me to create action plans to best support these students' academic, social, and emotional needs. On a macro level, I studied my students' environments: community, school, and classroom. By analyzing whole class and individual student data and reflecting on my own development, I grew as a professional educator and became an effective and socially just teacher.

Keywords: social justice, effective teaching, community

Table of Contents

Dedication 2

Abstract 3

Preface 5

Part A: Who am I and why do I want to become a teacher? 6

Part B: Introduction to scholars 17

 a.. Case Study 1: David 18

 b. Case Study 2: Jesse 27

 c. Case Study 3: Julia 37

 d. Concluding thoughts of Case Studies 44

Part C: What is my community, school, and classroom? 44

Part D: Reflection of a Critical Social Justice Educ..... 70

Conclusion 70

References 71

Preface

How can I become an effective teacher that intentionally teaches her class through a social justice lens? As I entered the Claremont Graduate Program, I set out to find my teacher identity and learn how to be an effective and equitable teacher. My ethnography follows in detail my journey as a kindergarten teacher working at an elementary public school in San Bernardino County, and centers on my experience as a student teacher displaying my process, reflection, and shift in perspective throughout my first-year in the classroom.

The majority of my study focuses on three students whose homes I visited while learning more about their immediate families and their lives outside of school. These in-depth case studies provided insight into my students' assets and needs and enabled me to become a more supportive and knowledgeable teacher. Additionally, studying the community, school, and classroom environment has strengthened my drive to be an ally for my students, and has opened my eyes to the need for social justice and strong education for all members of the community.

This ethnography highlights how my students and I have grown throughout the course of this school year both personally and academically. My own realizations about being an effective teacher and learning to recognize my strengths and weaknesses are highlighted in this ethnography. Challenges and setbacks are assets in the journey to becoming a better teacher, and without this failure, growth is unattainable. My growth stemmed from overcoming these challenges with the support of my colleagues, family, and advisors. Without my own strong role models, I would not be able to demonstrate this support for my students and help them grow to their fullest potential.

Part A: Who am I and why I want to become a teacher?

Journey to Teaching

As Sensoy and DiAngelo succinctly state, “Critical social justice recognizes inequality as deeply embedded in the fabric of society (i.e., as structural), and actively seeks to change this.”(preface). This is the type of educator I aspire to become, a critical justice educator. As stated by Sensoy and DiAngelo the first step is acknowledging that inequalities do exist within our society.

My Background

In order to tell my story, I have to give a bit of background on my parents’ story. Both of my parents migrated to this country at a very young age, right after they got married at the age of twenty. They arrived with nothing but the clothes on their back and hoped that this country would provide great opportunities for their future offspring. They worked the fields day and night to survive in this country and took on any other job that could offer extra income into the family. One story that I hear often is that my parents would take my older brother and I into the toy store and we would be in there for hours and fill up the cart, however when it was time to go we would unload the cart and leave the store empty handed but with huge smiles. This story still makes me smile and reminds me that although my parents worked hard to give us everything sometimes they could not and that was perfectly fine because they did what they could to make us happy and that taught me humility.

Years later my parents became U.S. residents because my older brother has a learning disability and he needed not only the medical care but also the education opportunities provided in this country. My dad right after went to school to get his license as a truck driver and my mom now more than ever encouraged us to do well in school. Living in a low-income neighborhood my elementary school consisted of mostly Latinx students and I never paid any attention to this until a couple years later. While at this school I felt comfortable and I was never questioned or asked to take any additional testing because I spoke Spanish. I was doing very good and I loved going to school and being in that environment. I remember during first grade for Christmas I asked for a chalk board because I wanted to become a teacher, and I got one and it was my prized possession. I would set up my room with stuffed animals and teach them what I had learned that day in class myself. At times I would also teach my mom and grandma what I had learned, and they would switch it up on me and teach me in Spanish, which is how I was able to develop both languages equally.

In 2005 my parents decided that they wanted to provide their family with a house of their own, so they decided to move to Las Vegas where the homes were more affordable. Upon entering school in Las Vegas, I began to feel marginalized, they began asking me to take the English proficiency test, because I had noted that I spoke Spanish as well. In my mind I remember thinking why they are making me take this test year after year even when I am scoring advanced and getting good grades. I also remember being at school and wearing a certain outfit or hair style some of the students would make hurtful comments or laugh at me and I began to feel ashamed of my culture. I remember asking my mom to buy me clothes that looked like the other students and I remember I also began denying that I spoke Spanish. During this time in

elementary school I wanted nothing more than to fit in with everyone else and I wanted to hide my true identity.

My Decision to Be a Teacher

In 2008 our whole lives changed, my dad lost his job, we lost our house, our car, and during the summer of the transition between elementary school and middle school, my parents decided it would be best if we moved back to California. My dad had an aunt in Pomona, and that is where we arrived. We packed all our belongings and put them in a storage and moved in with my dad's aunt. We lived with her for four months, all five of us sleeping on her living room floor. My dad took on two jobs where he could find work and my mom also took on a job at the County Fairs, and for those four months my two siblings and I were alone with my aunt all day. I had to step up and take care of both of my brothers, my younger brother being seven and my older brother being fourteen but with his disability, I took on the role of taking care of them both. Those four months were probably one of the hardest things to go through, we had no privacy, and we had lost it all, we lost our home. Fortunately, my parents were able to find a new house and qualified for the house and once again we were ready to rebuild our lives. I started middle school more determined than ever to achieve higher education, and that is exactly what I did. Middle school was a place where I began to shine in my academics and I felt culturally accepted.

Then I started high school and I was in those honors and advanced placement courses, until my sophomore year. During this year my aunt was suffering with cancer and I remember visiting her everyday and hoping she would get better but one day I got the devastating news that

she had lost the battle. This completely took a toll on me and I gave up on life. I found no point in living and working hard if life could be taken away so rapidly. This showed in my academics and I no longer had goals and college was nowhere in my mind. During my senior year of high school, I was seated and told that I needed to improve my grades because if I did not I would not be able to graduate. I remember my parents telling me that they were not mad but that they were just disappointed and that to me was more heartbreaking than anything else. My parents had sacrificed their entire lives in order to give us this opportunity and here I was letting it slip between my fingers. During this time, I was given the opportunity to teach a dance class to differently abled students, and that along with my conversation with my parents was what changed my mindset.

I regained my passion for teaching and realized the position I was in to continue my education and make a difference as a teacher which is what I had always wanted. That experience completely changed my look on life, they taught me that no matter what everyone said if you were your true self happiness would come. I entered Chaffey Community College determined to achieve my goals and be successful in higher education, while following my passion and helping out the community. I was excelling to the best of my abilities academically, and I continued my mission to contribute equity and diversity, I became involved in a club called Aman/Awoman (Umoja) whose focus was to guide minority students to develop pathways to graduation completion and success in higher education through intentional community service. During my time with the club I was involved in a tutoring program for at-risk high school students.

What and Who Do I Want to Teach

I then transferred to UC San Diego, where again it was a new challenge of navigating such a large institution. However, I quickly became involved within the education department and more specifically the PAL Program. This program provides undergraduates the opportunity to become mentors to students in underserved schools in San Diego. I worked at El Toyon Elementary in National City in a third-grade classroom. During my time in the classroom I realized that being a teacher is not just about throwing material at the students. I realized that a teacher's job goes beyond that, it is about truly wanting to make a difference in the students' lives no matter how small the impact, it is about being that support system for both the student and the parents. This is where I realized the type of teacher I want to become, an intentionally inviting teacher, one that treats all students with respect and is transparent with them (Smith, Fisher, Frey 2015). I also realized during my time in the third-grade classroom that the teachers also learn so much from the students as well. I grew so much as a person while working with the students and I realized traits about myself that I had lost or not believed that I had. They taught me that it is a two-way street being a teacher you mentor and help the students but they can also teach you valuable lessons. As a teacher it is always important to not assume that you know it all because in life there are always new lessons to be learned. I also became the Civic Engagement intern at the Raza Resource Centro, that provides support for the Latinx community at UCSD, and helps build community. My passion for teaching and making a change has been created

throughout my life time and every single one of my many experiences has grown this drive to beat statistics and not fall into the status quo.

Assets and Needs

During my time working at El Toyon in San Diego, I began to realize that my strengths in the classroom were building socio-emotional connections and communication. I know this will help me in my goal of teaching based on social emotional learning (CASEL 2019). I remember walking into the classroom and being terrified that the students were not going to like me. My host teacher welcomed me in and asked if I was willing to introduce myself to the entire class. I agreed, and I began introducing myself to the students and at the end I asked if they had any questions. The first question I was asked was if I spoke Spanish. I answered yes and immediately all of the kids' faces lit up with smiles and they yelled out "YES!" The following question I was asked was if I liked sports and if so which ones. I replied that yes, I do like sports and that soccer and basketball were my favorites, the class went wild and all the little boys jumped up with joy. Little did I know that those two sports were really popular during recess between the students. From then on it was pretty easy to form connections with the students I would walk around and if any student needed help I would get to their level to speak to them and we would work on whatever they needed. I also got students who would say that they did not need help, but I also make sure they knew that if they needed anything they could come to me and sometimes I would just have a conversation about their work and they would explain it to me. When it was read out loud, the students would save me a spot on the carpet and give me a stuffed animal to hold while

we were listening to the story. It was an opportunity for me to model good carpet behavior to the students and me being there made them copy my behavior.

However, lunch was really the time I got to connect with my students, during lunch I was given the option of going into the teacher lounge or sitting with the students, I chose sitting with the students. They all seemed really surprised and first but extremely excited that an adult figure was eating lunch with them. All the other students wondered with curiosity, and my students proudly said, “This is Ms. Karla, our class mentor”. As a way to get to know the students and them to get to know me at lunch I would play the number game. This game consisted of either me or the students to think of a number that was important to them or myself, I would say a number and the students would have three guesses as to what that number could mean. At the end of the three guesses I would explain why that number is important to me and then the next student would go. It was a good way for the students to know me and me to know them, but it was also a good way for my students who were mostly English learners to engage in conversation outside of the classroom and they did not seem stressed. On the contrary they were eager to play the game. This is when I realized that as a future teacher I value stories and I want the students to know mine but as Hammond states the best technique for this is to weave it into my lessons (Hammond 2015). Upon sitting with my students the first day I realized that I had to create a schedule as to what days I would sit with which students because they all wanted to sit with me. At the beginning of everyday I would let me students know who I was sitting with at lunch and that eliminated any behavior problems and it gave my students a routine and eventually they knew which days they were sitting with me.

