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Zurisaray Espinosa

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This dissertation, "IT JUST HELPED ME REALIZE THAT YOU HAVE TO FREE YOURSELF": LATINX MIDDLE SCHOOLERS' LEARNING FROM CHICANA FEMINISM, NEPANTLERA, AND MINDFUL BREATHING PEDAGOGY by ZURISARAY ESPINOSA, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education & Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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“IT JUST HELPED ME REALIZE THAT YOU HAVE TO FREE YOURSELF”: LATINX  
MIDDLE SCHOOLERS’ LEARNING FROM CHICANA FEMINISM, NEPANTLERA, AND  
MINDFUL BREATHING PEDAGOGY

by

**ZURISARAY ESPINOSA**

Under the Direction of G. Sue Kasun, Ph.D.

**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore, through a qualitative critical ethnographic case study approach, how Latinx students from a sheltered ESOL seventh grade classroom in an urban school context of a southeastern state in the U.S. responded to a mindful and social justice driven seven-week unit informed by Chicana feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and mindful breathing meditation through the exploration of *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). The data were collected through non-participant and participant observation, field notes from the observations, and audio recorded semi-structured interviews. I took photographs of the classroom space and collected student-produced work as artifacts to inform my study. Data were analyzed through a Chicana Feminist framework and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2015) seven stages of *conocimiento* (coming to knowing) to interpret how students responded to the unit implementation.

The findings highlighted students’ reflective processes through “aha” moments in which they experienced *conocimiento* that led them to understand what they were learning through a more mindful and holistic perspective. The findings encompassed three overarching macro-themes and ten micro-themes. These came in moments of *conocimiento* students experienced during their interviews that were in alignment with their comments and behaviors in the classroom and written reflections. The themes addressed a very broad research question by providing some insight into how students reacted to a curricular unit that highlighted student’s reflective processes in relation to themselves, the book, the classroom context, and their overall learning experience with every component of the unit. Students demonstrated they were reflective and critical thinkers by co-creating future learning experiences alongside their teachers.

INDEX WORDS: Latinx Students, Mindfulness, *Nepantlera* Pedagogy, Chicana Feminism, Sheltered ESOL Classroom

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A Dissertation

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Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Teaching and Learning

in

Department of Middle and Secondary Education

in

the College of Education & Human Development

Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA

2022



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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my husband, family, and daughter. I would like to thank my husband for being my rock and for sacrificing much in the past five years so that I may finish my Ph.D. in education. I consider myself very fortunate to have him in my life, because without his unconditional support, I would not have been able to do this study. Next, I would like to thank my family for raising me with love and compassion. Even though we did not have much growing up, I always felt supported and cared for. Everything I am in life today is because of them and for them. Furthermore, I want to thank my mother and father. Especially my mother for being the strong and valiant Cuban woman that she is. I do not know anyone who has gone through as much as she has in life and still smile at the end of every day! Lastly, I would like to thank my daughter for being the wonderful little being that she is. My daughter has been a great source of inspiration, because everything I do now, I do it with the intention of providing her with a better future. I have truly learned more from her than I have from most adults in my lifetime. I conclude this dedication by emphasizing that this study is also for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) students like myself, who struggle not only with their immigrant experiences, but with also having to learn English as a second language. I hope this work becomes a small piece of a bigger goal of providing a more holistic education for Latinx students within the current ESOL curriculum in the U.S.

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## CHAPTER 1: THE PROBLEM

As we think inspiring, positive, life-generating thoughts and embody these thoughts in every act we perform, we can gradually change the mood of our days, the habits of years, and the beliefs of a lifetime.

-Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 20

We are what we believe ourselves to be. In a world that tells us we are not enough, who is going to tell us, the marginalized, who we are? I write we because I am a Latina woman and I belong with the “othered.” This work is for us. Brown (2005) defined othering as “a strategy of symbolic exclusion that is used to create artificial boundaries of race, culture, religion, sexuality, and gender difference” (p. 290) that has historically labeled certain groups of people as the “other” through a westernized binary lens. When I reflect on the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, American scholar of Chicana cultural theory rooted in Aztec Indigenous knowledge, feminist theory, and queer theory, I think of individuals who are trying to find their home in a homogenous world that is unforgiving towards those who fall outside the norm. I think of the marginalized, the vulnerable, the black and brown students I have taught, and how their life experiences are affected by a neo-liberal capitalist system that has made its way into public education. I think about how I was meant to be another statistic within the system: a Latina immigrant with very little tools to navigate a world that does not speak my language, and with way too many rules and prejudices. Lastly, I reflect on how we live within a system in which creativity and thinking outside the box is subtly denied to all of us who dare to dream. Therefore, I can’t help but imagine a different way of being and learning: one that moves away from the very system that is killing our learning spirits (Battiste, 2013), as well as our mental and physical health (Hanh, 2017) within the classroom. We are meant to learn and educate ourselves

and others outside of the physical and metaphorical cages we currently find ourselves in. I believe that if we change the way we think about education through a holistic lens, we can progressively change our beliefs, how we feel, and how we act over time through a social justice lens. Achieving this requires a shift, a divergence from the current realities and truths most of us accept as the norm within our current public education system. It requires the knowledge of individuals who are usually found in the most unconventional places. We need the wisdom of the “othered.”

Therefore, in this study I focus on Latinx students Learning English as a second language through the context of their lived educational experiences within the U.S. Latinx students have historically been talked and written about as the “other,” the less educated, or the least likely to succeed within a fast-passed system that will not wait for them to learn English (Valenzuela, 1999). More specifically, I focus on Latinx students with origins from Mexico, South America, Central America, or the Caribbean (Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic), and who share ethnic, linguistic, and cultural background from Spanish colonization (Alemán, 2018). Latinx students have been described as a vulnerable population in educational research due to immigratory status, economic social status, and the racial prejudice they have historically endured (Wainer, 2006). Vulnerable populations in the U.S. consist of children, youth, and students that have been historically oppressed and marginalized due to their race, ethnicity, gender, and social status (National Center for Healthy Safe Children). The recent wave of Central American individuals coming to the U.S. make up part of this vulnerable population consisting of unaccompanied minors, refugees, and asylees who are dislocated, arriving primarily from Guatemala, Honduras, and other central American countries (Hernández, 2015;

Saldaña-Portillo, 2017). Today, Latinx populations continue to increase in many parts of the country beyond border towns along U.S. and Mexican borders.

I begin the argument of the problem by explaining how Latinx students often experience unaddressed stressors and barriers that affect their well-being and overall educational development in K-12 classrooms. This is due to a triple segregation of race, poverty, and language (Love, 2019). The following are what I consider to be main contributing factors that have negatively affect the overall wellbeing of Latinx students in the United States within school settings: accumulated acculturative stress (Araújo Dawson & Williams, 2007; Castro-Olivo et al., 2014; Hawley et al., 2007), experiences with structural racism (Blaisdell, 2016; Liggett, 2010; & Powell, 2008), and discrimination (Huber & Cueva, 2012; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Yousef, 2019). Additionally, current literature has failed to consider the mental health effects of the multiple socially constructed categorizations of ethnicity, gender, and immigration status on Latinx students (Jang, 2018) when considering the heavy burdens, they often take on to help their families achieve a good quality of life. Because of this, it is of grave importance to conduct qualitative research that taps the holistic experiences of Latinx students when considering that the current English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) curriculum does not consider all aspects of the human experience and its connection to learning in the classroom environment (Elenes, 1997).

The unrealistic federally mandated expectation to exit out of English Language Learner (ELL) status in a two-year's time frame and quickly moved to mainstream classes only hinders Latinx students when considering that many tend to drop out of school due to being inadequately prepared in such a short amount of time. In the state of Georgia, many Latinx students struggle to



keep up with their classes and are unable to pass the writing section of the state mandated graduation exam (Bohon, Macpherson & Atilas, 2005). Furthermore, tests do not adequately reflect Latinx student's abilities, considering that variation in assessment and testing have led to inaccuracy (Reeves, 2004), inappropriate (Abedi, 2005), and invalid (Sandberg & Reschly, 2010) scores within the U.S. In addition, teachers do not usually have enough time to meet the holistic needs of Latinx students when considering the cognitive demands, they often must face by having to learn a second language, as well as learn the regular curriculum (Khong & Saito, 2014). Because of this, it is important to bring Latinx student's unvoiced and marginalized experiences to the forefront of ESOL instruction to foster teaching practices that are holistic and critical. This can be achieved by drawing on student's diversity and multiple ways of learning and doing through compassion (hooks, 2010) that leads to mindfulness and understanding when considering that recent literature continues to point to critical issues and educational inequities of the schooling experiences and outcomes of Latinx students in the U.S. They show disparities in reading achievement and structural barriers inside of school contexts (Núñez & Kim, 2012; O'Connor, 2009; Ramírez, 2013; Reardon et al., 2013). I mention these to highlight how a hegemonic, colonizing, and capitalist driven education system continues to oppress Latinx students silently and generationally through a curriculum that does very little to offer students a voice through pedagogies that promote a deficit perspective.

### **Contextualization of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Education**

Unfortunately, these educational barriers and issues have only been recently exasperated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Coronavirus disease is defined as an illness caused by a novel coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome. The Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) reported that the coronavirus surfaced in China in the year 2019 and it began to spread to the U.S. in January 2020 with 84.1 million cases and 1 million deaths reported up to date. This resulted in society shutting down catastrophically with school districts and big corporations sending everyone home to slow the spread of the virus. The consequence of the outbreak was especially seen and felt within education, as children had to do schooling through a computer screen at home with very little experience or guidance. English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) struggled greatly because they could not get the same cultural exchange via online learning as they were able to physically get in a classroom setting by enacting identity through social presence (Hansen & McGee, 2021). Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has only added more to the burdens, stressors, and barriers Latinx students' often face in the school settings today.

A mixed group of students from three urban high schools in the U.S. experienced challenges related to the COVID pandemic differently, however, the greatest challenge for all students was related to academics and work habits (Scott et al., 2021). Mental and physical health were also of concern to most of the students, and Latinx students identified the most challenges related to physical health. Today, all students must deal with the repercussions of having missed a whole year of face-to-face schooling experiences. Today, many public schools, colleges, and universities are still leading classes through remote online learning, and this is a new challenge that needs to be addressed successfully within education in today's ever-evolving digital world. In another study, an online survey revealed that students and staff felt disrupted within the school environment due to the COVID-19 crisis (Correa & First, 2021). The study included teachers, school social workers, and school counselors who expressed students were in

distress and exhibiting negative behaviors from fear, bad temper, and problems with peers. Most of the staff expressed that they also lacked the confidence to counsel students and were experiencing moderate to severe anxiety themselves. Hence, the “results found that 45% of school staff indicated moderate to severe depression and 81.8% of school staff indicated moderate to severe anxiety” (Correa & First, 2021, p. 13). The adults felt like maneuvering and performing daily school tasks, as well as their professional roles with confidence was hard to do during the height of the COVID pandemic. They also expressed students experienced “classroom-wide distress including emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyper-activity/inattention, peer problems, and prosocial behavior” (p. 10). These recent findings demonstrate how the COVID-19 crisis negatively affected the well-being of the adults and students across all three schools. This is just a limited example, when considering that we are still constantly bombarded with news of teacher shortages due to the tress of the pandemic and how students have continued to struggle to catch up with their academic work and school experiences.

### **Exponential Growth of Latinx Students in the U.S.**

Now more than ever, school districts, policy makers, and institutions should maintain an awareness of the exponential growth of Latinx students in the U.S. and prepare with intention. The Latinx population has grown from 50.5 million in 2010 to 62.1 million in 2020 (Pew Research Center, 2021). This has caused an immense demand that ELL teachers have been unable to keep up with (Khong & Saito, 2014), especially when considering the teacher shortage currently facing that nation. Furthermore, In 2020, 14.8 % of Hispanic families were still living below the poverty level (Statista Research Department, 2022). It has been reported that students

from a lower income social status underperform academically when compared to their peers. This is an ongoing reality for the 3.8 million Hispanic Latinx public school students in the U.S., constituting over three-quarters (77.6 %) of ELL student enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Latinx students who live in low-income communities in the U.S. also have limited access to schools with adequate funding (Baker et al., 2020) and are at a higher risk of dropping out of school. In 2018, Latinx students had the highest dropout rates, and it is projected to increase from 25% to 29% (The National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). Within an education system that is solely focused on capitalistic goals that cater to standardized testing owned by four major companies (Harcourt Educational Measurement, CTB McCraw-Hill, Riverside Publishing, and NCS Pearson) in the U.S., approaches to teaching that could be more inclusive of emotions, deep reflection, and overall mental health are important and urgent for the present post-pandemic times we are entering.