However, throughout my time working in this third-grade classroom I realized that I had areas of growth such as self-confidence and developing my critical thinking skills. I began to realize that I was lacking self-confidence in myself because I began to have thoughts while in the classroom like, am I really going to be able to teach an entire class by myself, what if I am not an effective teacher to my students. All this self-doubt started filling my mind even though the students and even my host teacher seemed to have complete confidence that I would be an amazing teacher. I would get comments like, “Ms. Karla when you become a teacher I want to be in your classroom!” or one day we had a substitute and one of the students shouted, “Ms. Karla, why can’t you be our substitute teacher?”. The students saw the potential that I lacked to see, even my host teacher made remarks such as, “One day you are going to be teacher of the year.” or “I have never seen the students so connected to someone and so excited to be at school.” Even though everyone else believed in my abilities I still believe and feel like I need to gain that confidence for myself and realize that I can be the teacher I hope to be, but it will take time and failures to reach that goal and that it is perfectly fine. I also during this time felt a rush to teach the students the content and whenever the host teacher would hand my worksheets for the students I never really questioned the “why” behind anything, maybe because it was stuff that when I was in school was the norm and I did not think to question it. Now I continue to work on this area of growth which is to develop critical thinking skills.

Going into my mentorship program I remember thinking that I was going to walk into the third-grade classroom and change the lives of the students. Little did I realize that my own implicit biases led me to thinking that all the students came from a background that had a family structure of both mom and dad always providing support and that higher education was the key

and something that everyone had to do in order to achieve a better future. This all quickly changed as I started having conversations with the students and realizing that some came from very low-income single-family homes, or that their dreams and goals sometimes had nothing to do with school. I began to check my biases and realize that I had a very fixed mentality because of my own implicit biases.

The Role of Critical Social Justice

Through this experience I was able to realize how I can use my strengths to mitigate any negative impact my own biases may have on my students. I began to realize that forming those social-emotional connections with the students early on was very important. By doing so I got an idea of the students backgrounds and I could check my own biases that all students have a family structure of both the mother and father figure present. Communication skills would also as I began to realize would play a huge role in checking my biases especially when it came to the idea that higher education should be on the minds as a future goal. Instead I should be using the conversations I have with the students to hear about their own aspirations and goals for the future and support the students for them to believe in themselves and accomplish those goals. Biases are something that I never really noticed in myself until I entered that third-grade classroom and I was humbled by the students into realizing that I did have biases and that the way I projected them can be impactful either in a positive or negative way to the students.

My life experiences have shaped my personal goals as a future teacher. For my first year of teaching I know my goals have to start small but, they have to be meaningful. The first goal I have set is based on me always wanting to be effective. I have to learn that in my first year I am

going to make mistakes and I am not going to have all the answers. I have to learn to ask for advice from my mentors and co workers and learn from what techniques were effective and grow from those that were not. That is my first goal to learn to accept that my first year of teaching will not be perfect but that it is an experience to grow from. This will be an important step into becoming an effective teacher because it will make me analyze my teaching and improve year by year.

Another goal I hope to accomplish my first year of teaching is to learn to set routines effectively for my students. This will save and create valuable time for my students to learn the content I have planned. Like stated by Lemov, we must teach our students the right and successful way to do things (Lemov 2010). I want to be effective in communicating with my students, learning to be more explicit because at times I am not straight to the point. I believe that setting routines at the beginning of the year will help the students and I throughout the year in making sure things run smoothly. In my first year of teaching I will also see which routines are effective and which ones I can make better to make the classroom run smoothly. I also have an objective to create a social emotional classroom and to do this I hope to incorporate morning meetings in which my students will get to know each other and myself. This will build self-confidence in my students and will help build relationships that can help when lesson planning in creating ways to incorporate the students interests. Another very important goal I have is to reflect on my lesson plans and look for areas of growth, because thinking that it is perfect will not lead me into becoming effective growth is continuous.

I do believe there will be some challenges in meeting the goals I have set. I anticipate that at times I will feel low because I have not met a certain objective or because I feel like I have not been effective, but I have to remember that my goal of becoming an effective teacher is a process and it takes practice. I have to learn to be patient with my own personal growth and that will definitely be challenging as I am eager to become an effective teacher. Another challenge I anticipate is that my students will not adapt to the routines I have set for them or that they forget about the routines throughout the year. To through this challenge I hope to be explicit in providing clear directions for my students and clarify if there are any misinterpretations. I will also consider when behavior issues arise that maybe I have not given clear directions and therefore can change my routines or establish more explicit ones. In regards to lesson planning with a purpose one of the challenges especially in my first year is learning to not get caught up with time constraints. This I will try to control by learning to time manage and ask my mentors for advice. In becoming a social justice educator I have to be mindful of the purpose behind each lesson plan and how each one will impact the students. Another challenge is making time to reflect on what is effective and what the areas of growth are in my teaching. I anticipate this will be a challenge because in it being my first year of teaching everything will be new, and time will fly. However, this challenge will get better with experience and reflection.

Goals

Some of the metrics I will use to access my progress are from the social justice disposition. One is to demonstrate a strength-based perspective of students, households, and communities. Other metrics that can be used to access my progress are to develop appreciation of

others' ways of thinking, being, and doing. Also to maintain a socio-emotionally appropriate and empowering classroom culture. In regards to classroom ecology it is important to use the metric of establishing routines that facilitate students' success. These metrics I believe will be important because I can check my progress as I progress throughout the year. They will also serve as a reminder to me of my goals and if there are different ways I can achieve those goals. It is a good way to guide my practice and keep me in check and that I can move to different metrics once I have met my initial ones.

Part B : Introduction to Scholars

As I strive to become a teacher who is culturally responsive, empathetic, and self aware, I am also pulling from my past experiences of oppressive practices that I do not want to follow. Realizing the impact a teacher can have on a student, it is very important that I get to build those strong relationships with my students which go beyond the surface level. As I embark in my teaching career I hope to grow from this experience of conducting home visits, student interviews, and in providing ways that I can best support my students.

In the three case studies that follow, I closely examine the scholars' academic needs, socio-emotional development, and family and cultural backgrounds using interviews, and classroom observations. I provide each scholar with an action plan with goals relating specifically to their needs and learning styles. This year the student, their parents, and myself will work together as a team to meet these goals set in place.

I have chosen three different scholars of varying backgrounds. A scholar who is an English learner, another who has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), and one whose

separation of parents qualifies her to have experienced a significant life event. My goal for these case studies is to learn more in depth knowledge about each scholar. As I got to know the scholars and their families, I discovered so much more about them than just beyond their labels.

Focus Student 1: David

In deciding who my Focus student 1 would be I had a total of six options. I finally decided based on parent communication. I also realized that the student was a bit more shy than the rest and I was really interested to get to know him and his family. His mom was also very willing to participate in my ethnography and signed and turned everything quickly.

Focus student 1 will be given the pseudonym David, he is five years old and Hispanic. David is fairly tall for his age, dark brown eyes, dark brown hair and fair skin. I chose David to be my focus student 1 my English Learner because I noticed from the very first day he was very shy in the classroom, but would be completely outgoing outside of the classroom. I realized that he was a bit hesitant when it came to talking to myself or my master teacher. I tried to slowly gain his trust and I would have small conversations with him based on his interest such as Sonic. However, I felt like it was still not enough and I did not want him to feel scared of me or scared of school. I started brainstorming of different classroom ecology strategies that I could implement. I asked my master teacher if it was possible to implement morning meetings into the schedule, because I thought they would play a crucial role in building classroom ecology. After I got the green light from my master teacher I decided to start with the morning meetings right away. At first the students were all very hesitant and I could tell by the look on their faces. However they were open to it and participated with curiosity.

David's strengths inside of the classroom include his ability to stay focused and show his peers the appropriate classroom expectations. David really thrives in both English Language Arts (ELA) and Math, and he is always focused on completing any task that is given to him. During recess David is very polite and inclusive of his peers, I have seen him push kindly a little girl on the swing because she could not get it to move. Outside of the classroom mom has mentioned that he is very energetic at home and that he is always willing to help around the house. An area of growth for David inside of the classroom would be getting him to speak a bit more. David is very shy when it comes to speaking in class, however I have noticed that when he is my calendar or pledge helper and he is using the microphone he loves to talk and he feels empowered. However, when he does not have those jobs he is very shy and will not speak. Areas of growth outside of the classroom as of now and in talking with his mom none.

David's language classification is English Learner. In looking at David's formative assessments he is performing at grade level in both ELA and Math. David is able to work independently without a problem, he is very focused during this time and likes to do his work very neat and clear, and is usually one of the first ones to complete the task. He also does well in partner sharing or partner assignments with his grade level. He is always willing to take lead in when working in a partnership .However, I have noticed that when working with his fourth grade reading buddy he tries to group up with his classmates. I feel like this may be due to the fact that this is most of the students first interactions with upper grade students. We have not yet done enough work in groups to say that David feels comfortable in or how he may work in a group.

David is very creative, I have noticed that during enrichment he likes to go to the block center and he is always making buildings and trains and he is very proud of his work because everytime he is done he will ask me to go and see them. I have also noticed that as the days go by David is more willing to share with me his interests and wants me to play with him during enrichment. This I see as progress in gaining David's trust because at the beginning of the year he would shy away from me even observing what he was doing. I have also noticed throughout my time in the classroom that David is a critical thinker because he is always asking "why" and he wants to learn more about whatever we may be talking about. Knowing that David is an English Learner I get very excited every time he asks "why" because that lets me know that he is engaged or is able to ask for clarification.

In the area of communication David feels very comfortable with his peers however, is shy to speak when we are doing a whole group lesson. Upon noticing this I truly began to reflect on my classroom culture and how student centered my classroom truly was. I began to identify that we really did not have much student work displayed and that I also really did not have personal items that the students could see related to me and maybe themselves. I decided after the first few weeks to incorporate student work into the classroom and the students including David began saying comments like "I do not want to go home"! As I began to incorporate Universal Access groups into the classroom I noticed he likes to talk and participate, it is only when we transition into the whole group setting that he becomes a bit more shy. I began reflecting on my own experiences and being an English Learner myself I remember being in grade school and wishing one of my teachers would just even try to speak in my native language. So I decided to try this out with David. I noticed that when I talked to him in Spanish his little

face lit up and he immediately felt very comfortable with me and was willing to share more information than when I spoke to him in English. I know my school as an English language policy only but I felt that if I was going to be authentic not only to myself but to my students I had to show them that I was proud of knowing two languages and that I was not going to push one aside. I began to incorporate classroom chants that had Spanish words in them, also during our lunch conversations I would talk to the student both in English and Spanish. I realized that it brought our classroom ecology into another level the students truly began to feel comfortable with me as their teacher because they were getting to see and hear my own experiences growing up.