### **Accumulated acculturative stress**

Accumulated acculturative stress is the result of individuals trying to adapt to a new society or culture in the process of remediating issues they face due to language barriers, and the clash of social and behavior differences (Berry, 1995; Padilla & Perez, 2003). It also involves an individual's attempt to hold on to their culture or ethnic identity, while still trying to conform to the mainstream culture to avoid discrimination, especially in school settings (Mena et al., 1987). Latinx students often face the issue of adapting to school cultures that go against their natural ways of being and learning. Recent literature (Araújo Dawson & Williams, 2007; Castro-Olivo et al., 2014; Hawley et al., 2007) argues that school acculturative stress has not been explored enough in school settings with Latinx students. There is not enough research on the

internalization and externalization symptoms that lead to higher levels of acculturative stress in Latinx students. Younger students are more susceptible to assimilating in school environments to blend in with their non-Latinx peers. This only stunts the development of Latinx students, since learning the English language requires socialization that is dependent on the dominant culture. The language barrier Latinx students often face significantly adds to the internalization and externalization symptoms of acculturative stress. They are constantly bombarded with the message that speaking English and repressing their native tongue is the only way to learn within and outside of ESL contexts. Oftentimes, this causes students to take a powerless back seat in their own educational experiences. Feelings of shame also arise when students use their native Spanish language in the process of learning English in classroom settings (Olsen, 2000). This externalized response causes students to experience heightened emotions due to stress and anxiety that could also lead to low self-esteem and depression. Consequently, students also showcase externalized behaviors such as aggression and behave badly in school contexts.

### **Structural Racism and Discrimination**

Structural racism and discrimination contribute to Latinx student's struggle with positively mediating their mental health (Taggart, 2018). Structural racism is the social, economic, and political system in which we all live. It perpetuates group inequity through public policies, institutional practices, cultural representation, and other varying norms that value "whiteness" while placing people of color at a disadvantage (Powell, 2008). Schools work under the influence of structural racism through practices that segregate and racialized tracking practices that affect minority student class placement in schools (Blaisdell, 2016). Lower achieving students labeled as "fragile" are viewed through a deficit perspective and placed in

lower-level classes with untrained teachers that tend to do very little to promote long lasting educational attainment goals. Structurally racist school practices alienate Latinx students through physical and social marginalization (Liggett, 2010). Physical marginalization gives Latinx students the message that they are not important enough to have access to a classroom space meant for teaching, and social marginalization gives Latinx students the feeling like they do not belong to the overall school culture. Latinx students also experience discriminatory practices from adults in school contexts (Huber & Cueva, 2012; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Yousef, 2019). These students continually struggle within a system in which adults and peers act discriminatory towards them through their actions and words. This can be done consciously or subconsciously (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). In their study, Huber & Cueva (2012) explored how students' *testimonios* (testimonies) reflected on instances of systemic and subtle forms of racist microaggressions. Student's *testimonios* demonstrated how students experienced self-doubt and academic inferiority, resulting in "negative consequences to the body, mind, and spirit" (p. 401) through lived experiences that were internalized as trauma affecting the overall mental health of the Latinx students, but not impossible to overcome.

### **Immigration and Education: The Struggles of Latinx Individuals in the U.S.**

Latinx indigenous people experience dehumanization in their own communities in Latin America that is carried over into the U.S. "where it is sustained by settler-colonialism and implicitly by Latinx's exclusionary practices" through a double coloniality that begins to take place (Chón, 2019, p. 32). This double coloniality can be best explained through the division of race and labor (Quijano, 2000) that permeates in Latin American countries carried over to the U.S., with language being the greatest barrier to attaining educational or economic success.

Machado-Casas (2012) explained that “anti-indigenous beliefs, sentiments, and old prejudices migrate to the United States along with immigrants” (p. 542). Indigenous Latinx individuals have the added barrier of having to learn the English language, as well as a new culture that discriminates against their person due to their appearance and lack of being able to “pass” as white. Mastering the English, and in some cases the Spanish language, becomes a survival tool for Latinx students that allows for the act of disguise through multiple and fluid identities in a capitalist world that feeds off appearances. As individuals struggling to survive with limited or interrupted formal education and with no hope of integrating into American society without completely sacrificing the Indigenous side, creating a democratizing curriculum that is inclusive of the whole Latinx student is of great urgency towards creating equity in education for all students learning English as a second language (López & Hanemann, 2009).

In the U.S., “the struggle for education includes a struggle to construct an alternative identity and subjectivity” (Elenes, 1997, p.372). For example, to fit in, survive, and attain the “right” kind of success that will lead to a comfortable life, Latinx students are indirectly taught to forfeit their Indigenous identities, cultures, or language/s to move upwards in a world that only looks to the future all while sacrificing their present well-being. Latinx students in urban settings are often pushed to create identities that fit in with the educational trends of a western culture, however, these adopted identities often deny students their own holistic ways of thinking and being. Latinx students are especially alienated from the power to name and construct their worlds to rewrite the way they may view themselves, their own histories, and cultures (Elenes, 1997) due to a Eurocentric mentality of ownership and superiority that has prevailed throughout history within the world of education. This mentality extends to how curriculum is implemented in

ESOL settings through a formula that is restrictive, linear, and uninspiring for students who genuinely want to learn. The consequences have generationally affected Latinx students that tend to be segregated into urban communities, as well as within their own schools due to socio-economic status, gentrification practices, and other forms of systemic oppressions that are damaging to communities with diverse ethnic populations (Wolfe, 2006). Historically, refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants that come to the U.S. chasing the myth of an American dream. They are often situated in communities where life is less expensive but disadvantaged with less exposure and opportunities that could lead to more awareness and knowledges that can help them achieve educational success, better job opportunities, and lifelong skills that can lead to attaining a balanced quality of life.

### **Latinx Population in U.S. Southern States**

Latinx populations who have immigrated to the U.S. in the past 20 years have settled in southern states like North Carolina and Georgia and make up part of the immigrant English Language Learner (ELL) population in states where the English language has been legislated as the official language (Sox, 2009). The state of Georgia promoted an English-only approach to language for ELLs, resisted bilingual programs (Hammann, 2003), limited eligibility for English language instruction for ELLs to 2 years, and began placing ELLs who needed additional support in special education programs (Souto-Manning, 2006) that do not meet the needs of Latinx speakers learning English as a second language. Furthermore, recent studies show that the Latinx immigrant population in the U.S. is largely made up of indigenous individuals from rural areas in Spanish speaking countries (Flores et al. 2004; Machado-Casas, 2009; Stephen, 2007). Pentón Herrera (2018) provides a report on five indigenous communities residing in the U.S. to give



insight into the kind of diversity that make up Latinx people. There are Ixil, Konjobal, Mam, Quechua, and Quiche indigenous communities with individuals originating from the central American countries of Guatemala, Mexico, and the Andes region including Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. This is important to highlight, because the Latinx population in the U.S. is not a homogenous group.

Recent studies have found that Latinx students have not felt welcomed in Southern schools (Machado-Casas, 2006; Wainer, 2006). Latinx students in three southern schools felt unwelcomed and teachers were not prepared to teach what they assumed were Spanish speaking students (Wainer, 2006). Policies created in the south positioned Mexican communities as problems to be dealt with because of racism, hate, and discrimination (Machado-Casas, 2006) explained that the. Latinx individuals have been pushed into low skilled jobs and schools that deny their cultures. Parents have felt like they cannot be politically active in support of their U.S. born children. In North Carolina, two education policies, English as a Second Language (ESL) and NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act) was implemented to “help” newly arrived Latinx individuals, however, there are many unaddressed issues with these programs, beginning with how high stakes testing negatively affects student’s long-term learning, progress, and self-esteem or how the NCLB has not been implemented in North Carolina. This keeps Latinx students in southern states barely surviving, especially now in the current era of COVID-19, during which a quality education has become even harder to attain through socially distanced online schooling and an understaffed teaching workforce.

### **Reasoning Behind this Study**

I immersed myself in this study with the idea that some of us are in this world to create figurative and literal bridges across national borders, cultures, and people via writing and anthropological qualitative research with the intent of adding some good to the world by sharing knowledge that challenges a western lens to education in the U.S. I believe there is power that can come from the union of individuals who have been historically oppressed and marginalized, in agreement with what Moraga and Anzaldúa (2015) state:

We each are our sister's and brother's keepers; no one is an island or has ever been. Every person, animal, plant, stone is interconnected in a life-and-death symbiosis. We are each responsible for what is happening down the street, south of the border across the sea (p. xxviii).

Presently, human beings have become interconnected by a literal web that has become even more accessible through globalization and technology; however, Anzaldúa (2015) wrote that to turn our eyes “forward” we must turn to the past to understand what we can no longer ignore in the present through real and authentic conversations with each other. Those of us who have acquired enough knowledge to see within systemic forms of oppression driving society today have a moral obligation to do good for those who remain voiceless and oppressed. In educational contexts across the U.S., students originating from Mexico, Central America, and other Spanish speaking countries seeking a better life for themselves have been alienated through a collective identity and low-quality educational experiences through a curriculum that excludes the diversity that exists within Latinx identities, cultures, and languages.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Latinx students in a seventh grade sheltered ESOL classroom responded to a mindful and social justice driven unit that is informed by Chicana feminism epistemology (Calderón, 2014;Davalos, 2008; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Elenes, 2000;Keating, 2012; Anzaldúa 2012 & 2015) that is in alignment with indigenous knowledges (Kimmerer, 2013) that work from the premise of holism through a practical implementation of mindfulness (Hanh 2014 & 2017; Yellow Bird, 2014) in the classroom. The definition of holism I draw from for this study is one that incorporates a mind and body connection, spiritual transformation, and social activism for oneself and one's community. This study aimed to be inclusive of mindfulness in the classroom through daily breathing meditation and *nepantlera* pedagogy as form of culturally relevant pedagogy. Furthermore, I strived to be critical and culturally relevant by respecting student's dignity, and their families' cultural and linguistic backgrounds with the purpose of achieving social justice (Reza-López et al., 2014). I accomplished this by employing ethnographic case study methods in an ESOL classroom setting to gather data during regular school hours for an extended amount of time. The aim of this study was to observe and explore student's reflections as part of their educational experience learning English as a second language. The focus was on understanding student's reflective processes regarding themselves, what they learned, and what they did in the classroom setting. The overall goal was to allow students time and a safe space within an already existing ESOL curriculum to learn the course content, while also promoting their socioemotional well-being through the creation of unique educational opportunities that were holistic in nature and that also borrowed from an Indigenous lens to learning.

### Statement of the Research Problem

In this study, I aimed to fill a gap within ESOL education by highlighting a mindfulness component that is almost non-existing within classroom settings in connection to learning through reading, writing, and questioning that promotes critical and explorative reflection. I specifically wanted to explore the potential of a curriculum that taps the holistic and creative thinking processes of Latinx students in an ESOL classroom setting. I believe that it is imperative to bring Latinx student's unvoiced and marginalized experiences to the forefront of instruction so that teachers can foster compassion through mindfulness and understanding. I approached this study considering that there is no literature out there that explores how Latinx students make sense of their learning through reading, writing, and speaking in connection to their emotions, opinions, and lived experiences in the classroom setting. The six-week unit curriculum for this study makes connections between these components through a mindfulness and social justice pedagogy that offers an exploratory lens.

I created the unit curriculum with the aid of a social justice and mindfulness oriented sheltered ESOL teacher and adjusted by tailoring it to the needs of her Latinx students in the classroom. The method of questioning led students to reflect on "the structural inequality, the racism, and the injustice that exist in society" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p.140) through the Young Adult (YA) book "Esperanza Rising" by Pam Muñoz Ryan. They were able to do this in connection to their lived experiences in the classroom, moments of *testimonios* in their interviews, and their reflective writing in relation to what they were learning. This study demonstrated how students responded to a culturally responsive YA text, mindful breathing meditation, and questioning that promoted reflection to inform on how Latinx students in an

ESOL Sheltered instruction classroom can do critical thinking and hard meaningful work while learning English as a Second Language (ESL).

### **Research Question**

In this study, I answered the following question: “How do Latinx students respond to a unit informed by Chicana feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and mindful breathing meditation in a sheltered ESOL classroom through the exploration of *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan?”