The academic standards that David struggles with is in the area of writing he is able to formulate sentences but he is still writing the words altogether and not in the correct lines. However, I feel that with constant modeling and practice he will be able to grow in this area. I believe that he may be struggling in this area due to the fact that this is his first time in school and he has never written a sentence before until now, so this is something new for him. When looking at his writing journal it is evident that this is his area of growth but in speaking to my master teacher she has pointed out to me that at this time in Kindergarten it is still normal for them to not know how to formulate a sentence by themselves. However, she said it is something that we definitely want to monitor throughout the year.

The areas of strength for David include math he really likes working with numbers and gets really excited during a math lesson. Behaviorally David is very respectful and will try his best to daily meet the classroom expectations. Socially David is a bit shy, however I have noticed

that as the days go by he is talking more and he is asking to be my helper in multiple ways like helping carry the lunch cards back from the cafeteria, and during lessons he is wanting to participate more. I plan to provide David classroom responsibilities that involve him speaking, while also continuing with our morning meeting which gives him an opportunity to share with his peers.

David thinks of himself as a very good student, kind to his peers and respectful towards the adults. In creating a classroom environment that supports David I give positive specific feedback using our school's PBIS words. During our interview when I asked David what he wanted to be when he grew up he replied " A policeman" and then I asked him why and he replied with " because they catch bad guys" (Focus Student 1 , 2019). I believe those who have influenced David have definitely been his family, when I asked David what the best day would look like he replied, " At LegoLand with my family" I then asked why and he said, " because I like legos and I'm with my family." (Focus Student 1 , 2019). David feels very positive about school and said during our interview, " I like playing with my friends at recess" (Focus Student 1, 2019). I feel like this is due to the fact that at school David is able to socialize with children his age at school, since at home he has an older sister and a younger brother. He mentioned that his best friend at school was another student in our class and when asked why he said, "because he is nice and likes to play with me at recess" (Focus Student 1, 2019).

David has been the most successful in school pretty much everyday he is very focused and respectful in and out of the classroom. David's favorite subject in school as he stated in the interview, " I like math" when asked why he said " because I like numbers" (Focus Student 1,

2019). David's mother is very involved in David's education and definitely wants David to be successful in his education. I believe David is the most comfortable both in and out of the classroom, inside because we have really worked on creating a space in which the students feel welcomed and like they are able to express themselves without fear of being told they are wrong.

Outside of the classroom David is comfortable during recess because he is forming friendships with his peers. In school David's support system consists of his older sister, my master teacher, and myself. Outside of school his support system includes his family, mom, dad, sister, and brother. David's development is typical according to my master teacher and her years of experience in kindergarten. Also according to David's initial test scores and continual growth. As of now the only technologies that are needed are the use of a smart board to display visuals and the use of a microphone in order to project his voice.

Part I: Conduct an interview/visit using the home visit protocol

My master teacher and I both attended this home visit which already set a more relaxed tone for me and I felt the support. When we entered the home I was very surprised to see the whole family mom, dad, sister, brother, and my Focus Student 1 student setting up the table. Mom opened the door and greeted us alongside David. My student was really excited that his teachers were both there and he could not stop smiling. The mom then invited us to sit at the table and my student told me to sit in a specific spot because the cup had less ice. He knew I had been sick and informed his mom that he would put less ice on my cup, which I thought was very considerate and thoughtful of his part. I handed the mom some pastries I had brought for the family, she thanked me and said they would make a perfect desert. My master teacher and I then

both started serving the kids food and then served ourselves. Next thing we knew we were all gathered around the table sharing food and talking. It reminded me a lot about my home because every day after school we would have family dinner, where we would set up the table and just talk about our days. It was truly a great way to break the ice and it also made me realize how family oriented FS1's family is.

While eating dinner I shared about myself and showed the kids my baby pictures which they absolutely loved and could not stop smiling. The parents were both very welcoming and seemed very comfortable and after started telling us the story on how they met back in Mexico while they were both in college. I found out that she was a psychologist and he was involved in agriculture. They also mentioned their reasons for coming into the United States were because they wanted their children to have better opportunities and because they both had family here. The mom actually mentioned that her sister lived right across the street from her, which was nice because her sister had children about the same age. Overall the tone of this home visit was very inviting and appreciative.

Part II: Reflection to Inform Asset-Based Instruction

During the home visit I was able to talk to the parents about FS1 and they said, "He is very energetic and loves to help" (Focus Student's Mom, 2019). This got me thinking about the way David is in class, he is usually very shy and calm but hearing this from mom definitely made me rethink how I can have him help me model for his peers. Since the home visit I have incorporated this feedback and FS1 enjoys being my helper especially during my lessons which also helps me in monitoring his understanding of the content. His parents also expressed their

interest in FS1 going into higher education, “ We ideally want him to go into higher education of course him having the choice on what he wants to study” (Focus Student’s Parents, 2019).

During the home visit I shared being a first generation student and they were very interested in my journey because they do not have any idea how higher education works here in the United States. Another very insightful comment during the home visit was, “ David is very involved in church and even sings for the choir at church” (Focus Student’s Mom, 2019). This was very interesting to me because I had never thought to ask him about religion and hearing that it is something very meaningful to him made a connection between us in which he could share why he loved being involved in the church. I also found out that at home the only language spoken was Spanish his parents shared, “ We both know the basics of the English language however we want our children to be bilingual as well” (Focus Student’s Parents,2019).

This got me thinking about my own situation growing up and how important it would have been to see a teacher that appreciated my home language and that maybe even incorporated some of it during a lesson. After this home visit that is exactly what I did I started relating examples to familiar words the students might know in Spanish and even when I eat breakfast with them in the morning I talk in both English and Spanish. The students have become more receptive towards me because of this and I can see it in their eyes they feel like their backgrounds are being seen not shut down. According to school policy no language other than English is allowed to be spoken to the kids or even they cannot speak another language and I am very sorry but to me this is disregarding students cultures and backgrounds and is something I will not do. It reminded me of this quote, “When you walk into the classroom and say to

yourself, ‘My job here is to evaluate my impact,’ then students are the major beneficiaries (Hattie & Zierer, 2018, p.3).” I strongly believe that the small impact I have by talking to them in Spanish makes the students feel acknowledged and builds our classroom ecology.

Lastly, the parents of David mentioned how grateful they finally had a teacher they could communicate with, “ For our oldest daughter none of her teachers ever spoke Spanish or tried to communicate with us in anyway, so it is a nice change to have our son’s teacher speak Spanish and making an effort to get to know our family” (Focus Student 1 Parents, 2019). After our dinner and chat they welcomed us back into their home any time and said they were extremely happy that we have taken the time to really get to know our students outside of the classroom.

Action Plan

David is a kind hearted and eager to learn scholar in the areas of reading, writing, and math. He began the school year scoring low in the percentile for reading and in the high percentile for math. However, his dedication and resilience have helped him grow these last couple of months in reading. His eagerness for knowledge has helped him to continue to excel in math. One of the biggest hurdles was coming into Kindergarten with very little background knowledge in the English language. My hope is that with the list I have created below it will help not only increase his reading proficiency, but will also help David with his social interaction skills.

David has three very close friends in class, I have seen him interacting with two of these boys during enrichment, and with the little girl I have seen them playing in the playground together. David is very shy at first but once he gains that trust his goofy personality shines

through. He is very hardworking and focused during class and he models appropriate classroom behavior and follows our classroom guidelines for learning. Keeping this in mind I hope to continue building a strong relationship with David through our morning meetings and sitting down during breakfast time with him. Hoping that in doing so he will slowly gain the confidence to participate in group activities in class.

At the beginning of the year I had each student fill out an “All About Me” flyer at home with their caretakers where I gained more insight about each individual student and helped set a foundation to start building personal relationships with them. From this activity I found out that David wants to become a Police Officer when he grows up and during our interview he was able to explain that it is because Police Officers catch bad people and that is what he wants to do. Now knowing this knowledge about David I hope to incorporate his likings into my lessons in hopes of keeping him engaged and eager to learn.

David loves being a helper and the puppet that we use during our Phonics lesson . He enjoys being given opportunities to feel successful and during this Phonics lesson he has multiple opportunities. This is why I plan to continue using our puppet during our lessons, especially since they are in the area of growth for David, which is reading. I definitely think this will help him with learning how to segment and blend cvc words and hopefully by the end of the year meet the grade level expectations or see significant growth.

Focus Student 2: Jesse

Focus student 2 will be given the pseudonym Jesse, she is five years old and her race is White. I chose Jesse because she is the only student in my classroom with an IEP and her mom is

the school nurse and is very open to her daughter participating in my ethnography. Jesse's strengths inside of the classroom include her being able to stay engaged during a lesson and being able to model for her peers what the behavior expectations are in class. She is also very helpful and willing to help any of her peers with a specific task. Jesse is also very kind to her peers and is able to show a great level of empathy. Lastly, Jesse is very positive, she always comes into the room with a smile on her face and leaves school with a smile on her face. Outside of the classroom I have noticed that her strengths include her being very extroverted. She is very social and will say hello to everyone. During the first couple of weeks of class I noticed that Jesse loved setting the expectations for her peers and her classmates really respected her for that.

However, in spending more time in the classroom I got to see how Jesse sometimes did not stand up for herself when her peers were not being respectful to her. She instead internalized what had happened and she never let anyone know I was able to find out because her peers would inform me. In those moments I realized another reason why I had chosen Jesse as my second focus student. It was also because I saw part of me in her. I was always trying to make others happy but I never had the confidence to stand up for myself when needed.

Jesse's areas of growth inside of the classroom would be speaking and writing. She needs help with formulating sentences and pronouncing the sounds in words correctly. She also is a bit shy in class when it comes to defending herself when one of her classmates is being unkind to her. As I began to notice this her mom also began to mention it to me that she was saying the same thing happened at home with her baby brother. She expressed her concern but she also commented how she really liked that Jesse was in our classroom which was full of positivity.

She tends to internalize her feelings and it is apparent by her facial expression that something happened because her smile is gone. However, she does not verbally say what is wrong or what just happened.

An area of growth outside of the classroom would be to start becoming a bit more independent and start relying less on mom. I have noticed that when mom or dad are not there at dismissal she tends to get really worried, however I understand because she is only five and slowly she will become more independent. Mom also shared that at times they are late to school because she had a hard time getting ready in the morning that instead she will be running around the house. My master teacher and I had a casual conversation with Jesse about her morning routine and she was very self reflective in realizing that she was not putting effort in getting ready for school because all she wanted to do was play. We talked to her and came up with a compromise that if she gets ready soon then she would have extra time to play instead of rushing to get to school every morning. She was very accepting of the advice and even mom mentioned the next day that she had seen a change.

Jesse is classified as an English Only and during the formative assessments we have done so far she is performing below benchmark. Her ability to work independently is great. We have given the students multiple opportunities to work independently and she does very well. In groups she also works very well and is very kind to her table mates. The work she completes is always organized and detail oriented. Jesse also likes to personalize her work so she always draws a little heart at the bottom of each page or task. She always completes her work as directed and makes sure she is doing it correctly by asking myself. Jesse definitely has a lot of creativity

and she likes to draw and has even shown me her notebook with all of her drawings inside. I remember for one of our spirit days the students had to dress up as their everyday superheroes and she dressed up as an artist. She was not afraid to step outside the box and be her unique self. I remember thinking that day how much admiration I had for Jesse because she was not afraid to express who she was. This is also when I realized the importance of staying true to yourself. I began to relax a bit more in the classroom and instead of trying to be the perfect teacher I began trying to be true to myself.

This showed the students that I was human too and that I was still learning and growing but that I had qualities that I followed. During morning breakfast she will tell me these jokes she comes up with herself. Her communication skills are definitely there with people she feels comfortable around. I have noticed that with some of the boys in the class she will struggle communicating to them because they overpower her. In critical thinking I can see that this is an area of growth for her that she struggles with because during our morning meeting I will ask questions and ask my students to support their answers with one “why” and she will reply with a “because I like it”. Language is the area in which Jesse is struggling the most and it has to do with her not being able to recognize the letter sounds which is a kindergarten standard. I think Jesse might be struggling in these areas because she may be lacking confidence in language. Her inability to pronounce certain words or produce certain sentences are almost becoming like a barrier for her to be able to explain herself and her reasoning.

The data on Jesse suggests that she is not performing at grade level in her letter sounds and in the sight words the kinders are required to learn. The current academic area in which Jesse

is excelling is in math she is meeting grade level standards in this area as shown by the formative assessments. Currently Jesse's strengths behavior wise include her ability to be very empathetic with her peers and her ability to have a positive look on every task or situation. An area of need socially would be her ability to stand up for herself when others are being unkind to her. In providing opportunities for her to become self-aware during our morning meeting I do a lot of self reflecting questions as well as self-managing skills like meditation. In regards to her social skills I have assigned her with the task of being my calendar helper which means every morning she comes up and using a microphone asks the students the season, month, year, day of the week, and counts out the days. This is really helping her build her confidence in her speech and in talking with other peers.

Jesse's self concept is that she is brave, loved, and happy. I am supporting her self concept by creating a space in which she feels like her voice is being heard through our morning meetings and her job as my calendar helper. I am also creating engaging lessons in which not only Jesse but all of my students feel happy and excited to learn. I try to have them help and participate as much as I can throughout the lessons. I also leave them positive affirmations on their desks every other week that I hand make so that when they walk in that morning they are surprised. I also have them choose a morning greeting before walking in the door just so they feel welcomed before even stepping into the classroom, and eating morning breakfast with my students has made them open up to me more and formed a trusting relationship with my students. During the interview Jesse mentioned that her dream was to become like Jesse from Toy Story,

when asked to support her answer she replied, “because Jesse fights bad guys” (Focus Student 2, 2019).

Some events that have influenced Jesse would be the positive behavior chart we use in class where the students can only go up and when they get to the very top they get a book for the treasure book. Jesse stated, “ I am happy when I get on pink and my mom reads my book!” (Focus Student 2, 2019). She really likes school and the fact that her mom reads the book that she picked out makes her really happy. The most influential figure in Jesse’s life would have to be her mom because she talks about her all the time and since mom works at school, Jesse is very proud when asked by her peers if that is her mom. During the interview, which took place outside of the classroom Jesse saw her mom walk by and yelled, “There’s my mom, hi mommy” (Focus Student 2, 2019). Jesse feels very comfortable and happy at school because during the interview when asked what her happiest day has been she replied, “ at school playing with my friends.” (Focus Student 2, 2019). I also think this is due to the fact that her mom works at the school and pretty much the entire staff knows her by her name and she has been in preschool and TK at this school.

I think Jesse’s cultural background has given her the freedom to pick what she wants to be when she grows up choosing freely and without redirection. Her mom is really open about letting Jesse express herself without worrying about hardships. In school Jesse has the support of myself, her speech teacher, and of her peers. At home Jesse has the support of her dad, grandma, and grandpa, and her mom is both a support in and out of school. This also makes Jesse feel very comfortable at school because when asked what her favorite subject in school was she replied,

“All the subjects!” and when asked if anything made her sad she said, “nothing” (Focus Student 2, 2019). I believe Jesse’s development is typical especially in her writing where I see her writing in reversal. I learned from my mentor teacher that this is something typical for the beginning of kindergarten, however this becomes atypical if by the end of the year she is still writing her letter in reversal. My data sources for her progress are through ESGI and based on the experience my master teacher has on the grade level. I would not be able to tell you at this moment what technologies are needed by Jesse because we have not introduced any technology devices to the students since our computer person had been out for paternity leave and was unable to set up the technology for us.

Part 1: Conduct an Interview/visit using the home visit protocol

Once again my master teacher and I both went to visit Jesse at her home. This home visit was extra special because FS2’s mom is our school nurse and we have a really good relationship with her at work, so it was very nice to see her outside of work. When we arrived mom opened the door and greeted us and there was Jesse sitting at the dining room table painting her pumpkin, which was a home project we had given. We sat at the table with her and I shared my box of donuts I brought for the family. Mom told Jesse to clean up so we could eat the donuts, so she did very excitedly. As we were eating donuts and I was sharing about myself with mom, dad walked in with little brother. He said hello and the little brother smiled, dad said he just picked him up from preschool. They sat around the table with us and we talked about my schooling experience and then they both shared theirs.

Later, grandfather walked in the door as he was just coming home from work. Mom mentioned how grandma had passed away last year to breast cancer and how they had moved in with dad to keep him company. Grandpa also shared how close he was to his grandchildren especially FS2 because she shared the same passion grandma did, which is art. After our talk at the dining room FS2 was eager to give us a house tour and mom came with us and talked about each room. It was really nice to see their home and overall the mood was very relaxed and welcoming.

Part II: Reflection to Inform Asset-Based Instruction

During the home visit mom and dad mentioned a couple of things that really became useful when thinking about how I can best support FS2 in the classroom. The first thing mentioned by mom is, “ She loves anything artsy, drawing, music, dance, coloring” (Focus Student 2 Parent,2019). This got me thinking of the importance of incorporating the arts into my lessons. Whether that be through visuals, videos, music, or having them draw throughout the day. In talking both of her parents also mentioned why she was receiving speech, “ When her brother was born Jesse just stopped talking”⁹ (Focus Student Parents, 2019). They mentioned how before she was developing well with speaking but the moment her brother came she just stopped and when enrolled in preschool she was referred to speech. This got me wondering why that occurred I asked mom but she said that they had no idea and she was never taken to a psychologist, so I truly wonder why. It would be interesting to find out, however this gives me insight into noticing any signs of FS2 shutting down again in her speech.

She also mentioned how her goal for Jesse is for her to go to college because she never finished school, “I want her to experience college but I will never tell her what to study. That choice is ultimately hers” (Focus Student 2 Parent, 2019). In thinking about her comment I was able to realize that I was not there to push my students towards an ideology of what I want them to be but rather support them in their vision that they have for themselves. This was a reminder of how during instruction it is also important to provide opportunities for my students to have choices. Her mom also mentioned how she was concerned about Jesse not speaking up, “ Sometimes Jesse tends to not speak up and I am concerned about that” (Focus Student 2 Parent, 2019). I mentioned to mom that in class FS2 communicate quite well. However, this got me thinking about the importance of classroom ecology. Since the beginning of the year my master teacher and I both have worked on building a classroom ecology in which the students feel like they are part of the community.

Lastly, both parents mentioned how glad they were that Jesse was in our classroom, “ She never wants to miss school and she always mentions how much she loves it and her teachers” (Focus Student 2 Parents, 2019). This comment got me thinking of the importance of being a teacher and how it truly takes a team to help guide the student into the path of success. It made me recall this quote “...being responsive to students’ learning and emotional needs, caring for students, encouraging students to participate and take academic risks, and comforting students when they need it” (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015,p.61). This is the type of teacher I aspire to be and it really has opened my mind into realizing that teaching is not about forcing curriculum unto the students but rather encouraging them to explore it.

Action Plan

Jesse is currently receiving speech to help in her area of growth in producing and hearing certain letter sounds /f/ /s/ /h/. The accommodations for Jesse include being taken out for one on one speech for 45 minutes daily. She is also positioned on the carpet in the second row in proximity to the teacher and smart board. In hopes that she will be able to hear the sounds better and look at the shape of my mouth while I am producing the sound. I am also aware to use the microphone during the lesson so Jesse can really hear the letter sounds and I use physical proximity to ensure she is able to hear how the letter sounds are being produced.

She completed preschool and TK prior to entering Kindergarten and has been exposed to letter sounds and blending of those sounds. I believe Jesse will be able to transfer that knowledge into this Phonics lesson. I am not sure if she will grasp the letter sound being introduced, however I do believe that she can transfer her previously learned skills in blending to help her during the lesson. I plan on providing her multiple opportunities to be successful in segmenting and blending words.

Jesse has one very close friend in class, they play together during recess and at lunch will sit next to each other, and I will see them sharing their stickers. However, she is very kind to her peers and they all seem to have a positive perspective. Jesse also has a very positive self-concept and feels very brave and proud that she is taking ballet. She always has a huge smile on her face and is full of positivity and she can be silly at times. I plan to use her positive self-concept as a motivation for her when it starts getting challenging. I will remind her that we always keep

trying and never give up. I will remind her of her areas of strength and use her positivity to move forward in her areas of growth.

Jesse loves all subjects in school as she mentioned during our interview and one day when she had to go home and change, she begged her dad according to mom to come back to school because she did not want to miss anything. Jesse has also stated she wants to become an artist when she grows up and loves being able to write and be creative. In knowing this about her I will try to incorporate multiple opportunities for her to be able to express herself during different lessons. I plan to do this by providing students with the option of drawing a picture, incorporating music into my lessons, and providing opportunities for my students to express themselves orally by storytelling in our morning meeting or in writing during the day.