### **Terms and Scope of the Research**

I focused on Latinx students, because of my own theory in the flesh embodied experiences (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002). I was/am a Latinx student myself and understand the struggles of learning English as a second language. My life, education, and work experiences are like those of other immigrant Latinx students. I understand the importance of holistically supporting culturally diverse students because I have seen the consequences of students not receiving an equitable education. I am Latina, born in Cuba with ancestry that can be traced back to my Black, Spanish, and Indigenous roots. My life experiences across contexts within and outside my Cuban culture through the lens of a feminist woman, daughter, sister, wife, mother, aunt, as well as under the label of immigrant in the U.S. has allowed me to cultivate a sense of compassion and responsibility for the struggles of Latinx students and their educational experiences. I call myself a feminist because “feminism is a sensible reaction to the injustices of the world, which we might register at first through our own experiences” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 21). My goal in life is to make sense of experiences that don’t make sense to me and to others. I am a person who is capable of loving and seeing individuals for who they are on multiple levels regardless of their age, race, or gender. I understand how gender and sexual orientation affects

the educational development and opportunities of minority students after seeing the struggles of family members who belong to the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer (LGBTQ) community. My life experiences, having held a wide range of jobs have led me to live in the “in-between” spaces of cultures, social classes, and socioeconomic standing. Therefore, I believe in building bridges between cultures, because like Gloria Anzaldúa, I never felt like I belonged any group, but could mingle in all of them comfortably and peacefully trying to understand to create meaningful connections. This in-betweenness allows me to feel compassionate towards the issues of Afro-Latinx students, who also often struggle greatly due to discrimination, oppression, and wrongful neglect within our current education system.

My parents, brothers, sister, and I struggled greatly living in poverty during our early years in this county, as my father could not find stable work due to the language barrier and not knowing how to work the job market. We sustained ourselves by collecting trash metal on the streets to sell to recycling companies in the city of Miami so that we would not become homeless. My family and I spent many long hours in the afternoons and nights collecting thrash metal while my sister and I would help and do our homework. Collecting soda cans on my way to school with my brothers and sister would sometimes put me in a situation in which I would be bullied at school. Being very poor and doing something that is frowned upon in society only added more fuel to how others “othered” me since I was already being bullied for my accent, the way I looked, and the way I dressed, considering that sometimes I had to wear clothes that my cousin’s mom would donate to us. I will never forget that I had to wear boy shoes! I write about some of my struggles with transparency to explain why I understand some of the struggles

Latinx immigrant students' phase with their parents in the U.S. These experiences, along with many others within the school system have shaped who I am as a person and teacher today.

Furthermore, my daughter symbolizes opportunity and a kind of strength I didn't know before she came into my life. She inspires my work because she pushes me to advocate for myself and others. I am also the daughter of an immigrant mother who struggled greatly under severe poverty and patriarchal ideals in Cuba. Like my father, she too had to face a great language barrier that forced her to take on jobs that would mentally and physically drain her so that she could keep a roof over our heads. Living with the label of immigrant in this country has taught me the good and bad of what it means to be considered an outsider. Presently, I do not consider myself or anyone to be an immigrant or outsider of any country because we all live on the same planet. Political lines and laws should not determine the worth of human beings, especially if immigrating to a new country is needed because our life lacks quality or is no longer safe in our native land. I am also a sister and an aunt. I believe in giving back to my family by promoting their educational aspirations, and lastly, but not least, I am a wife to a kind man who accepts, supports, and pushes me to accomplish my goals.

As a previous ELL student, learning English as a second language in a new culture at the young age of six in Miami was life changing. González (2001) explained, "Language is at the heart, literally and metaphorically, of who we are, how we present ourselves, and how others see us" (2001, p. xix). When I came to this country, I felt like I had to rip everything I knew from my person. I felt like I had to forget about Cuban and my language because they were not longer needed or seen as important in the U.S. This broke my heart in a way my young self, who was very reluctant to change, could not understand. I rebelled by refusing to eat the frozen food at the

cafeteria and by refusing to speak at school. I now realize that Spanish and my Cuban experience is at the core of my identity and who I am as a person. My language is tied to my embodied felt experiences and abandoning my language was like losing a part of myself. Coming back to Spanish later in life was decentering in the sense that when I think and speak in Spanish, I feel too much like the self I've been fighting against all my life in the process of trying to assimilate to American culture. Today, I understand that I cannot fully learn or be myself without repeating information to myself in Spanish after having heard it in English. Anzaldúa (2012) wrote, "until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (p. 81). Taking pride in my language means accepting my culture, everything that makes up my identity, and being forgiving with myself so that I can move on to become a better version of myself.

Unlike some of my previous students and childhood peers, I consider myself very lucky because I was able to attend college and graduate with the support of my mother, husband, and extended family members. After realizing I did not know what to do with my bachelor's, I went back to school to become an English teacher to high school students but became a Spanish World Language teacher instead, since it was the job most principals felt I was "most suited for" based on what I assume was their prejudiced assumptions of me and my English accent. Despite being labeled as an individual who could not teach English, I pressed on to become a Spanish teacher and began to acquire a deep appreciation for myself and other Latinx cultures. I was reminded that I was Cuban because I spent all my life denying my language and heritage in my attempt to assimilate to a homogeneous American culture. I was reminded that there is beauty in language and difference. Overall, I learned much about the diversity that exists within Latinx cultures. I taught my students about Afro Latino culture, which is something I never thought about before I



realized I had to find a way to connect with my African American students. There were many times during my experiences as a teacher when I felt humbled by my students, but at the same time felt frustrated when I realized they were playing a game of life that was rigged against them. Some of my students never stood a chance. I, myself did not stand a chance, but here I am, thanks to a close-knit community that has supported me throughout my graduate program. I have always felt like an impostor in university and professional educational settings. As a doctoral student, I have continually tried to address, work on, and accept negative feelings about myself by trying to acknowledge that I am a person who has value in this world. Our current education system supports individualism over community, and this has been a grave problem for minority African American and Latinx students.

My personal struggles with learning the English language and feeling alienated in American culture and within my own Cuban culture is very similar to those of the Latinx students I have encountered and read about in the literature from the past couple of decades. My experience as a Spanish and English teacher taught me that there is much knowledge to be gained from the struggles of African American and Latinx students in urban contexts. Being a world language and English remedial teacher taught me much about a school system that is hegemonic in nature regarding the inequalities Latinx students experience in k-12. During my five years of teaching, I saw many African American and Latinx students fall through the cracks of the current public education system. I saw illegal things occurring in school contexts and experienced adults being micro aggressive with students whom they did not consider were worth their time. I saw students being tracked into classrooms and exited out of high school with very few tools or skills to be successful in life. I would see these very same students in the community

up to no good or simply settling for lower paying jobs to help support their families. Some of my students did not even make it out alive due to community violence. The thing that impacted me the most is the discrimination and lack of compassion my students and I often experienced. I keep in contact with some of the students I taught during my first few years teaching. Sometimes our deep and reflective conversations lead us to critical realizations about our experiences together in the classroom.

Furthermore, a focus on my own and that of my students' inner well-being led to the mindfulness component of this study. The anxiety and anger that has continuously boiled over my body throughout the course of my life trying to mold myself into someone I am not, feels too heavy for any one person to carry. I was the shy student who never asked questions. I constantly struggled with completing assignments because I was afraid that other students would make fun of my accent and intelligence. I never tried to speak up for myself on various occasions during bullying incidents when I should have said and done something. Most teachers also did not do much to address bullying in the classroom, nor did they try to promote meaningful discussions about the things we were learning. Learning was always bland and uninspiring because we would always constantly work on worksheets and do readings that did not relate to us or our lived experiences. I especially struggled with making friends and I was never involved in a sport or club that could have allowed me a safe space to develop socially. My parents simply did not have the income that was required for me to be able to partake in any extracurricular activity. I was very lonely and would often self-isolate in the school library where books and librarians would become my salvation. Lastly, I also had many family responsibilities. I had to get home by a certain time to take care of my adopted nephew and help him with his homework, bath, and

feeding. I was not a very happy person or student, nor did I feel like I could share these thoughts with anyone before. Therefore, I'm sharing them now. I simply did not know how to be happy, because I didn't have an example.

I shared my very personal reflection above to mention the following. Hanh (2014) asked, "why don't schools teach our young people the way to manage suffering?" (p. 17). Suffering well is part of being mindful with awareness in the present moment. Moving away from victimhood and acting towards living life more fully can help promote a healthier way of being for all. I wish I would have known this when I was younger. Maybe I would have focused more on living than on trying to make time move by faster in my mind because I was unhappy. In a way, I sometimes feel like I was robbed of my childhood, and I must make peace with all my suffering through the social justice lens that Anzaldúa (2012) left for all of us so that we may help the next generation. Someone once told me, "What is the point of reaching the top of the mountain if you still don't know how to be happy?" Being happy with all your basic needs met while in school and learning is of grave importance. It is the most important thing, because you cannot truly embody learning without being in the present moment. When all you can think about is how stressed and unhappy you are. My only hope for students is for them to be happy and loved while learning. Then and only then, will I know that I am doing my job well.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

For this study I focused on mindfulness through a social justice lens that drew on Chicana feminism in alignment with indigenous knowledges that work from the premise of holism. In this first chapter, I began by offering a view of Latinx students within education in the U.S. through the definition of othering and what it has meant to be "othered." Next, I cited the overall

exponential growth of Latinx populations in the U.S., as well as the growth of Latinx students in southern states. I did this to explain why a more holistic curriculum is necessary due to the unaddressed stressors and barriers Latinx students continue to face today within and outside of educational settings. Furthermore, I contextualized my study through the impact of a COVID stricken world and cited Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, whose work on mindfulness aligns with Indigenous knowledges and how I wanted to carry out the study in the classroom. Lastly, sharing my own life experiences was also a way for me to transparently explain what drew me to this study. I began to perform mindfulness in my life during my Ph. D program by performing breathing and walking mindfulness meditation, as well as through painting, doing yoga, and dancing. Going back to my own unique way of being, creativity, and authentic self has helped me focus on the present for longer periods of time through acceptance and peace during great moments of anxiety. I am on a journey towards continually evolving into my higher self through peace and acceptance. This is the same journey I would like for all students to experience at an earlier stage of their lives. This is important because learning requires a kind of inner peace and presence, unique to a society that works on the premise of individualism and a mind-body disconnect that makes us “othered” feel even more lonely, lost, and unguided within and beyond educational contexts.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I provide a macro historical and a micro empirical perspective on issues and barriers still affecting Latinx students. I explore the following: the hegemonic effects of capitalism and colonization; settler colonialism and the removal of indigenous people; and the barriers Latinx students still face within educational contexts today. I do this to inform on the interconnectedness that exists between the past, present, and future in relation to the educational experiences of Latinx students today. Then, I cite literature to explain Chicana feminist theory and Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the *mestiza* consciousness, borderlands, and her delineated seven stages of *conocimiento*. This is followed by the history, definitions, and practices of mindfulness and how it has been practiced in classrooms in the U.S. through a Western lens. This is to inform that, although good work has been done through mindfulness in classroom contexts, there is still a great need to include mindfulness in classroom settings to specifically meet the needs of Latinx students.

I also cite literature that informs on Indigenous lenses to mindfulness to demonstrate how Indigenous populations around the world practice mindfulness by valuing a mind/body and place connection through storytelling. This is followed by an explanation of my theoretical perspective, Chicana Feminist theory through literature that informs my study. Furthermore, I define *nepantlera* pedagogy and how it has been implemented through empirical qualitative research in classroom settings with the aim of addressing the needs of Latinx students mindfully and holistically. Lastly, I also cite case studies that explore how Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and *nepantlera* pedagogy have been implemented with Latinx students in classroom settings and this is followed by various critical ethnographies and critical ethnographic case

studies have been conducted in school settings with a focus on *nepantlera* pedagogy, the method of *testimonio* (testimonies), and how a culturally inclusive curriculum can create more equitable learning environments for often marginalized students in school settings.

### **Methods of Review**

For this literature review, I reviewed a total of 73 sources. This includes articles, books, and on-line sources to inform my study. The articles reviewed were discovered through google scholar, EBSCO, and Georgia State University's library's general search page followed by selected references cited in those articles. I cited 15 theoretical studies and 3 on-line sources that related historical information on the effects of hegemonic effects of capitalism and colonization. I cited 8 empirical studies to provide information on barriers Latinx students still face today in educational contexts. These were followed by literature on the history, definitions, and practice of mindfulness through seven theoretical and empirical articles to also offer an explanation to mindfulness through a western lens. I also cited a total of 7 empirical articles to provide examples of how mindfulness has been implemented in classroom settings and cited 6 theoretical and historical articles that offered an Indigenous lens to mindfulness. This is followed by 8 theoretical literature citations to explain Chicana feminist theory and Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the *mestiza* consciousness, the concept of borderlands, and her delineated seven stages of *conocimiento*. Furthermore, I cited 7 qualitative empirical studies on how *nepantlera* pedagogy has been implemented in classroom settings with Latinx students. Lastly, I cited 6 exemplar case studies that have been conducted with Latinx students in classroom settings, followed by 4 empirical critical ethnographies and two critical ethnographic case studies to inform the methods of my study. Together, the literature gathered for this section informs all aspects of my study.