Focus Student 3: Julia

Focus student 3 will be given the pseudonym Julia, she is five years old and Hispanic. I chose Julia to be my focus student 3 my student with life experience because at the beginning of the year her mom talked to my master teacher and myself about a situation that happened when Julia was two years old. The event involved physical abuse to both her mother and herself from the father. I would have never thought she had gone through anything like that because she is so focused and responsible in class. After Julia's mother mentioned this to us I immediately felt bad for assuming Julia was just shy and quiet and not really taking the time to support her. It did take me awhile before I could look at her and not hear the story her mother had told us. My heart was broken for what she had gone through and I did not know how to support her because it was something that I had never experienced or related to. I struggled with this for a while and then I

realized I had to have a conversation with my mentor teacher and get her insight. In doing so I found out that she was also struggling in processing the information provided to us but I remember her telling me that the biggest thing we could do is show Julia what kindness looks like and listen to her.

So I began to look at Julia's strengths inside of the classroom, which include being able to follow guidelines and complete any task given to her very neatly and within a reasonable time. Outside of the classroom she is also very responsible and kind to her peers. Areas of growth inside of the classroom would be in the area of math, I have noticed she struggles a bit more with numbers. Areas of growth outside of the classroom would be her interacting a bit more with her peers, I have noticed that at times she does isolate herself and likes to be alone and quiet. Julia's language classification is as an English Learner. Julia performs well during formative assessments for English Language Arts, for math she does struggle a bit. Her ability to work independently is excellent. She thrives working independently, however working in groups is a bit of a challenge for her, especially if her peers are not at her level academically or behaviourally. Her work is always very organized and done very thoughtfully. Julia always completes tasks as directed and she always strives to complete the task before her peers. Julia is very creative when drawing. She loves it and I get to see more of her personality that way.

She is a critical thinker because she always wants to learn more and is asking mom to buy her more books so she can learn. Communication wise Julia struggles a bit with this area, at the beginning of the year she was very serious and hardly wanted to talk. However, now I have noticed that she is opening up a bit more to her peers and myself. The content area in which I

believe Julia is struggling in is math. I believe this might be because at home she is not really getting as much number practice as she is in ELA. During the home visit mom shared with me all of the ELA books Julia has and practices in. The only exposure Julia is getting to math is at school, which is why she is not as strong in that area as she is in ELA. However, I do believe that she will meet the standards for math at the end of the year because I can see her really trying and focusing during these particular lessons. I know this is an area of growth for Julia because based off on the ESGI testing for math she is not yet meeting the expectations, however in ELA she is meeting grade level expectations. Julia is excelling in knowing her sight words and being able to write a sentence with a capital letter, proper finger spaces, and the correct punctuation. Behaviorally Julia is a role model for her peers and they look up to her, socially from our morning meetings I was able to gather that she is very empathetic towards her peers and is always willing to help.

The area of need would be socially because in talking to mom and personal observation Julia likes to isolate herself and does not really say much to anyone and she is very serious. I plan to keep providing opportunities for Julia to share, like in our good morning meetings, and giving her a job such as calendar helper or pledge helper in which the students are engaging and speaking to their peers. Also during instruction I plan to incorporate more pair sharing and groups activities. As for my student teacher relationship I plan to continue sitting with my students during lunch and I plan to check in with her every morning and simply have a conversation with her.

Julia thinks of herself as a very good student as mentioned in the interview, “ I am good because I help others” (Focus Student 3, 2019). I am providing specific positive feedback to my students which helps them in knowing what the expectations are and gives them comfort inside of the classroom. I also leave positive affirmations on their desks every now and then just so they feel appreciated and seen. Julia loves school and during our interview she said, “School makes me happy”(Focus Student 3, 2019). When I asked what she wanted to be when she grew up, she replied, “ a teacher and nail person” (Focus Student 3, 2019). A major event that definitely had a great impact on Julia was the physical abuse from her biological father. In talking to mom about the incident she says that Julia has isolated herself because she does not want to get attached to a person and them just walking out of her life. During my home visit mom also shared that my mentor teacher and myself have been Julia’s positive influences and that she talks about how happy she is in our classroom. Julia loves school because according to her, “ everyone is really nice and I like to write” (Focus Student 3, 2019).

Julia has been the most successful in school when in the moments she speaks we are truly listening to her, I believe this is because she feels that trust and like we are there for her and listening to what she has to say. She has been the least successful in school when she is sick, her focus is not there and she does not want to be in school, she actually mentioned in the interview, “ I do not like school when I’m sick” (Focus Student 3, 2019). She is very motivated and focused in school because her mom came to this country when she was sixteen and still struggles with English, however she has always motivated Julia to try her best in school and to dream big. Julia is the most comfortable in school when she is working independently and the least comfortable when she has to interact with her peers. I believe this is because she does not want to get attached

to her peers in possible fear of them hurting her or leaving, which is what mom shared. Julia's support network outside of school is only her mom and inside of school it is my master teacher and myself. I believe that academically Julia's development is typical, however emotionally it might be atypical. My data sources include ESGI test scores, ELA assessments, math assessments, mother as a source, and personal observation. No technologies are needed by the student.

Part I: Conduct an Interview/visit using the home visit protocol

Visiting the home of FS3 was my first home visit, my master teacher and I both went to her home. When arriving at the home the mother of FS3 greeted us at the door and led us straight into the living room. Along the way we saw FS2's grandmother said hello and continued into the living room. There the mother of FS2 mentioned that they were currently living with FS2's grandmother, however that they were hoping to get a new place soon still remaining in the area. I did notice however that there was tension between them both and the mood did feel a bit uncomfortable. However, I tried to remain positive and I handed the mom a couple of snacks I had brought for the girls. That really helped open the conversation and I got to mentioning the purpose of my visit and how I even got started in my educational journey. This really helped with mom being able to open up to me because she was a bit shy at first, however in hearing that we shared similar backgrounds she felt comfortable. Overall the mood was inviting and appreciative.

Part II: Reflection to Inform Asset-Based Instruction

During the visit mom mentioned a couple of things that would truly be informative especially when preparing for instruction. The first thing mom mentioned that really became something for me to take into consideration was that FS3 is not very comfortable working with male students. Her mom mentions that ,” she has a fear in trusting males because of her experience with her father” (Focus Student 3 Parent, 2019). Mom mentioned that her father was physically abusive to both her and FS3. The mom did mention that she could work with her male peers but that it just took awhile for her to trust them. This immediately got me thinking of the way I organize my partner work and giving my students the opportunity to choose their own partners from time to time. She also mentioned that FS3 tends to isolate herself from her peers, “ She is very mature for her age and does not do what regular five year olds do” (Focus Student 3 Parent, 2019).

This got me thinking of how important classroom ecology is because it helps build that sense of community, and it got to appreciate the importance of our morning circles because it gave space for everyone's voices to be heard. Another important thing mom mentioned was that FS3 loved school and learning , “ Everytime we go to the store she wants me to buy her books that will help her read, write, and learn math” (Focus Student 3 Parent, 2019). This became helpful information because I know she has the motivation for school and I want to continue supporting her in her love for education while being mindful of not overwhelming her at the same time. Mom also mentioned, “ I want her to go to college, since I only finished high school and was not able to continue my studies” (Focus Student 3 Parent, 2019). In talking to the parent of FS3 I found out that she has no idea how the college system works in the United States since she immigrated at the age of 16 and only finished high school. I mentioned to mom that if she

had any questions she could reach out to myself and I could connect her to resources. Lastly, mom mentioned that FS3 was very comfortable in our class and always talked about her teachers, “ One of the reasons we are staying in the same area is because she has grown so close to her teachers and I fear that if I move her now she will get sad” (Focus Student 3 Parent, 2019). Once again I realized the importance of student teacher relationships and I think about how especially at the beginning of the year we as teachers really need to take the time to foster those relationships. It reminded me of this quote, “When you walk into the classroom and say to yourself, ‘My job here is to evaluate my impact,’ then students are the major beneficiaries (Hattie & Zierer, 2018, p.3).” I believe that there is a difference in thinking your only job is to teach content, when in reality teaching is multidimensional.

Action Plan

Julia has a history of physical abuse and parental abandonment as disclosed by the mother herself. She displays behaviors of isolation, and in occasions of inattentiveness, but does not have a 504 or IEP. Her mother disclosed suspicions of trauma but declines to seek a medical diagnosis. Julia needs redirection when working in groups to speak and frequent teacher check-ins to incorporate her into the conversation. In knowing this knowledge about Julia I plan to support her as best as I can, especially in creating an inviting classroom ecology. I plan to frequently check in with Julia throughout the day during transitions. I also plan to sit with her during morning breakfast and just listen to her.

Julia, as disclosed by her mother, asks to get books that have the letters and words for Kindergarten and First Grade. I plan to continue teaching ELA phonics lessons in which her

prior knowledge of being able to identify the alphabet will help her make the connection between letter and sound. I will incorporate Julia as a leader throughout the lesson helping me in certain areas of the lesson. I made this decision based on the insight I have gained through the home visit.

She has trouble making and keeping friends due to her social isolation. There is one student Julia loves to work with and play with, but at times the student is confused when she isolates herself. Julia appears to be very serious and occasionally will appear happy, but she is always willing to help her peers. I plan to incorporate more partner and group work into my lessons providing Julia with more opportunities to collaborate with her peers, however also being mindful of providing her with independent work time.

Conclusion

These three case studies have been extremely crucial in my growth as an educator. Before entering this program and the classroom I always thought it was the teacher's job to “fix” the students' problems and in doing so it would increase their academic achievement. However, throughout this process I have learned that in being vulnerable with your students and willing to listen and not fix but support my students we both can achieve growth.

Part C: My Community, School, and Classroom

Section 1: Community Context

Demographics

The school I am currently doing my student teaching is located in the city of Ontario, California, which is located in the county of San Bernardino. It was in the first week of August, 1881 when George Chaffey, a Canadian engineer, viewed the wastes known as the Cucamonga Desert and decided that this patch of land, if properly watered, could become productive and profitable. The Ontario Colony lands were quickly surveyed and went on sale in November, 1882. The centerpiece was Euclid Avenue, eight miles long and two hundred feet wide, the twin "driveways" separated by a parkway which was seeded in grass and lined with pepper trees. Chaffey College, which was located where the Chaffey brothers put it until 1960, originally emphasized agricultural subjects to give the growers a hand. The college has moved to Rancho Cucamonga now, but Chaffey High School is still on what was originally a joint campus. I actually attended Chaffey High School and Chaffey College, as I myself am a part of the Ontario community. Ontario first developed as an agricultural community, largely but not exclusively devoted to citrus(ontarioca.gov).

Since 2000 Ontario has experienced a 5.62% growth, with a total population of 166,892 as of 2014. The dominant race in Ontario is Hispanic with a 70.20% followed by White at 56.94%, Black at 6.22%, Asian at 5.07% and Native at 1.00% (usa.gov). The population of Ontario by gender is 81,723 (48.97%) male and 85,169 (51.03%) female. The median age for the city of Ontario is 31, with the two highest age groups being 25-34 with a 15.23% and 35-44 at a 14.61%. The average household size in the city is of 3, with an average family size of 4. The languages spoken at home are Spanish with a 51.76%, English with a 41.04%, Asian and Pacific Islander Languages at 4.66%, and Indo-European Languages at 2.24%(usa.gov). In looking at

the data I cannot help to wonder with 51.76% of the population speaking Spanish, “Why are there not more dual immersion programs in the community schools?”

Housing and Resources

The school is located next to a community park, local restaurants, and near various apartment complexes in which the majority of our student population occupies. I was able to gather this information by personally eating during lunch at these local restaurants, and in the morning observing how a majority of the students would walk to school from these apartments. The city is in close proximity to Big Bear Mountains, a variety of beaches, and theme parks. The city of Ontario is very industrial, the highest occupation being in production, transportation, and material moving occupations (usa.gov). It also states that the average commute time is 30 minutes. This has an impact on our students because in my time being at the school, I have seen the necessity for an after school program because some parents just cannot make it in time for dismissal because of their commutes to work.

Our school had a great reputation in the community because we not only serve our students, but their families as well. There are a variety of resources our school offers to the community including resources for health, wellness, and parent engagement. The following are just a couple of the resources offered, The Parent Educational Center, is a dedicated location for parents/guardians serving as a resource center, classroom and meeting area. The center has a continuous and planned schedule of classes to accommodate educational needs at all levels. It encourages adults to continue and expand their learning; to enhance their student’s development, advance professionally, and promote higher self-esteem. Curriculum is delivered by district staff

members and invited professional guests. Courses that are offered are community plazas, computer classes; English as a Second Language (ESL); Common Core overview; opening doors; Wellness class; and many more (Ontario/Montclair School District, 2019).

Additional resources include Case Management, this program works to strengthen families dealing with domestic violence, low income, lack of housing, food or health care or other obstacles that impact a child's success in school. Case management staff work with community-based nonprofits, county agencies and school's Outreach staff to ensure coordinated supports are provided for each child. I have seen some of my students benefit from this program, receiving food, shoes, and housing placement. Mental Health Services assists students who may have psychosocial problems that interfere with their ability to fully attend to and engage in instructional activities. After a referral, the OMSD school-based Mental Health Program links these students to counselors at their school site or to community-based health providers. Physical Health Services, each school site has a full time Health Assistant and part time Nurse to assist students and families with health needs. They coordinate health services for families who have difficulty navigating the health system. Health insurance assistance can be obtained through the case management process. Families can also be referred to the Montclair Medical Clinic in Montclair.

The Board also established the Pathway Seal of Biliteracy Award, the Board encourages pupils to develop biliteracy skills and contribute to a multicultural society; encourages foreign language instruction in OMSD; supports dual language immersion and other language programs; recognizes and honors our communities' rich and diverse language assets; strengthens, affirms

and honors diversity in multiple cultures and languages; and encourage students to earn the California Seal of Biliteracy upon graduation at their respective high schools. Although this is a fairly new program, I do see it prospering within a couple of years and I think it is a highly important one because it connects students' home life to school. Some resources that I see are needed include the access to technology on a 1:1 scale. Right now, we share a rolling cart of computers and we only have access once a week. Other educational resources would be the funding for field trips. As of now students only get one field trip a year and it is limited to cost and transportation. However, I feel like students need to have more exposure to how school and life connect but we do not have the resources available. I think this might be because we are a bigger school district and funding is limited. If our school was given more resources, I believe students would have access to 1:1 technology, and the opportunity to have more field trips which would help the students make the school and life connection.

Our community and school assets are that because of our school size being small our staff members and parents are able to form relationships in which support and encourage students both at home and at school. We have a social committee team on site who is in charge of not only organizing events for staff like luncheons for every birthday, baby shower, holiday, etc. They are also in charge of creating school wide events for the community to take a part in such as Culture Day in which students and parents are invited into the classrooms to share about their cultures and we have performances by students, parents, or community members. We also have an annual visit to a convalescent home and the students spend an entire day playing games,

making crafts, and performing for the members in our community. Overall, our community is very involved and always willing to give back.

Although I support having a social committee because it celebrates the staff members during the special days, I believe a support committee is also needed. A support committee which would be organizing teacher restorative circles, and I have heard teachers at the school wanting a space to share areas of growth for our school, so why not have a committee that would help facilitate this space. I also believe that this committee should also celebrate staff on random days not just birthdays, baby showers, or holidays, but perhaps a monthly staff appreciation day. Although I was not able to experience Culture Day, I do appreciate this event because it is a way to bring the community together. My concern is that cultures are not represented correctly, I know that staff members put on the event, but I wonder if they get input from community members. Another concern is that our community is mostly Latinx, but that is not the entire student population, “How are different cultures represented during this event?”

Section 2: Community Events and Community Members

Anticipation always builds in the classrooms and throughout our school community as talk about Open House during the first week of May begins. Not only is Open House a huge event for the school, but it is also an important community event. Open House is an event in which students showcase their work and performances to family members and community members. As stated by the school proctor I interviewed, “Many teachers and staff members bring their family members as well which is awesome for the students.” She said that this adds another dimension to the event truly making it feel like a community event. She added, “The students are

always really excited to see that their teachers have a life and family outside of the classroom.” She explained that this truly helped the students and teachers bond with their students because the teachers were humanized. Booths are set up throughout the school courtyard where local businesses are selling tacos, desserts, and drinks. To open the event, the students put on a performance. Last year as stated a student proctor, the students performed Michael Jackson’s, “We are the World”. The upper graders sang the song and the lower grades added in dance moves and joined in singing the chorus. After the performance the families walked around the school to the different booths and simply being in community with teachers and family.

The classrooms opened up shortly afterwards. Each teacher has the option of choosing their own theme and decorates their classroom accordingly. Some teachers even have themselves and their students dress up to match their theme. The students' artwork and assignments from throughout the year cover the walls and desks and most classrooms have a slideshow of photos taken of their students. The teachers then go ahead and thank the family and community members for supporting the students and the school. This has been a school and community tradition for the last three years. The community members appreciate the support through the school. This event continues to expand and grow every year. Although I did not get to experience this event due to our schools closure this year, it was described very vibrantly. Throughout my year student teaching Open House seemed to be the most talked about event and anticipated by staff, students, and community members.

This event means the union of the school to its community. It shows the students that school is not a separate entity; it is a place in which they can bring their family members. I

believe this event matters because it is an opportunity for not only the teacher but most importantly for the students to showcase their school community to their family members. I myself remember growing up and looking forward to Open House. I wanted to show my family members every piece of what I considered my second home. It felt like I had worked all year for that one night in which I was able to show where I had made progress. However, although I much anticipated this event, I also had some hesitation. This was because although school was the place, I felt like I shined, I did not necessarily feel like my culture shined in the same way. When attending Open House, I knew that I had to become my parent's translator and it was difficult to have that responsibility at such a young age. I at times envied those students whose parents could read all of the signs and understand everything the teacher was saying. I remember having mixed emotions both positive and some that caused anxiety. This connects back to how accessible Open House is to not only English-Speaking families but to everyone that is part of the community.

This next community event is one that I actually got the opportunity to attend right before our school closure. The event was held at school, it was the Perfect Attendance Movie Night. Students who have had perfect attendance meaning they attended school every day and or made up school days through Saturday school. The students were given a formal invitation and two extra tickets per student were given. During this event that took place in the school's multipurpose room the school had a local business provide the food for the event which included popcorn, fruit, hot dogs, and drinks. The vendor was set up on the side wall of the multipurpose room next to the photobooth wall. The photobooth wall was decorated by the school's staff social committee, the theme was Frozen since that was the movie that would be playing. The

lights were turned off and there were Christmas lights hanging around the room and snowflakes hanging from the ceiling, it was a true winter wonderland. As the families walked into the room you could feel a sense of community and warmth.

The students and families began grabbing food and breaking bread with other community family members. The photobooth was being used to capture the memories created that day with the students and their friends, family members, and community members. I myself was asked by a couple of students and their families to participate in the photobooth with my students, they really seemed to enjoy this simple act. We were bonding in a nonacademic way and the students began to see that I was human, and I also enjoyed taking photos and being in community. I also made my way to sharing a meal with my students and their families and the parents expressed their gratitude towards the progress they had seen in their children. They also mentioned how these events were meaningful to them because it brought them a sense of community and family time. One parent mentioned, “We look forward to this event yearly and I just love seeing how my children interact with other members of the community”.

Shortly the movie began, and the students naturally gravitated towards the floor of the room near the screen with their friends and or siblings. During this time, we got together the gifts that were donated by our local community businesses. These gifts included backpacks, lunchboxes, coloring sets, Amazon gift cards, and two bike sets given by the district. After the movie we explained how the raffle was going to take place, you could feel the excitement rising in the room as we explained the raffle. As I glanced at the students you could see a spark in their eyes and a huge smile on their faces. We began calling out the student names and every time we

called out a name everyone cheered each other on, and the applause was loud and genuine. After the raffle we thanked the vendor and the community members for coming out and the students. After the event I stayed around to help clean, during this time I spoke to the vendors and they stated, "I appreciate how this school supports local businesses and for us to be in community." This event has taken place and been a tradition for the last three years and has been received positively by the community.

Services

During my time of being part of the community I have had the opportunity to talk to a staff member that mentioned a couple of services available to the community. The first I saw taking place at our school site, it was coffee with the principal. Once a week parents were welcomed to have coffee with the principal during this time the principal would share different strategies and or resources for parents. It was also a time for the parents to share their concerns and or positives about the community, school, and district. This weekly service would take place from 8-9:30am and during this time we would go into the multipurpose room for breakfast and I would have an opportunity to listen for a bit. The parents really seemed comfortable speaking to our principal and it was a great way to show that our students' success is a team effort. Curious one day I asked our principal what about those parents that were unable to attend the meetings or due to language barrier did not attend? She replied that all the resources shared at the meeting were shared with all the parents via email, Twitter, and on the school's website. She also mentioned that during the weekly event an interpreter would be present and translate for the parents.