## **Hegemonic Effects of Capitalism and Colonization**

The world has progressively become a connected and successful capitalist conglomerate fueled by technology, production, and consumption that advertises shallow participation and happiness. Excess labor and the accumulation of goods in a western ideologically driven world caters to modern systems that have historically colonized and abused African American and Latinx individuals. Modern technologies offer momentary happiness and interconnectedness at local and global scales, however, there are underlying systems of oppression that have taken over the world through the spread of a Europeanized mentality that persists today. The current White ideology that has resurfaced in all kinds of social platforms poses the question of how democracy is being carried out in the U.S. and around the world today, as many are forced to live with the reality of COVID-19, poverty, and social injustice issues affecting mostly low-income urban communities. Today 9.2% of the world, or 680 million people live in extreme poverty (The World Bank), with 1.3 billion of these people living in developing countries, which account for 22% of the world's population (UN Development Program). The U.S. holds 38.1 million individuals living in the poverty line (Census, 2018); however, the COVID-19 pandemic threatens any progress the world has made against poverty. The World Bank estimated that 88 to 115 million people fell back into extreme poverty in 2020. These are individuals labeled as “vulnerable” and forced to live with a survival mentality that is sometimes blind to hegemonic structures and systemic forms of oppression that hinder progress for everyone who does not fit within a homogenous society that keeps pushing forward in the name of prosperity.

It does not help that in the U.S. and around the world today young people are enacting their citizenship through consumerism (Giroux, 2004). Mass consumption is in effect today

through a modern neoliberal market that thrives on the dysfunctional and oppressive relationships individuals maintain within colonized systems of oppression seeking happiness outside of themselves through ideals and aspirations that bring more psychological and physical harm than good. A specific idea of happiness and success is prescribed through an education that is driven by indisputable facts and absolute truths through a one-sided history that paints Indigenous individuals as evil, all while rendering the natural world lifeless through western ideology that segments truth into parts, discarding other ways of being and knowing (Patel, 2015). Ultimately, this renders individual's incapable of achieving a holistic view of themselves, the world, and what truly makes for an authentic, self-explored fulfilled life through knowledge that is intuitive. This segmented way of learning and being subconsciously strips human beings of their creativities through a kind of preached lifestyle that mostly caters to a neo-liberal market that owns and sells as if there is nothing new left to create. This western prescription of the ultimate way of living and being in the world is harmful even to those who benefit from it the most. Indigenous knowledges informs that the world is interconnected through the spirit, the emotional, and the physical relationships humans maintain with all living beings and the world around them (Lavallée, 2009). The current deteriorating ecological and political state of the world is also a result of the oppression of African American and Latinx individuals, when considering that western knowledge, along with the greed of attaining and destroying territories alone, is what has led to the destruction of the very home that sustains human life. Unfortunately, a Cartesian split of the mind and body (Descartes, 1984) continues to rule the world as we live in it today.



The idea of the mind and body existing as separate entities has historically led to the subjugation of individuals in modern capitalist societies in which laborers continue to work more for less money through competition and maximum production (Marx, 1912, Vol. 1). Modern global societies today still follow the low wage working labor system that enslaves the mind and body in return for economic survival through jobs that emphasize production that caters to a global high demand of the consumption of material objects. Individuals labeled as workers or producers in the U.S., as well as in developing countries are treated as objects valued for their skills to advance jobs, versus their thinking potential for human development and evolution. This still occurs today as minimum wage employees, consisting of mostly African American and Latinx individuals, continually struggle to receive a quality education while also trying to make a living in jobs that emulate factory settings. This pattern of reproduction that oppresses by catering to a global economy (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) has led to struggle and suffering in a world in which people want to do more than just survive, but do not know how to escape their current states (Hanh, 2017). Economic and social class power in the U.S. has belonged to the elite few in power, while the less privileged have struggled to survive in a world of submissive relationships as colonized subjects within colonized systems. Mignolo (2009) explained that “knowledge-making in the organization of society, institutions are created that accomplish two functions: training of new (epistemic obedient) members and control of who enters and what knowledge-making is allowed, disavowed, devaluated or celebrated” (p. 176). It is usually the case that those who hold power enforce ideologies for the rest of society. It is a kind of subjugated reality that reproduces systems that benefit white individuals but renders African American and Latinx individuals powerless. In the U.S., Indigenous, black, and Latinx

individuals have been generationally marginalized from any kind of schooling that could add to their educational progress and quality of life, since those who hold and enforce power (usually European white males) get to decide what knowledge is deemed worthy for what public purpose (Giroux, 2004). Ultimately, these present-day realities, not easily seen by the naked eye, also makes life even harder for recently arrived migrants trying to make a better life for themselves in the U.S. where they are labeled as inferior due to their race, social class, or citizenship status

### **Settler Colonialism and the Removal of Indigenous People**

In this section, I explain the concept of settler colonialism to connect with the previous explanation of the state of the modern world to a history that has led it there. Patel (2015) explained that “settler colonialism’s fulcrum is the land; coloniality more broadly is about the stratification of beingness to serve accumulation of material and land” (p. 7). Early European settlers took over lands as property and labeled Indigenous people as non-intelligent beings without much consideration for their rich educational, communal, and mindful ecological practices pertaining to their ways of knowing and being. This label is still perpetuated in U.S. society today as indigenous communities continually fight against historical and present injustices committed against them and their people. Settler colonialism is a structure promoted by a European doctrine of discovery of taking possession of territory as private property through the logic that they were not legally claimed by Indigenous people, and promoted through genocide, forced removal, and a historical fictionalized and generic description of Natives as savages (Goldstein; 2008; Mikdashi, 2013; Morgensen, 2011; Veracini; 2011; Wolfe, 2006). European settlers viewed land as territory to be acquired through legal processes that lead to a definition of success that involved the accumulation of land within “global capitalism, liberal

modernity and international governance” (Morgensen, 2011, p. 53) that still informs past and present political processes through the literal and historical erasure of Indigenous nationalities. Mikdashi (2013) explained that “settler colonialism is the history of a family welded together by natives and settlers. It is the logic of superiority, of primacy, of genocide. It is the colonization of memory and events that come to be known as history” (p. 32) that has trickled its way into how the past is remembered, how life is lived in the present, and what goals humans create for themselves in a liberal and capitalist driven world that ignores the plight of African American and Latinx individuals. Erasing the Native through Eurocentric ideological notions of what a man “should be,” in a literal and historical sense, became an important component of settler colonialism to promote a justified process that benefited “everyone” who were of European descent through legal means and through political authority over territories and Indigenous people.

Under settler colonialism, progress is equated to the accumulation of private property that has been tainted by the pain, hardships, and the blood of indigenous people. Goldstein (2008) explained that Indigenous individuals were not included within the definition of “human rights” for all within the new colonies of what has now become the United States, because “both ‘human’ and ‘rights’—are themselves bound up with modern property and sovereignty as they have been at least partially constituted by the juridical fictions of colonial conquest” (p. 837). Indigenous individuals did not come to have human rights under a settler colonialism system that historically led to their suppression, criminalization, and dehumanization within a society that took away Indian self-determination and restitution (Mikdashi, 2013). There is no better present-day explanation of this than when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the declaration

on the rights of Indigenous people on September 13, 2007, with 4 dissenting votes from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the U.S., all countries with a history of settler colonialism and takeover through genocide. The ideologies of settler colonialism have been ongoing in these four countries as “Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan—their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system” (Patel, 2015, p. 23). Today, not only is settler colonialism ideology hidden in plain sight through systems of oppressions promoted through education, but it is also hidden within modern day history books that still paint the settled European lineage in the U.S. as good through their justified removal of Indigenous people. However, the “trail of tears” is a perfect example of a history that is oftentimes ignored in the present, but that will forever be remembered by Indigenous people for the lives lost of five tribes in the southern parts of the U.S. who were uprooted from their homes westward to Oklahoma when president Andrew Jackson abused his power, broke countless of treaty promises with Indigenous people, and harassed them to force their removal through “legal” justification (Cave, 2013). It is speculated that around 4, 000 Indigenous people lost their lives “during the entire Trail of Tears ordeal; that is, during the round-up and months spent in stockades awaiting removal, the journey itself, and the first year in Indian Territory” (Thornton, 1984, p. 292) that accounts for the complete experience of the forced removal under a system that wanted to do away with Indigenous people with complete disregard for the outcomes. An education system that still hides the realities of the past and that still continually educates minority students through a strict westernized lens does not work towards maintaining democracy within a diverse society.

### **Latinx Student's Accumulated Acculturative Stress within Educational Contexts**

Colonization, hegemony, and capitalism have led to westernized ideologies that favor whiteness and homogeneity. This type of ideology has led Latinx students to the struggles they still face today within educational contexts. Recent empirical research demonstrates how Latinx students have struggled with acculturative stress, mental health concerns, and structural racism and discrimination because of the oppression they experience within school contexts. As stated in the introduction, Latinx students experience high levels of accumulated acculturative stress (Araújo Dawson & Williams, 2007; Castro-Olivo et al., 2014; Hawley et al., 2007). Castro-Olivo and colleagues (2014) examined the psychometric properties of the Coping with Acculturative Stress in American Schools (CASAS-A) through a sample of 148 Latinx middle school students. The CASAS-A identified students who would benefit from culturally responsive social-emotional interventions due to high levels of school acculturative stress. This was based on how students feel, think, or act in relation to the following items or stressors implied within CASAS-A: sense of belonging, perceived discrimination, ELL related stress, and familial acculturative gap. Significant differences between Latinx and non-Latinx students became notable, with Latinx students reporting higher levels of acculturative stress. A significant finding from the study is that CASAS-A identified higher levels of acculturative stress in ELLs. The authors explained that the language barriers Latinx students experience causes them to feel marginalized and discriminated against, and this could lead to social-emotional problems and educational risks.

Araújo Dawson & Williams (2007) examined the relationship between Latinx children limited English proficiency status through their hypotheses of internalizing and externalizing

behaviors in kindergarten. They argued that there is a positive relationship between limited English proficiency and externalizing symptoms, with sex and place of birth providing explanation for such behaviors. The following five items measured externalizing behaviors: child argues, fights, gets angry, acts impulsively, disturbs, and talks persistently. Place of birth and family poverty contributed to the following internalizing symptoms: anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, and sadness. The authors found that language status negatively affects students and adds to their stress in the classroom, and the externalizing symptoms mentioned above increased through the grades. The male gender was associated with higher externalizing symptoms and the authors explained this could be due to expected gender cultural roles. Furthermore, family poverty and place of birth were significantly correlated to internalizing behaviors with an important finding pointing to students who were born in the U.S. experiencing higher levels of internalized symptoms. The authors suggested, “it is possible that US born Latino/as are conflicted by their American and Latino/a status and may feel rejected by both cultures” (p. 408). The authors explained that a significant and impactful finding from the study was that student’s internalized and externalized symptoms increased from school entry through the end of third grade, and this was influenced by family poverty, place of birth, and parental education. Lastly, Hawley, Chavez, & Romain (2007) analyzed multimodal student archival data to address the relationship between academic achievement, acculturative stress, and coping factors in 126 children between 8 and 11 years old, with 67 of them being Latino and 59 white. The authors discussed that coping strategies differ by ethnicity, with Latinx students adhering to spiritual, religion, and more diverse support, versus their white peers. On the SAFE-C, A-COPE, Self-Perception Profile for Children, and Harter Teacher’s Rating Scale Latinx students reported a

higher mean level of acculturative stress than their white peers. Overall, “Latino children significantly differed from white children in levels of stress, coping, and dimensions of self-perception” (p. 294) with Latinx students demonstrating greater levels of acculturative and overall stress regardless of how they coped.

### **Structural Racism and Discrimination**

Recent empirical studies also point to how structural racism (Blaisdell, 2016; Liggett, 2010) and discrimination (Huber & Cueva, 2012; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Yousef, 2019) can also affect Latinx students within school settings. For instance, Ligett (2010) conducted interviews to study the obstacles English language teachers (ELTs) think hinder student’s abilities to become academically successful through their thought processes and feelings by considering the influence of social, political, and historical factors in urban and rural settings. Within the rural settings, the teaching spaces of the teachers were located on the outskirts of the schools in portables or small rooms that were not designated as classroom spaces.