Another service I found out about that is available to the parents is the Parent Educational Center. This is a dedicated location for parents/guardians serving as a resource center, classroom and meeting area. The center has a continuous and planned schedule of classes to accommodate educational needs at all levels. It encourages adults to continue and expand their learning; to enhance their student's development, advance professionally, and promote higher self-esteem. Curriculum is delivered by district staff members and invited professional guests. Courses Offered: Community Plazas; Computer Classes; English as a Second Language (ESL); Common Core Overview; Opening Doors; Wellness Class; and many more. The next service is Foster Youth which is the office of Child Welfare, Attendance and Records is the designated liaison for foster youth attending the Ontario-Montclair School District. The CWA ensures that barriers commonly encountered by foster youth are significantly reduced through communicating legislative updates to schools and attending school-level meetings that determine the educational and emotional needs of these students.

The CWA also makes certain that the school records of foster youth are processed without delay and that enrollment is not postponed due to lack of documentation. These safeguards are put into place to minimize any disruption that frequent mobility of changing schools may cause. In my short time of student teaching and due to our school closures, I was unable to gather more information about community services. Although I did my research online it was difficult to find services available. However, during my time at the school I do know one missing service in the community was that of after school tutoring . The factors for not having this service unfortunately is the lack of funding. Tutoring is optional for teachers to host but they do not get paid for their time after school. Many teachers at the site have expressed that they

wished they could offer this service but with the limited prep time during school they take after school to prep. I believe this is a service that should be a part of the community because a majority of our students have parents whose first language is not English, and it becomes a challenge when trying to help their children with school work.

RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS

The week of March 9th felt different and perhaps it was the gloomy raining weather or the fact that it was about to become the last week of in person class. Monday we were told to have the students wash their hands more frequently but other than that everything else felt normal. Monday evening my younger brother who at the time was at UCLA called and said their campus was closing. When I heard that news my stomach sank and part of me knew that what was to come would be more serious than I had thought. Tuesday morning in conversation with my mentor teacher I mentioned what was happening at my brother's campus, that is when she mentioned that a last-minute staff meeting was called Wednesday after school.

I had this unexplainable feeling inside me, but I continued to act normally as did the rest of the teachers. Wednesday after school it was pouring rain outside as we made our way to our staff meeting. There our principal explained that they did not have much to offer about what would happen with our district. However, she did mention that we would start incorporating social distancing when the students were eating lunch and making sure they cover their mouths when coughing or sneezing and washing their hands more frequently. She also advised that we start preparing packets for our students to take home just in case there were to be a closure.

During the meeting I could not help to wonder if this would be the last time, I was going to see everyone, I knew it probably would, but I did not want to admit it to myself.

Thursday, our school nurse came into our classrooms and spoke to the students about washing their hands and about what was happening. Friday was an unexplainable day for me, probably one of the hardest in my teaching career. From the moment I woke up something felt strange and surely enough I got a message from my mentor teacher informing me that she would not be going to school because she had the stomach flu. On my drive to school it was rainy and gloomy, and I remember telling myself you can do this you already teach all day. So, I walked in and got into the classroom and the substitute was already in the room. We introduced ourselves and shortly the principal walked in to speak to us. She mentioned that they were unsure about the school closing but that she was be checking in and updating us throughout the day.

The morning went smoothly, and I was really appreciative that I had the other kindergarten teacher checking in on me through the phone as well as our fourth-grade teacher friend. Fridays we usually had reading buddies with a fourth-grade class and their teacher called and asked if we would be doing it and something in me said yes, it is something my students look forward to. Little did I know that it would be the last time they would see their buddies. During this time, we heard the news that LAUSD had closed their schools and I knew our time would come but I figured maybe next week.

Right before lunch an announcement was made over the intercom asking that teacher please send home packets that day. That is when I knew we were closing; I remember skipping lunch and working on getting the packets together, but I was in panic mode because my students

had a short day because they were kindergarten and they left shortly after lunch. I called the fourth-grade teacher and she very kindly sent me helpers. We got four weeks' worth of packets done and packed into my students' backpacks. After this I explained to my students why I had packed their backpacks and told them that they would not be coming to school for a while because of this virus that our nurse had talked to them about. My heart was completely broken as I told them and saw their little faces. They instantly came up to me and hugged me and said they did not want to leave. "There is no one way to be an abolitionist teacher. Some teachers will create a homeplace for their students while teaching them with the highest expectations; some will protest in the streets; some will fight standardized testing; some will restore justice in their classrooms, etc (Love, 2019, p.89-90)". This quote came to mind because it was at that moment when we had our last classroom family hug, that I realized I had created a homeplace for my students. I identified with being the teacher that creates a homeplace for their students while teaching them with high expectations. I have to remind myself that I am barely starting in my teaching career and I will have an opportunity to try different ways to be an abolitionist teacher. I assured them that we would keep in touch and that I would miss them deeply, but it was honestly the hardest moment of my teaching experience. The parents had already been notified so at dismissal the parents all greeted me with a sympathetic expression mixed with a sad expression. It was like we did not have to use words to express how we were feeling. Something that I will never forget was that every single parent said thank you to me.

After I stayed to turn in the emergency cards the parents were sent at the beginning of the week asking for updated information and if they had access to WIFI and a device. I handed them over to the front office and returned to the classroom to clean it all up. As I was cleaning, I remember

trying to stay positive and thinking maybe the closure will only be for a couple weeks, but I never thought that would be the last time I stepped foot in our class.

In the days to follow I began to worry about the resources that would be available to our students. However, our principal was very good at keeping us all updated and expressed students who had marked that they did not have a device would be given a laptop. She also mentioned that we would be handing out more packets to the students, and that the cafeteria would remain open and serve breakfast and lunch. Our school nurse also sent out information to the parents about low cost medical clinics available in the county. Our district home page created a parent resource page in which the parents could access a number of free educational resources.

Although this brought some peace of mind, it also made me think about how the school was a big part of the community and with it being shut down it would bring complications to some families. It also got me thinking on how I can be a better advocate for my students when we do go back to our normal.

Section 3: School Site Research

The School Site

The school is located in Ontario bordering the Montclair city line. The school is small but beautiful, well-structured and safe with a gated campus. Over the years, almost every outdoor wall has been covered with paintings of some of our world's great leaders as well as inspirational quotes. These paintings promote individuality, unity, and creativeness. Our front office as well as inside the classrooms are constantly updating their decor with different art projects the students work on throughout the year. There are many windows that let in much natural light into

the buildings and create a sense of curiosity amongst my students as they often look out the windows to explore the world around them. The school has indoor and outdoor lunch areas and multiple playgrounds for different age groups. The school has a great reputation in the community because we not only serve our students, but their families as well. One parent I spoke with explained that she specifically decided to wait on the waitlist because she wanted her daughter to have the best education, succeed and go to college (conversation with parent, February, 13, 2020). We have multiple programs which support our students with food, shoes, clothing and more. The school also has a Special Education program set in place that provides support for students and their families with special needs and IEPs. Within each grade level, there is a special education support person who works closely in specific classrooms to provide academic and behavioral support for students with special needs and IEPs. The school also provides one to one aide for individuals that need one-on-one support in the classroom.

Our school has also been successful in winning a gold level PBIS award for two years in a row. PBIS teaches the students to not only grow academically, but also to grow as personally. Our three PBIS school wide norms are being SAFE, RESPONSIBLE, and RESPECTFUL. Our school morale is high, because it is such a small school, our staff members are all rather close. Our social committee team hosts luncheons for every birthday, baby shower, holiday, etc. We also have friendly administrators on campus for extra support who work extensively to create a supportive and safe educational environment. We have true friends in many of our coworkers that we know we can truly count on. The students and parents also have the same. We as staff members do our best to build relationships with our kids and their families.

Personnel

Throughout my time at my school site I really took it upon myself to make relationships all throughout the staff. At first, I remember I felt like a new student on the first day of class. Since our campus is fairly small our staff is not large either and everyone knew each other well before I got there. I felt very nervous because I knew I was going to be the new kid on the block. However, when I walked, I was greeted with smiles. My mentor teacher also welcomed me with a surprise gift, a pencil pouch filled with pens, pencils, and a notepad. Also, at our first staff meeting I was introduced officially to the entire staff by my principal.

As the days progressed, I made it a goal to myself to say hello and have conversations with different staff members. I also made it a goal for myself to go to breakfast with my students. I decided to do this because I felt it was a good opportunity to get to know my students outside of the classroom and for them to get to know me as well. It was also a way to show my students that I care about them not just in the classroom but as a person. That is where I met the cafeteria proctor, she was always very friendly, and we would have conversations about the school and her family. In talking to her throughout the days I was able to get her insight about the school. She mentioned how grateful she was to be working in a school because the students really bonded with her. She also mentioned that she had really good relationships with other staff members. This I witnessed myself with their interactions they would always joke around and give each other hugs. The interactions felt very genuine and really enforced the school's ecology of being sincere and supportive. On occasion I she did mention how one area of growth would be

that the school was understaffed in proctors and times during lunch it was a challenge to monitor all the students sometimes by herself.

In working with my mentor teacher, I was able to make connections with the other staff members that she had really good relationships with. One of those being a fourth-grade teacher who my mentor knew for more than twenty years. They had gone to college together and now worked together. They had started reading buddies on campus first it was just their classes, but soon other teachers became involved. Reading buddies is where upper grade students once a week come into lower grade classrooms and read with the students and or do STEM projects together. I was fortunate to have met her and in talking with her throughout my time at my school site, I was able to get a good perspective on the school culture. She was involved with the leadership team at school and she would often present at staff meetings introducing new strategies for classroom management.

However, when this occurred it showed the push back that some teachers had for change. That is when I started to notice that not all teachers were critical social justice educators . I wonder if it is because professional development is limited, I believe in this district it is 1 conference per year and that is only if the teachers want to attend. However, I also developed great respect for her because she still respectfully held great conversations with those educators. Reminding me of the school culture of being respectful, she was showing respect to those who had different perspectives.