These inferior teaching spaces, unfortunately, represent many of the settings for English language programs throughout the nation. Having to conduct a lesson in public areas of schools diminishes the ability of students to concentrate and attend to the material. In addition, the possibility of having to leave at a moment’s notice undermines the ability of teachers to provide a predictable and stable setting for their students to learn. (Ligett, 2010, p. 225)

The location and aspect of the classrooms reinforced a sense of exclusion the teachers, as well as their student’s felt within their school. The urban setting teachers talked about how ELLs were also refused entrance into general education classes, considering that there was no structure in place to transition students. This only added to the observable marginalization that students experienced. The supports that the rural teachers talked about lacked structure to support positive

collaboration between teachers so that ELL students could be accommodated in general classes. Some of the teachers expressed that they and their student's felt like they were not part of the school culture because they were excluded from all kinds of school social and language practices. There was also talk about the lack of support from school principals and administration. Although this study does not focus on student's perspectives or student's mental health specifically, it does shed light on the deficit perspective that exists on English language learning in urban and rural schools and how it negatively affects students. Ligett (2010) concluded that:

In the instances of exclusion and marginalization accounted above, the division among populations of teachers and students within the school community illustrates the separate and marginalized status of ELTs and ELLs, and how this status is structurally maintained within the school community. (p. 228)

The teachers in this study were trying to advocate for their students socially and academically, however the students had become so accustomed to being marginalized and discriminated against, that it was impossible for their mental states not to affect their social interactions and academic success.

Blaisdell (2016) explained that analyzing schools as racial spaces can help teachers examine the role of structural racism through ethnographic and autoethnographic work. He offers examples of schools as racial spaces where whiteness controls access by highlighting the experiences of four teachers who pursued racial equity in their teaching. This study took place in two different rural schools in North Carolina in which black and Latinx students were often labeled as "fragile" and denied full access to the curriculum. Blaisdell (2016) highlighted how lower performing black and Latinx students could not catch up to the reading levels of their



white peers by the time they took the End-of-Grade (EOG) test and were also often given more discipline referrals than their white peers. Most of the teachers at both schools were complicit in this cultural segregation, however the four teachers in this study were able to pursue racial equity to some degree through their knowledge of racial literacy by making a connection between race and space:

They consciously tried to work against practices and dis-courses that diminished the value of non-white culture and that decontextualized the context of education for their students of color. While not perfect, these teachers were able to create classrooms that were less dictated by the logic of white supremacy and to allocate educational resources in more racially equitable ways. (p. 258)

The literacy approaches at the schools favored the white students. This was seen in the types of standardized tests all students had to take, which did not accurately portray the progress black and Latinx students made. These tests would often overshadow what students could do in the classroom and failed to recognize students' ways of being and knowing, including a lack of understanding of their cultural practices. The teachers commented on the harm this was having on the black and Latinx students at the school by recognizing the emotional and academic toll it took on the students because they felt restricted and oppressed in the ways they could interact with the teachers, their classmates, and even course content. The findings of this study demonstrated that racial spaces analysis can help teachers resist structural racism with their black and Latinx students. The teachers in this study were able to tap on students' cultural backgrounds and give them access to higher level curricula by fighting for their students through a social justice inclusive lens within their classrooms:

They resisted de-racing – the idea that students of color needed to give up their cultural identities and only focus on individual merit to succeed. They resisted de-racing by looking at their classrooms as communities that included all students and did so while

countering, at least in their own classrooms, the way their school's used whiteness as a form of property to deny students of color access to more rigorous curriculum. (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 265)

This study is significant because student's inner-wellbeing and educational success is often affected by the structural racism, they often face in school contexts, because they feel like they cannot be their unique selves and succeed in a society that tells them that being, and acting white is the only acceptable way to be.

Recent experience-based papers and empirical studies explore how discrimination affects Latinx students (Huber & Cueva, 2012; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004; Yousef, 2019). Yousef (2019) wrote about the injustices Latinx students face during her internship during the fall of 2017 at a LAUSD high school located in the San Fernando Valley, where she observed and interviewed various students about the obstacles and situations the immigrant students faced. In her paper, she outlines the Los Angeles Unified School District's lack of support for incoming immigrant students as discriminatory. The author witnessed how the Latinx students struggled with the English Language Development test, being classified as lower performing students in school, financial trouble, isolation, large class sizes that made learning harder, and college maneuvering and academics leading to dropping out. The author based her argument on the numerous stories, frustrations, and fears from the students. Although some students did thrive, she discussed that there is still much room left for improvement regarding the ostracization of immigrant Latinx students in classrooms throughout Los Angeles County.

Huber & Cueva (2012) utilized *testimonio* as a methodological approach to understand how 20 undocumented and U.S.-born Chicana/Latina students experience racist nativist

microaggressions in the University of California by drawing on critical race and Chicana feminist frameworks to study how embodied systemic oppression affected them. The authors explored the process of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2002) through their findings because of the students' experiences with everyday verbal and non-verbal subtle racism. The students told their *testimonios* documenting their struggles of survival and resistance within oppressive institutional structures. This helped the students challenge the deficit discourse about them through their *testimonios* as a continuous process of reflection. The findings pointed to how the students felt a sense of academic self-doubt and feelings of not being “smart enough.” As a result, these unhealthy and internalized emotions affected their social development and academic performance. However, this study proved that the students proved resilience within counter spaces where they were able to connect with their culture and each other’s experiences, regardless of the discrimination they faced elsewhere, “the K-12 counter spaces the students described were sites of resistance and resilience to the subordination they encountered in public school as Spanish-dominant Chicana/Latina students” (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 404). Most importantly, these spaces helped students heal through community building and by experiencing the final state of *conocimiento* leading to transformation.

Lastly, Rosenbloom & Way (2004) explored how discrimination affected 20 Asian, 20 Black, and 20 Latinx 9th grade students in an urban high school. This study explored how discrimination goes beyond Black/White relations and how it happens in very subtle ways within and across ethnic/cultural groups in high school. The findings demonstrated that the teachers preferred the Asian American students, and the Black and Latinx students harassed the Asian

American students because of their teacher's biases. Issues of language, immigration, and assimilation were explored in relation to student's experiences with discrimination. In their interviews, students explained that they experienced racial and ethnic discrimination from the adults and their peers. The Asian students were physically harassed by the Black and the Latinx students, and the Black and Latinx students were continually discriminated against by police officers, shopkeepers, and teachers. Field observations demonstrated that teachers would discriminate Black and Latinx students by having low academic expectations and labeling them as the "bad kids." Latinx students express in their interviews that they felt like their teachers were passing them in their classes without teaching them anything. They also expressed that they perceived their teachers as not caring for their academic or emotional well-being. The students also talked about the intragroup discrimination they experienced within their own groups. For example, the Latinx students talked about the tensions between the Dominican and Puerto Rican students. The Chinese students talked about the within-ethnic group tension between recently immigrated Chinese students and the one's born here. The authors concluded:

our findings suggest that urban high school students struggle to live with the contradiction of American egalitarianism and the stereotypes, harassment, and discrimination they experienced in their lives. They spoke passionately about the ways in which the assumption of uniformity is harmful and how the interaction between positive and negative stereotypes shapes their daily interactions. They revealed patterns of discriminatory processes that have yet to be noted in the social science literature. (Rosenbloom & Way, 2004, p. 447)

This study shed light on the subtle discrimination that can also happen in very subtle ways within and across ethnic/cultural groups in urban high schools and how students internalize their experiences in negative ways. Ultimately, these discriminatory practices lead to unhealthy mental states of being affecting students in every facet of life.

### **History, Definition, and Practices of Mindfulness**

In this section, I provide recent background information, definitions, and practices of mindfulness in classroom settings in the U.S. The practice of mindfulness has been prescribed through a western lens that has done very little for Latinx youth in urban settings when considering the struggles, they still face in urban school contexts today. Cannon (2016) critiqued the application of mindfulness-based practices in a neoliberal market by explaining how the concept of mindfulness can also become oppressive in society. Mindfulness progressively entered education in response to the daily stressor's young adolescents face in their everyday lives as education has come to embrace the same competitive process as the workforce through assessments and other competitive components in school contexts (Sibinga et al., 2014). Mindfulness based practices do not achieve a liberating purpose if implemented to control individuals, because "without an integrated critical pedagogy, mindfulness alone can be seen as the latest tool to pacify unruly students" (Cannon, 2016, p. 403) when considering that controlling students behaviors through the practice of mindfulness is becoming a recent trend in education and would simply turn the practice into yet another forced assignment for Latinx Indigenous students who are already struggling in a colonizing and oppressive education system.

The practice of mindfulness came to the U.S. in the form of yoga, and more recently through non-religious meditation practices. Jon Kabat-Zinn (2003) played a major influence in bringing mindfulness to the West through mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). In 1979, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) became a practice in the U.S. with the idea that it would become integrated into mainstream medicine. Hyde & LaPrad (2015) defined mindfulness as a way "to train ourselves in bringing attention to our sensations, emotions, and thoughts,

keeping all in balance yet without denial or restrictions" (p. 4), and in their medical and psychological definition of mindfulness, Parrish and colleagues (2016) explained that "mindfulness interventions are theorized to target regulation of emotion and coping processes associated with stress, and may represent a helpful branch of psychotherapies to address the suffering experienced by stressed youth" (p. 172). However, Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh, defined mindfulness as "a kind of energy that we generate when we bring our mind back to our body and get in touch with what is going on in the present moment, within us and around us" (PlumVillage, 2020). Hanh (2017) explained that living mindfully requires for human beings to look deeply within themselves to arrive at the root of suffering by living in the present and allowing one's emotions and thoughts to flow. With these definitions of mindfulness in mind, it's important to highlight that these practices only scratch the surface of how mindfulness-based practices can be implemented with African American and Latinx youth in urban contexts.

### **A Western Lens to Mindfulness Based Practices in Classroom Contexts**

Recent Empirical Studies Implementing Mindfulness Practices in the Classroom has incorporated an inner-awareness definition to mindfulness in the classroom to help connect students to their cognitive and emotional lived experiences (Broderick & Frank, 2014; Franco et al., 2010; Garretson, 2010; Hyde & LaPrad, 2015; Luiselli et al., 2017; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Orr, 2002). Some of the studies explain the goal of mindfulness is to help young adolescents respond better to outside stressors that come with the experiences of the adolescence stage of a person's life in an ever-evolving world (Broderick & Frank, 2014; Cannon, 2016; Franco et al., 2010; Garretson, 2010; Hyde & LaPrad, 2015; James et al., 2017; Meiklejohn et al., 2012; Orr, 2002). Broderick & Frank (2014) explained that "mindfulness offers emotional and regulatory

skills that adolescents need as they take greater responsibility for their behavior, their relationships, and their decisions about the ill-defined problems they confront" (pp. 33-34) when considering the fast paced and competitive world of school, as well as that of the complex worlds of their homes and communities.

In a study demonstrating how three mindfulness programs for teachers were effectively implemented in the classroom, Meiklejohn and colleagues (2012) found that for students "cultivating mindful awareness via mindfulness training is associated with reduced emotional distress, more positive states of mind, and improve quality of life" (p. 3). The three programs explored in this article were experientially based and built from the need to include more relational dimensions of mindfulness practice, such as listening more deeply and developing emotional awareness, as well as empathy and compassion in the classroom. Teacher's ability to be with students and improving the felt sense in the classroom was a central component for student's learning and development, and thus became a foundation in mindfulness training for teachers.

Brady (2008) conducted a study that aligned more with Thich Nhat Hanh's practice and definition of mindfulness as he was able to successfully implement mindfulness based practices with his students in a secondary school setting by following Buddha's teachings on the seven factors of enlightenment (joy, rest, concentration, curiosity, diligence, equanimity and mindfulness) by providing his students a variety of opportunities to be mindful on a daily basis within the curriculum during the regular school day via yoga, meditation, journaling on readings and math problems, as well as on their own emotions on an array of things. These different applications of mindfulness in the classroom setting allowed students to foster the ability to self-

regulate, as well as re-frame how they viewed themselves. Students gained understanding of emotions and responses to outside stimulus in such a way that led to a deeper understanding of their own behaviors and actions.

Furthermore, recent empirical studies have also explored the positive effects of mindfulness practices implemented with minority, ethnically diverse youth in urban school settings that include Latinx students in relation to reducing internalized and externalized behavioral problems, the use of expressive suppression, and depression or anxiety disorder (Bluth et al., 2016; Edwards et al., 2014; Fung et al., 2016; Sibinga et al., 2014). The findings in these studies pointed to increased self-compassion, social connectedness, increased calm, conflict avoidance, self-awareness, and self-regulating thinking and action that improved inner well-being and more positive educational outcomes. However, even though these empirical studies demonstrate how mindfulness has been implemented in school contexts with youth yielding promising results, they do not specifically address the more inherent needs of Latinx students in Urban settings. Hyde & LaPrad (2015) emphasized that “mindful pedagogies can open up the space where education can become authentic liberation, the process of humanizing, the praxis of learners empowered to transform their world” (p. 5). Incorporating authentic mindfulness practices in the classroom would mean understanding student’s inherent needs on an individual and cultural level, while also acting upon it through a decolonizing lens daily.

### **Indigenous Lenses to Mindfulness**

Many Indigenous populations around the world practice mindfulness by valuing a mind/body and place connection through the concept of storytelling that most westernized and capitalistic driven countries are unfamiliar with, or just simply refuse to acknowledge through



their own views of what they believe knowledge to be. Some of these Indigenous populations are the Māori in New Zealand through āta (Pohatu, 2000), the Potawatomi Native American nation through their origin story and teachings of Skywoman (Kimmerer, 2013) in the U.S., and the Mi'kmaq (Battiste, 2013) through their teachings of the learning spirit, interconnectivity of everything, notions of holism in every aspect of life, and connection to their ancestors in Canada. There are also other older mindfulness teachings that can be traced back to Indigenous people in Mesoamerica (McNeill et al., 2021) through belief systems passed down through stories that tell of the cosmologies, natural healing traditions, and emotional and spiritual well-being through holistic practices that focuses on a mind/body connection.

The Māori have a wealth of knowledge that derives from the concept of āta, a type of old narrative with words that create engaging relationships within the community to counter hegemony towards a more humane existence for the marginalized oppressed and exploited (Pohatu, 2000). The concept of āta is based on the pursuit of respectful relationships through messages of earlier generations used to reinterpret present activities (Ngata, 1940). Five elements developed by Pohatu (2000) were used as a cultural tool to guide understanding and respectfulness in relationships towards wellbeing. They are:

- 1- Relationships, negotiating boundaries, and creating and holding safe space.
- 2- How to behave when engaging in relationships with people, Kaupapa (Māori cultural values), and environments.
- 3- People's perceptions are intensified through āta according to quality space of time (wā) and place (wāhi), by demanding effort and energy of participants, and by

- conveying notions of respectfulness and reciprocity and conveying the requirements of reflection, the prerequisite to critical analysis, and of discipline.
- 4- The transformation process is an integral part of the relationship through āta.
  - 5- Finally, āta incorporates the fourth and fifth elements: those of planning and strategizing

Pohatu (2000) concluded that Āta offers a view of “the multi-layered nature of Maori thinking and language, signaling complexity yet simplicity, as long as there is a clarity and purity of intent and commitment” (p. 24) associated with our own narratives daily so that we may learn to live more mindfully in relationships, to critically reflect on our actions, and to liberate ourselves during moments of our day.

The Potawatomi Native American nation originally on the East coast of the U.S. and like the Māori, they have narrative stories imbedded within their culture and language to help guide future generations. The Potawatomi origin story explains that Skywoman fell from the sky and together with the animals created Turtle Island, the earth. She brought seeds with her from the Tree of Life in Skyworld and scattered them into the ground to grow grasses, flowers, trees, and medicines. Kimmerer (2013) explained that the teachings of the Potawatomi Native American nation can be reinterpreted to meet the needs of new generations through the origin story of Skywoman, considered the “Original Instructions, with ethical prescriptions for respectful hunting, family life, ceremonies that made sense for their world” (p. 7). The instructions remind us of our relationship with the land, hence, our surroundings to ensure a future for our children. The instructions are there to remind each generation that the earth isn’t simply real estate to be owned but part of “identity, the connection to our ancestors, the home of our nonhuman kinfolk,

our pharmacy, our library” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 17) as the animate source of everything that sustains human life. Kimmerer (2013) argued that our relationship with the land and each other has changed in modern times because relationships between systems and individuals in society went from reciprocity to producers and consumers, hence, we have come to view and learn about the world, our surroundings, and ourselves through a lens of ownership and no longer understand things with all four aspects of our being: mind, body, and spirit. Kimmerer (2013), being an enrolled member of the Potawatomi Nation highlighted that excluding Indigenous narrative teachings that serve as cautionary tales for life in all its aspects in school contexts, deprives future generations of important wisdom with reciprocity at its core, that can save future generations and the world from many hardships.

Like the Māori and the Potawatomi, the Mi’kmaq in Canada also have stories passed down in community in their language through generations that serve as guidance on how to live mindfully and respectfully in the world. Battiste (2013) explained that the Mi’kmaq view the world through a lens of interconnectivity in a continuous relationship with the environment to create awareness of how to live well. This awareness leads to respect for self and every living being in kinship with the spirit world that led to the creation of social forms and processes like “stories, symbolic and creative manifestations, technologies, ways of being and learning, traditions, and ceremonies” (Battiste, 2013, p. 121). Relationships are interconnected because everything is affected through the decisions we put out into the world, hence, “Indigenous science embodies a holistic view of the world in which all human, animal, and plant life are perceived as being connected, interdependent, and interdependent” (Battiste, 2013, p. 121) with

living spirits and energies. Battiste (2013) also highlighted and explained the learning spirit of individuals as connected to their ancestors:

we carry both a physical and spiritual energy that is both constant and changing. The constant comes from our spiritual energy that is connected to spirit guides that have traveled with us before birth, and the changing is the physical form that transforms constantly through life to death. (Battiste, 2013, p.18).

The Mi'kmaq consider the concept of the learning spirit as a focal idea due to a colonized history that led to an education that stripped them of their language and these spiritual ways of being. Battiste (2013) explained that the learning spirit “is the entity within each of us that guides our search for purpose and vision. Our gifts unfold in a learning environment that sustain and challenge us as learners,” (p. 18) however, this requires a deep spiritual source connection that is vital foundations of Aboriginal learning.

Indigenous people from Mesoamerica live their lives in mindfulness through their cosmivision of the world and healing practices they performed in communality within their cultures. For example, they consider humans to be at the center of the cosmos and are “very mindful of factors that contribute to a lack of equilibrium in human existence: social inequalities, sex, animistic changes, temperament and changes in health” (McNeill et al., 2021, p. 2). They heal and balance these equilibriums through balance and harmony of the soul and body. For example, they believe that the body is composed of three souls or animistic entity: the skull, the heart, and the liver and if you could keep these in balance, everything would be okay, with the heart being the most important because it is the place of equilibrium. Padilla & Salgado de Snyder (1988) explained that an extremely important concept in Mesoamerican culture was the concept of *in ixtli-in yollotl* because of its relevance to emotional well-being. *Ixtli* literally means

the facial features that makes each individual different, but it refers to the “ego” conceptually to refer to the nature of individuals, and hence, their identity. Mesoamericans still use medicinal plants to also treat ailments related to the heart such as depression. There are individuals still referred to as readers who have more knowledge and a connection to the supernatural world than the normal person (Hill Boone, 2007). In pre-modern times, these individuals were referred to as the sages, diviners, sorcerers, curers, midwives, and physicians in their societies. These ways of knowing and being are mindful by nature due to their interconnectedness to the physical and spiritual world in community through healing and balance seeking. In a recent talk at the American Research Association AERA Peace education SIG (2022), Angelica Hernandez spoke about the importance of indigenous cosmology’s and holistic ways of knowing and being during the business meeting. This is important to recognize because she is Nahua from Mesoamerica and provides an authentic voice to the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing and being through a holistic lens and how it can be applied in educational contexts through a mindfulness and social justice lens today.

### **Chicana Feminist Theory**

Chicana Feminist theory draws on concepts rooted in Indigenous knowledge dating back to the Aztec civilization and the border historical experiences of Chicanos’ ancient Indigenous ancestors among the Mexican and U.S. borders (Anzaldúa, 2012). When Hernán Cortés invaded Mexico, many Indigenous died to disease and colonization. Spanish, Indigenous, and *mestizo* (mixed) individuals settled in parts of the U.S. Southwest. In the 1800’s, Anglos illegally migrated to Texas, which was then part of Mexico and through war pushed the Texas border down 100 miles. This caused great turmoil for the 100, 000 Mexicans who were left in the U.S.

and lost everything. Many decades later after much loss and suffering, Chicanas/os decided to fight back through social justice movements. The women involved in these movements led to the creation of Chicana Feminist theory that came about the sexism Chicanas experienced within the Chicano Civil Rights movement between 1960 and 1970.

Although many self-identifying Chicanas dedicated themselves to their community in the fight for better working conditions, they often could not overcome “a discourse of nationalism that emphasized the value of family loyalty in the project of cultural survival” (Moya, 2001, p. 447). This was because achieving gender equality opposed the cultural and patriarchal ideals that emphasized family and loyalty. Some Chicana feminists tried to work within white women liberation movements during the 1970’s because they were often criticized as sellouts within their own communities, however, they did not have success in this endeavor because white women did not recognize the class and race biases within their own organizations. Chicana feminist theory adds a deeper layer to the definition of those who are oppressed and alienated today by bringing to light the struggles of third world individuals who fall under the labels of Chicana/o, Mexicana/o, Latina/o, and Hispanic from different parts of the world in which Spanish is the colonizing language. In her critique of six books on Chicana theory, Davalos (2008) explained that Chicana feminist theory is greatly influenced by Gloria Anzaldúa’s work in that it sets an argument for a third world feminism that includes “multiple subject positions,-- race, class, gender, and sexuality along with additional social factors such as immigration, language, religion, and nationality” (p. 152) towards a methodology that draws on Anzaldúa’s *Coatlicue* state in which the colonized survives within all the violence, trauma, and displacement through resistance. Chicana feminist writing fights for social justice through a holistic lens

rooted in the Indigenous concept of duality and embraces it as “necessary and complementary qualities, and by challenging dichotomies that offer opposition without reconciliation” (Bernal, 1998, p. 560) regarding the oppressed experiences of Chicana/o individuals and how those experiences inform resistance by claiming an indigenous identity.

### **Chicana Feminist Theorizing as Place Based**

Chicana feminism draws from the knowledge of multiple worlds through critical connections and cultural intuition, history, and lands, as well as by pointing out colonial blind discourses in education (Calderón, 2014). Through a Chicana feminist lens, individuals can make sense of their evolving identities as individuals influenced by their cultures, histories, and the loss of land experienced through relocation and having to adapt to new settings. Chicana feminism draws from Indigenous spiritual knowledge that address the emotional needs of individuals who have lost much, but still resist against systemic societal and cultural oppression. Keating (2012) explained that Chicana feminist writer, Gloria Anzaldúa employed a writing practice called *poet-shaman aesthetics* “a synergistic combination of artistry, healing, and transformation grounded in relational, indigenous worldviews” (p. 51) to inspire spiritual change within herself and those who read her work through the power of how “words, images, and things are intimately interwoven and intentional, ritualized performance of specific, carefully selected words *shifts* reality” (p.52). Anzaldúa employed *Poet-shaman aesthetics* as an Indigenous way of imparting knowledge that is like that of how Native Americans enact storytelling that views words as containing power that control emotions, as well as word verbs and metaphors to name the world. This is still a common way of imparting knowledge and learning in Indigenous communities around the world today. Calderón (2014) argued that embodying land is an integral

part of Chicana feminism because “territorializing situates settler land policies and ethics targeting indigenous peoples and other groups, as the forefront of understanding how most people come to be in a given place, which continues at the expense of indigenous people” (p. 91). Understanding concepts of settler colonialism is an important component of Chicana feminist theory to fight local, as well as global systems of oppression that still ignores the needs of Indigenous individuals all over the world today.

### **Gloria Anzaldúa’s Influence within Chicana Feminism**

Chicana feminism embraces the work of Gloria Anzaldúa in her analysis of borderlands in which she makes connections to the historical experiences of indigenous people following the portrayal of Malintzin, the biblical Eve-like traitor woman. Anzaldúa (2000) also referred to her as *Malinali, la Chingada*, a person who lived in-between the borders of literal and metaphorical worlds. Anzaldúa (2012) theorized the experiences of Chicanas through her *mestiza* consciousness, “an Aztec word meaning torn between ways, *la mestiza* is a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another” (p. 100). Anzaldúa (2000) explained the *mestizaje* that occurred between Mexican and American Indians and Spaniards created “a chock culture, a border culture, a third country, a closed country” (p. 33) with each recurring generation caught in-between white rationality and that of their own indigenous thinking.

Anzaldúa (2012) emphasized that the new “mestiza copes by developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity” (p. 101) by residing at the borderlands and taking on a resistant stance towards both sides. Elenes (1997) explained that “the mestiza identity is located in the interstices of Mexican/Chicano culture, patriarchy, homophobia, and Anglo-American



domination” (p. 365) living within and outside all these intersections while surviving and resisting daily existence. Gloria Anzaldúa and other Chicana feminist writers felt there was a need to look for answers within, rather than from an outside world that does not make Latinx individuals feel whole (Bernal, 1998, 2001), hence “the term *mestiza* has come to mean a new Chicana consciousness that straddles cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities—that is, living with ambivalence while balancing opposing powers” (Bernal, 2001, p. 626). This evolved definition of the *mestiza* is at the core of Chicana feminism.