Another very influential person I met through this experience would have to be our school's principal. Although I did not formally get the opportunity to interview her due to the

school closure, I am going to recall on my interactions with her and her email response to some of my questions. The principal always was very nice to not only staff members but the students and their families. Every day she would be by the main gate greeting the students and their parents. She would host weekly coffee with the principal meetings with parents. Another thing she always did at every staff meeting was remind the teachers that she wanted to be informed of anything that was going on. She would mention that she was there to support us, that all we had to do was talk to her about our questions, concerns, and anything positive going on. In conversation with her she mentioned how proud she felt about the school culture. She felt like it was a team effort and would continue to support her staff, students, and their families as much as he could. Through her perspective I was able to figure out another school value which was growth. She herself was always seeking ways to improve, and if teachers expressed an area of growth, she made sure to provide them with resources.

Technology is also an integral part of our school day, however it seemed to be for upper grades. Our school is not a one-to-one school for technology. Each upper grade student had their own computers, in the class, the students use them daily to enhance their knowledge of math and reading through online programs. This I had the opportunity to see during a spotlight visit to an upper grade class for professional development. We did not have a technology department on campus, but we were able to quickly call the district office for any technological problems that we experience throughout the day. My mentor teacher had received her own personal computer to use for planning, preparation, and curriculum instruction. This would be the same computer I used as well in the classroom. Within the classroom, each teacher has a smart board, overhead projector and document camera to further enhance our instruction. Throughout my time at my

school site, I began to problematize the lack of technology resources for the lower grades and this quote came to mind, “The reality is that “our political economy is structured to create poverty and inequality. Schools reflect our political economy” (Love; 2019, p.17). It highlighted the fact that schools in the upper-class neighborhoods receive funding that ultimately creates a gap between students in middle- and lower-class homes. An example that comes to mind is one that my younger brother experienced. He was part of the academic decathlon team in high school. Their school only had one coach and limited computer access. When they would go to competitions even in the same district, other students from schools located in higher class neighborhoods would share their resources. They expressed that they had five coaches and they each had access to an individual computer. Something that small nevertheless creates a gap in achievement.

Morale in the school among students, teachers, and staff is influenced by informal school policies that are enforced daily. Each teacher and staff member genuinely care about one another. This is evidenced when someone experiences a loss in their life, hardship, or celebrates a birthday. For example, one teacher decided to retire and everyone came together to create a gift basket and all staff members signed a card. This was followed by a staff meeting in which she was given an El Camino bell artifact just like the one in front of our school which was given to any retiring teacher as a tradition. Moments like these provided reassurance that staff were not just seen as employees but as human and they were valued and cared for.

Section 4: School Mission/ Vision & Demographics

Demographics

My school site is part of the Ontario- Montclair School District. The Ontario-Montclair School District, founded in 1884, serves a 26 square mile area which covers most of the city of Ontario, Montclair, portions of Upland, and unincorporated areas of San Bernardino County. The District is the third largest elementary district in the State (OMSD, 2019)

More than 21,800 PreK-8 students attend 26 elementary schools, 6 middle schools, and 2 alternative programs. Included in the 34 schools are magnet and academy programs, each of which is uniquely designed to provide an option for students to become fully immersed in an enhanced specially designed course of study, and two alternative programs. With the majority of the student population at 89.45% being Hispanic, 3.14% White, 2.7% African American, and 1.95% Asian (OMSD, 2019).

Vision/ Mission

“Ontario-Montclair School District (OMSD) is committed to providing a world-class education to our students in safe, respectful, and welcoming school environments that empowers students, staff, and families to be successful in a dynamic global society and cultivates college, career, and community partnerships (OMSD, 2019).” I do see the school environments being very welcoming as mentioned in the district mission stated, I myself have experienced feeling welcomed and have seen by observation that the students and parents feel the same way. I think this makes a difference because if the students, families and even staff members do not feel welcomed a disconnect will form between what is supposed to be a team made up of the students, families, and staff. My school site has a similar mission statement it goes as follows, “A

progressive community of educators and learners, is to empower every student with knowledge and skills to become a productive member of society through a dynamic educational environment. We are committed to working collaboratively with families, community members, teachers and staff to ensure that our students receive the skills needed to be college and career ready (OMSD, 2019).” Similar to the district mission statement my school site is working towards making education a collaborative experience for the students, families, and staff. Throughout my time at my site I have seen the effort to make this happen and how much the families truly appreciate working with staff as a team.

Our classroom culture both does and does not reflect the school’s mission statement. In our classroom we make an effort to build a team with our students, families and teachers. We stay in contact with the parents daily through the use of Classdojo: sending school wide reminders, class reminders, student in class progress, resources to try at home, and positive words of affirmation for both the student and their family. Our school site is an AVID school which is apparent even at the kindergarten level, we are showing our students how to take two column notes. Then showing them the importance of using the resources provided to help during a classroom task. We also share our experience with higher education with our students. Throughout my time I have shared with my students where I attended school for my undergraduate and that I am currently in school to receive my masters. They loved hearing about me doing homework and how I get through things that might seem difficult. I bring it back to our classroom motto which is “Try, Try, Try, and never give up!”. I tell them that as students there

are many ways to solve a problem or learn something new, we just have to find a way that works for us.

The parts that don't reflect the schools mission statement are the fact that technology is not really a priority in the classrooms. As stated, before our school site does not allow students to have 1:1 access to technology. As a matter of fact, the year prior to my placement the school's computer lab had been removed. This was due to the fact that in being a small campus there was a need for a classroom but no funding to add a portable, so instead they removed the computer lab. This has been a set back for the students because the rolling carts available are mainly used for upper grades. In my classroom right before school closures we had only received the computers three times and only for an hour use at a time. This impacts the mission of the school and the district in wanting to prep students for college and a career with technology being at the forefront of both.

We currently serve a diverse population of approximately 480 students from preschool to sixth grade. In the student population 87.2% are Hispanic, 5.6% White, 3.1% African American and 2.4% Asian. This also consists of 86.9% socioeconomically disadvantaged, 24.7% English Language Learners, 26.3% students with disabilities, and 0.7 % foster youth. Additionally, the school is an integrated school that serves both mild to moderate students who participate in the district's Autism Program and general education students (School Accountability Report Card, 2018-19). In comparing the school's demographics to the city's, they are similar in who is the dominant group in the community. However, from my personal observation at my school site the

teacher population is not parallel to the school and city demographics. There is only a total of four teachers that identify themselves as Hispanic, the rest have identified and or look White. This does not come as a surprise to me because growing up that is what I saw. I wonder however, why that is, it got me interested in exploring the numbers in teacher education and whether they match with those actually being hired at school sites.

Section 5: Classroom Reflection

Ecology

As we walk into the classroom the first thing displayed on the door is our classroom norms. The students and I co-created these classroom norms during our morning meeting which happens every day on the rainbow carpet. My intention behind co-creating our classroom norms is for my students, even my kindergarteners to feel like this is their classroom, not just the teachers. It brought to mind that we as teachers have to set high expectations for the students and value everyone's voices (Milner, Cunningham, O'Connor, Kestenberg, 2019). This I believe to be important because it will give the students ownership of their learning. The morning routine is something my students look forward to everyday and they will ask and get really excited when it is time for our morning meeting, this helps support my students who at times feel shy to share or feel like they do not belong. One thing that I do want to grow on now reflecting back on my morning meetings is referring back to our classroom norms every day.

The next thing is our job list, I created this list after seeing that my students wanted and needed that independence. I sat down and really thought about where my students could be involved in the classroom and how that would impact their sense of belonging. As stated in one of our readings it is important for teachers to be aware and responsive to students' emotional and learning needs (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015). My job list was my response to the need of my students wanting to help out around the classroom. Some adjustments that can be made to this routine is maybe extending the jobs instead of for just one week, maybe two weeks. I will also be adding more jobs as I begin to see students taking on more responsibility.

The next item which is the behavior chart I still have mixed feelings about, and it is something that was implemented by my master teacher. I did however suggest a modification because at the beginning it had the colors yellow, orange, red going down from green. I suggested that we get rid of those colors because I remember growing up if you got yellow or red you were seen as the "bad" student and it was dehumanizing. That was something that I definitely did not want in my classroom and I believe that it would have affected my classroom ecology. That is why now it is only going up because we are encouraging our students to reach higher expectations for themselves. This is making a difference because it gives the message to the students that we do believe in them and that they are all able to reach higher not lower (Smith, Fisher, & Frey, 2015).

Lastly, something I found to be very powerful in the classroom is answering the question "Why". In including this strategy into my classroom ecology, the quote comes to mind, "I was

struggling to remember why I became a teacher, and the students were struggling with the purpose of it all. We were all trying to survive” (Love, 2019, p.19). When reading this CGU was my first thought. I remembered one of our final assignments was our “WHY” presentation. It brought me back to thinking about when asked why I wanted to teach. I just replied because I like kids, very superficial. However, during the program I have really got the opportunity to figure out my true why. I always used to think how this is going to play in the classroom, but it makes sense in every way possible now. If you know your why even on challenging days, it will keep you going. If you know your why students will feel that and connect to you. It was also a lesson that even when teaching it is important to explain to your students “why” they are about to learn something and how they can apply it into their daily lives. These are the main classroom ecology strategies that we used in the classroom and I hope to keep adding more as I evolve as a teacher. I also plan to make continuous adjustments based on how I can best support my students.

Demographics

Our class has 24 students and 2 students that are mainstreaming for 30 minutes one during writing and the other during math. Asian (2), Indian (0), Hispanic (20), African American (1), and Caucasian (3) decent, providing a culturally diverse student population within the classroom. I was able to obtain information on students through individual conversations with both students and parents, observations, cumulative files, consulting with my Master Teacher, IEP case managers, and resource teachers. Twenty-four students were born in the United States

and two students were born outside of the United States in China. The majority of the class are native to California and have lived in the area for their entire life. A majority are involved in after school sports and activities such as dance classes. Students are comfortable working in pairs and are starting to get comfortable working in groups and are given a lot of opportunities for collaborative learning activities. Students are very interested in phonics and a great majority love math because they get to use manipulatives within the instruction. There are a few students who prefer to keep to themselves and exhibit shy behavior in the classroom. Every student in the classroom is aware of what technology is, however, we have yet to have 1:1 daily access.

Part D: Reflection of a Critical Social Justice Educator

[Audio Recording](#)

Conclusion

An effective teacher incorporates social justice into the classroom by setting high expectations for all students and by creating meaningful individual connections with students and their families. Each student has progressed at different speeds, but every individual has grown academically, socially, and emotionally. When I take a look back at the school year and my students I think, I created a classroom environment where inclusion, respect, and trust is valued.

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