With this idea of the *mestiza* consciousness in mind, Anzaldúa (2012) wrote extensively about living in the borderlands, a metaphor for all types of crossings that exists in multiple linguistic and cultural contexts and emphasized that it is a basic concept that “involves the ability to hold multiple social perspectives while simultaneously maintaining a center that revolves around fighting against concrete material forms of oppression” (p. 7) in a third space between cultures and social systems while living in-between them. Anzaldúa explained that living within this third space leads to achieving *facultad* (faculty), meaning that you can see between multiple social worlds and make sense of them through self-reflexivity. Furthermore, Anzaldúa (2015) also explained that in one’s reflective path, one may also fall within the seven stages of *conocimiento* (coming to knowing), a metaphorical journey through which you seek knowledge to change your perceptions of reality and in essence your life conditions while fighting against oppressive truths and ideals. This can only be achieved by facing our most painful experiences, and then sharing them with others to achieve empowerment, “together, the seven stages open the senses and enlarge the breadth and depth of consciousness, causing internal shifts and external changes” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p 123) that others will see.

The seven stages to the path to *conocimiento* are as follow (Anzaldúa, 2015):

1. The *Arrebato*/deep rupture- An intense life shattering experience, like moving to a different country, that causes a rupture or fragmentation of the heart, mind, and soul.
2. *Nepantla*- The deep rupture in stage one results in a state of being torn between ways. Anzaldúa describes this as a feeling of being torn between identities.
3. The *Coatlicue* state- The stage of despair spurs a process of self-reflection and inward search for new meaning.
4. *The Call / el compromiso*- If we are brave enough to spend time in a space of self-loathing and hopelessness in *Coatlicue*, we emerge with a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world.
5. Putting Coyolxauhqui back together- Putting the pieces back together. The self is reinvented from the destruction. We can interpret and reinterpret how we see ourselves.
6. The blow-up...a clash of realities- In this stage, Anzaldúa reminds us that *la nepantlera* can teach mindfulness to the thoughts of others around us to help soothe our frustrating thoughts and feelings. We are inspired to grow and change.
7. Shifting realities- The final move through and away from pain. Healing the wounds. One gives forgiveness were needed. The individual comes out stronger after having gone through all the stages.

### **Nepantlera Pedagogy in Classroom Settings**

In this section I explore how the concept of *nepantla*, the second stage of Anzaldúa's (2015) seven stages of *conocimiento* has been implemented through *nepantlera* pedagogy in the classroom setting through recent qualitative empirical studies. Recent studies demonstrated how *nepantlera* pedagogy can work towards cultivating social justice and human dignity in the classroom context through a mindfulness component that is inclusive of student's experiences across spaces between race, class, sexuality, and other identity markers throughout the learning process (Aguilar-Valdez et al., 2013; Apple, 2004; Baldonado-Ruiz, 2021; Gutierrez, 2012; Lizárraga & Gutiérrez, 2018; Ngo & Chandara, 2021; Reza-López et al., 2014;). Apple (2004) explained that *nepantlera* pedagogy focuses on helping students think critically and reflect about themselves and the world without ignoring how education, economics, politics, culture, and power affects their experiences. López & Reyes (2014) explained that

*nepantlera* pedagogy keeps us constantly asking our students to challenge their taken-for-granted assumptions about schooling and how class, race, gender, language, sexual orientation, spirituality, and age have been used for stratifying students and teachers. (p. 117)

Teachers continually challenge their students by having them reflect on moral and ethical issues they have accepted without question regarding how they think and function in the world. This leads students towards praxis in their teaching and social practices, focusing on human dignity as they reach *conocimiento* by experiencing the *nepantla* stage.

Aguilar-Valdez and colleagues (2013) employed *nepantlera* pedagogy in their approach to science education by recognizing “that students are a sum of many (dynamic) parts, and that all these parts must be made visible and respected “(p. 828). In their study, they draw from

Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "consciousness of the borderlands" teaching science to Latinx students illustrating how students cross many cultural borders as they go through tensions and transformation. They saw students as dynamic and continually taped students' diverse and embodied knowledge and experiences to get them into the state of *nepantla*. The students were fully aware that their teachers had a holistic view of them and felt honored during times when they were going through their own *nepantla* experiences when they would find their lives and identities fragmented. The students felt safe when putting the fragmented pieces back together as students continually worked "toward a shared conocimiento that involves students, family, the community, society, and their teacher" (p. 846). The students in the study demonstrated a sense of learning through their native languages, shared cultures, and community when exposed to the dominant notion of what science teaching is through an initial culture shock, *arrebato*.

Lizárraga & Gutiérrez (2018) explored how youth's repertoires can help them with their developing identities as they learn. They argued that "highlighting and privileging youth's everyday language and literacy practices such that they are brought into relation with dominant texts and discourses" (p. 39) is important because of the sustainability that comes with learning that is based on history and community practices within the in-between spaces of student's experiences. They explained that creating a rich and safe third space in which adults and students work side by side through a variety of tools and instruments contributed to the sharing of knowledge in which the students were novice and experts at the same time. They found that in this process, students were able to enter the *nepantla* stage "from concerted self-reflection and naming of marginalization; a creation of a self-authored testimonio that embraces the fluidity of

identity” (p. 42) to construct and negotiate new knowledge about themselves and what they were learning through their own ingenuities and inventiveness.

Ngo & Chandara (2021) explored how Xang, an educator within a community-based youth theater program employed *nepantlera* pedagogy to help students author their new evolving identities through performing writing. Staff helped students explore issues between the first and second generations in the Hmong community through discussions, drawing, writing, and skits to explore the similarities and differences between them. This created conflict as students re-imagined their culture and identity, especially when exploring the topic of marrying someone within their same clan. The youth reflected how they reciprocated vulnerability in *nepantlera* pedagogy by being vulnerable when Xang shared his own experiences of racism, sexism, and clashes that are considered taboo within their own cultures. The sharing and performing of stories helped the students see that marrying someone with their same last name was okay. Ngo & Chandra (2021) concluded that

Xang’s artistry, critical view, and pedagogy transgressed ethnic/cultural borders, unsettled youth’s ideological conceptions, and facilitated a reconstruction of ethnic identities. As a *nepantlera*, Xang assisted youth in rebordering realities and negotiating multiple cultures. (p. 103)

This was achieved by having students tackle binaries, *nos/otras* perspectives, taboos, and by enacting vulnerability to awaken students in their exploration and production of Hmong culture and identity.

Gutiérrez (2012) drew from Anzaldúa’s concept of *conocimiento* and *nepantla* to argue that mathematics education needs to be reconceptualized through a more holistic lens so that a more diverse student population can learn math effectively. The author embraced *nepantla* in a

mathematics teacher education program and focuses on data collected from teacher candidates who were undergraduate math majors. The teacher candidates had to visit a school in a neighborhood community in Chicago and be involved in several ways to complete certification. Through their engaged experience teaching, creating lessons, and engaging with high school teachers on site, the teacher candidates “moved from a position of limited awareness of broader issues of equity (beginning with their own positions and looking at students from a deficit perspective) to ones that were inclusive of others’ views” (Gutierrez, 2012, p. 45). This demonstrated how the teacher candidates reflected on their *conocimiento* and how they experienced *nepantla* regarding how their thinking shifted. The teacher candidates also acknowledged tensions they faced when imparting lessons with the students and made changes in mathematical activities that better reflected student’s lives and experiences. These findings demonstrate that emphasizing *conocimiento/nepantla* in mathematics education is of high importance because it draws from a humanistic and critical view of mathematics, as well as the identity issues that students face. *Conocimiento* also led the teacher candidates to experience *nepantla* as they came to understand their own personal views and uses of mathematics and how they are to teach those views to others.

Baldonado-Ruiz (2021) investigated the writing practices, choices, and reflections of Latinx high school students during an instructional unit on writing testimonio. The findings demonstrated how the students interacted with the unit as they navigated the in-between spaces of their lives, between cultures at school and at home, and through their usage of language how “the participants found agency as writers, pride in their writing, and ownership of the narratives of their communities” (p. i). Through their testimonios, students defined what home means to

them, celebrated their culture and ancestors, and took ownership of their own stories. Students' thinking changed and shifted over the course of the unit as they created new *conocimiento* in the *nepantlera* stage,

The data revealed that writing about topics that matter to them and writing from personal experience helped give students more confidence in their writing. All six of the case study participants expressed their pride and confidence in writing differently, each felt like this writing unit and experience was the best writing experience they had during their secondary ELA educational experience. (p. 92)

The students in this study were able to make their silenced and oppressed voices heard through the testimonio writing. The stories told by the students not only allow them to express themselves as individuals, but also on the larger community they are part of by taking risks in their writing and through protest.

### **Examples of Case Studies with Latinx Students in Classroom Settings**

In this section, I write about case studies that have been conducted in classroom settings through culturally relevant pedagogy (Buck, 2016; Choi, 2013; Jaffee, 2016; Leonard, Napp, & Adeleke, 2009) and *nepantlera* pedagogy (Abril-Gonzalez, 2020; DeNicolo & González, 2015) with Latinx students. Teaching mathematics through culturally relevant pedagogy is a tough challenge when considering teacher's beliefs about the nature of mathematics and high stakes testing. Leonard and colleagues (2009) were able to change their beliefs and identities, and how to implement CRP with their ELL students changed as they learned from their practice in their mathematics classroom, "after the study, they believed it was better to teach fewer concepts in more depth," (p. 19) meaning that quality became more evidently important than quantity, because students were learning better as the teachers moved away from a one size fits all mentality. The teachers in this study realized that students learned mathematics and developed a

critical conscious, even though the culturally relevant pilot did not resonate with the ELL student's culture, "this case study confirms that culturally relevant theory and practice must be conjoined in the teaching-learning practice" (Leonard et al., 2009, p. 19). The authors highlighted that CRP is very complex to perform and carry out within the mathematics curriculum, because teachers must be aware of students marginalized experiences and cultures. This requires teachers to step out of their own comfort zones to learn about the students, keep their interest, and have them rigorously engaged through scaffolding practices that tap on their background knowledges in relation to their lives and math, as well as their discourse practices.

CRP has also been implemented in the social studies classroom. Choi (2013) conducted a case study in which she explored how Mr. Moon (pseudonym), a social studies teacher went against a curriculum that narrowly defined citizenship without considering globalization and cultural diversity to be more representative of his student's stories and cultures. Mr. Moon's curriculum "seemed to have great emotional appeal to his students, while enhancing their academic achievement" (Choi, 2013, p. 15) as students also had the freedom to safely express their own views and critique the official knowledge. Mr. Moon used the method of questioning to change his student's frustrations into meaningful educational opportunities by building a respectful community within his classroom. Furthermore, Mr. Moon incorporated student centered learning, inter-disciplinary pedagogies, and differentiated instruction through different types of visual texts and technology. The findings of the study demonstrated how Mr. Moon was able to transform his own interpretation of the curriculum and pedagogical practices by capitalizing on his student's linguistic and cultural diversity, emphasizing global/multicultural perspectives, creating collaborative learning communities, setting high expectations, encouraging



critical thinking skills, and effective literacy strategies. Choi (2013) concluded that “student academic engagement and achievements were evidenced and observed by their active participation in learning, critical thinking/analysis skills development, and cooperative knowledge construction, instead of test scores” (p. 17) demonstrated how Mr. Moon was able to effectively teach through CRP.

In her multi-site, collective case study design, Jaffee (2016) examined how teachers in 4 urban newcomer high schools conceptualized and implemented a social studies curriculum for Latinx newcomer youth through Culturally and Linguistically Relevant Citizenship Education (CLRCE) with overlapping and intersecting elements of CRP. The findings indicated that the teachers at the schools were able to include “pedagogy of community; pedagogy of success; pedagogy of making cross-cultural connections; pedagogy of building a language of social studies; and pedagogy of community-based, participatory citizenship” (p. 161) within their social studies curriculum. Teachers implemented a pedagogy of community through caring and by enacting advocacy. Teachers demonstrated caring by taking an interest in issues affecting their student’s lives and then by talking about how to engage in those issues through advocacy at the school and community. Teachers enacted pedagogy of success by meeting kids where they are, rather than focus on what they can’t do. They tapped student’s bilingual proficiencies and cultures to promote active citizenship experiences. They fostered experience of success for the students so that students could feel successful in the classroom. They promoted and helped students make cross-cultural connections with historical content, one another, and larger issues in their communities.

Jaffee (2016) explained that “the cross-cultural practices implemented sought to make connections within and among students’ cultural groups by engaging in communication, building relationships, and creating a community of learners” (p. 166) so that they could gain a sense of empowerment by feeling proud of who they are. Furthermore, the teachers also focused on developing student’s academic language “by using bilingual practices; acquiring English using multiple texts, content, and vocabulary; identifying linguistic demands of classroom tasks; and developing literacy skills” (p. 169) in all classroom activities. Lastly, the teachers implemented pedagogy of community-based, participatory citizenship for their Latinx newcomer students because they believed that “students could “thrive, feel confident, and grow together in the classroom by channeling civic and political motivations through understanding and grappling with local and community-based issues” (p. 171). The findings indicated that the teachers in this study had a fluid understanding of how to enact their social studies curriculum with their newcomer Latinx students. They challenged notions of subtractive schooling and worked towards promoting their student’s civic participation by truly seeing their students and building curriculum including their culture, language, and citizenship experiences as assets.

CRP has also been implemented in the classroom to promote peace. Peace Works is a research-based peace education curriculum developed by faculty at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in partnership with staff and students at the campus’s *Center for Peacemaking*. The Peace Works model brings philanthropically funded outside peace teachers from the local community into schools to teach a structured curriculum during regular school hours. Buck (2016) conducted a yearlong case study at one urban K-8 private Catholic school in a community that faced structural violence in a large Midwestern city. The findings are centered

around two Latinx teachers who grew up within the same community as their students with no previous training on peace education. The teachers talked about building connection with their students by offering them a space to speak and feel listened, making the curriculum more relevant to the student's lives by focusing on issues within the school and community, and by exposing them to a larger world of possibilities. The teachers also drew from student's funds of knowledge and promoted activism by helping "students understand "the various ways that violence persists, the ways that inequality prevails, and the ways that racism functions in society; further, and perhaps more importantly, they said they wanted to show students that they have the capacity to resist these malignant features of the world" (Buck, 2016, p. 43). The findings demonstrated that their students really respected the two teachers and were able to connect to their curriculum in critical and reflective ways. Students were especially motivated through skits that prompted dialogue, and sometimes, even disagreements that led to deep conversations when students shared what they would have done if they were in a specific situation by participating and acting them out. Buck (2016) concluded that "the peace teachers demonstrated pronounced cultural competence, owing chiefly to their own cultural background and their intimate understanding of their students' particular socioeconomic, historical and sociocultural situation" (p. 48). This led to students gaining a sense of agency and to think of themselves as agents of change in the world.

In a case study examining the use of *testimonio* in *nepantla* as a narrative of marginalization, in a third-grade language arts classroom, DeNicolo & González (2015) explored the process of sharing and witnessing *testimonio* as an embodied literacy experience through a Chicana/Latina feminist framework. The researchers of this study both identified as Latinas and

wrote about their own subjectivities, lenses, and histories that shaped and reshaped the ways they looked at the testimonio unit, language acquisition, and learning of the students. DeNicolo & González (2015) explained that they had to focus on *nepantla* to analyze students' *testimonios*. They explained that "the process of *testimoniando* as an embodied literacy practice allowed for *nepantla* to become visible" (p. 116) as students continually read and discussed in class. The findings revealed that students identified four ways in which they articulated their lives in *nepantla*. They were through the identification of shared struggle; feeling ideological tensions; challenging dominant ideologies; and redefining notions of bilingualism. Students shared their own struggles after hearing about the experiences of Francisco in *La Mariposa*, a children's book they read and the testimonials of graduate students.

The experiences of the students through *testimoniando* revealed that they experienced sadness and discomfort. This "opened possibilities for normalizing the feelings through shared experiences and recognizing that they were not alone" (DeNicolo & González, 2015, p. 117). Students also realized that there was tension between wanting to become bilingual and having to negotiate deficit ideologies of their native language. Some of the student's *testimonios* "attest to the marginalization of Latina/o students and their linguistic abilities" (DeNicolo & González, 2015, p. 118). Students also challenged deficit perspectives of emergent Bilingual Latina/o students, "the students in this study asserted how important and central bilingualism was for their education, community, and families" (DeNicolo & González, 2015, p. 118). Lastly, the students actively reclaimed their bilingualism residing in *nepantla* by making sense of their pain and began to redefine bilingualism as a strength and as a resource to navigate the world. The findings of this study revealed that the students were able to reside and flourish in *nepantla* to make sense

of their experience of becoming bilingual through *testimoniando*, which allowed them to voice their opinions and find commonalities across their lives. This was accomplished through a focus on language and culture within language arts, which “created a space for students to identify their own knowledge production, abilities, and agency” (DeNicolo & González, 2015, p 120) to reframe their lives towards transformation.

Lastly, in a case study that focused on one Mexican teen’s *testimonios* of healing, empowerment, and transformation, Abril-Gonzalez (2020) explored how one of her previous students expressed her *napantlera* border artist empathy to reimagine her life. The findings indicated that the student’s spoken, written, and artistic testimonio expressions led to the following themes: “empathy to understand healing, healing generates empowerment, and dreams and imagination for transformation” (Abril-Gonzalez, 2020, p. 274). The student demonstrated empathy to understand healing by reflecting on a poem she wrote when she was in fourth grade about wanting to help children with cancer due to a family members’ friend who died because of cancer, “the poem affords a metaphorical aperture, as she accompanies her past self and others, embodying their feelings in the present. She understands her ‘life in a broader way’ maintained inside her body and psyche, a dream of alleviating others’ pain” (Gonzales, 2020, p. 275). The student also mentioned how this experience still motivated her to want to help others by becoming a teacher or a doctor.

The theme of healing to generate empowerment was evident in the third out of the seven *practicas* the teacher had with her student. For example, the student expressed how she was able to heal through the help of her community by keeping little papers with quotes and cards her friends gave her over the years to read every time she felt depressed and in need of motivation,

especially when referring to more recent experiences being Mexican in a predominantly white school. She expressed how she listened to music and drew to prevent herself from stressing out too much and through a “self- acompañamiento, she gently and symbolically walked alongside herself, locating hurt in the past. In an affirming empathetic self-dialogue, she motivated herself to move on—*muévete*. Valeria embodied the pain; it is forgiven but not forgotten” (p. 276). The student accompanied and coached herself through an embodied pain through awareness in *nepantla* “using her unconscious resources and multiple perspectives to shift. Her self-encouragement and self-empowerment were born out of imagination and metaphors. This stimulated healing and motivation, manifesting creativity to counteract future negativity” (Gonzales, 2020, p. 276). The student ultimately “transformed herself, across memories, imagination, and reality, through various modes of expression” (p. 276). This was relevant in the fourth *practica* when the student shared her fourth-grade poem and was given the chance to rewrite her poem, in which she highlighted how her Mexican community was negatively perceived and realized in *nepantla* that she was distressed and poetically confronted the fighting, conflicts, and inequities she felt at school through her reimagined poem. Furthermore, she also reimagined herself by drawing herself with smaller icons around her face of potential future careers. The findings of this study revealed that teachers can accompany and help their students within and outside the classroom wall to repair past hurts and initiate social change to shift education for Latinx students.

### **Examples of Critical Ethnographies in School Settings**

In this section I provide four examples of critical ethnographies in school settings. I cite empirical studies that explored how students made sense of race, space, and place (Rodriguez,

2020) and how they experience racism, racialization, and racial inequality (Rodriguez, 2021). I also cite an exemplary study that used the method of *testimonios* (Cervantes-Soon, 2012), followed by a study on Mexican-origin families' ways of knowing and how their ways of knowing were manifested and related to US schooling (Kasun, 2014). Together, the findings of these studies point to a social justice lens teachers should take on in the education of Latinx students towards addressing the holistic needs of students within the contexts in which they live. Education can serve as a mediator towards improving the lives of students who often feel excluded within a curriculum that is not inclusive of their experiences, cultures, or ways of knowing and being.

In a critical ethnographic study, Rodriguez (2020) explored how 19 Latinx youth made sense of race, space, and place at predominantly white, well-resourced suburban high school outside of Chicago, Illinois. Rodriguez (2020) did this through spatial theory and borderland theory in relation to how students built a sense of belonging for themselves by enacting agency. The participant in the study reflected on the ways that interaction took place in the school between white and Latinx students, as well as the spaces the adults controlled through a spatial and social lens. For example, "each participant noted the racial divisions at SHS, such as in the hallways and the cafeteria" (Rodriguez, 2020, p. 20) and reflected on how the Latinx students didn't feel like they could participate in certain school wide events or socialize with their white peers at any given moment. In fact, the Latinx students reflected that the white students could dictate the social norms of engagement at the school and would even monopolize space at the school like the commons and how Latinx students were not able to be where they were. The student's also spoke about how they are viewed by the white students, "being labeled as lazy or

as a troublemaker carried immense implications for how the larger white student population viewed Latinx students at large,” (p. 23) hence, some of the Latinx students avoided certain spaces at the school where other Latinx students sat so they wouldn't be perceived as such.

Furthermore, the students also reflected on spaces controlled by the adults, like the College Resource Center (CRC), which was usually busy with white students in upper-level classes, involved with extracurricular activities, and on a college track. The Latinx spoke about how they felt uncomfortable in these spaces, “the idea of feeling inferior and showing weakness came through. Attending a school that was predominantly white, and that had the prestige of being known for its academics, played an important role in leading Latinx youth to not seek help” (p. 24), however, some of the Latinx students talked about where they felt comfortable at the school. One student spoke about the Latinos Unidos (LU) club, in which students talked about themselves and important issues that were important to them in a safe space. Students also felt comfortable in the Future Saxons program, created at the school to mentor middle school students of color in their transition to high school, however, they came across the issue of how much to talk to the students about the realities of being Latinx in a mostly white school, “The group wrestled with essential questions at the heart of why Latinx students did not feel comfortable in white-centered spaces, why they did not occupy certain spaces, or try out for certain extracurricular activities” (p. 26) so that their experiences would be less painful. The Latinx students demonstrated that they had awareness of how the school functioned, about themselves, and what they were doing to address them. Rodriguez (2020) concluded that “to construct communities of belonging, it is important to center race as it allows educators and researchers an opportunity to understand how the cultural and linguistic worlds of Latinx youth



can enrich a school community” (p. 27). We can learn much about space through the lens of race and white-centered spaces were deemed more valuable than Latinx centered spaces in this study, and sadly, the Latinx students were always perceived as visitors within their own school.

In a three-year multi-site critical ethnography in a state in the New Latino South, Rodriguez (2021) conducted a study that provided insight into the everyday experiences of racism, racialization, and racial inequality that undocumented students faced in two Title I public high schools. Rodriguez (2021) expanded on undocumented students’ encounters with teachers through organizational practices that “are informed by prejudices, and racial attitudes expressed at the micro level through interactions and via the exclusion and unequal treatment of people of color” (p. 571) through meso (school-level) and micro (interactional—level) data analysis. Educators talked about the lack of services for students and employees at the district level mentioned the unmet needs of vulnerable immigrant students through civil rights violations related to equitable education. One teacher reflected on district and school level neglect that have led to a lack of resources and emphasized assimilation practices rather than a focus on accepting difference. At the micro level, the teachers lacked awareness, empathy, and training on how to teach and advocate for undocumented immigrant students. Another teacher who positioned himself as an advocate for his student’s, displayed ignorance on the challenges that undocumented families face in the U.S., especially under the restrictive policies of South Carolina. The same teacher also mentioned that immigrant student should learn English quick to assimilate better and so that they don’t have so many problems. This teacher validated notions of colorblindness in relation to how the students should be integrated in the schools. Overall, Rodriguez (2021) concluded that “given the anti- immigrant state context, and overall limited

teacher awareness of policies impacting undocumented students, youth face discrimination, racialization, and surveillance in the Denizen community” (p. 587). He argued that the assimilative and negative racialized biases of those in power have led undocumented Latinx immigrant students in southern states to struggle in school districts that promote a deficit perspective and not enough access to language learning services and programs.

Cervantes-Soon (2012) conducted a yearlong critical ethnographic study in which she presented the *testimonios* of two high school girls coming of age in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico attending a school with a critical pedagogy orientation. In her study, Cervantes-Soon (2012) used the method of *testimonio* to elevate the voice of often marginalized female students. This led students to feel a sense of empowerment, as well as feeling seen and humanized in a world that so often ignores them due to their race, gender, and position in society. Although the *testimonios* of the girls in this study did not take place during regular school hours, it did take place in an after-school classroom space with the idea to help students foster the “ability to self-author their identities and become critical and active initiators and agents of change” (p. 378). The method of *testimonios* explored in this article reflected a kind of democratizing, liberating, and mindful pedagogy that can help heal the wounds of Latinx students who are oftentimes unable to express the pain that accompanies their ways of knowing. The *testimonios* of these students lead to an organic way of learning that placed the students as constructors of knowledge and capable of giving advice to each other through *consejos* that involved spirituality in the search of healing. Cervantes-Soon (2012) concluded, “testimonios as a pedagogical practice fosters humanizing knowledge stemming from students’ and teachers’ own narratives or survival and resistance and promotes theory that offers both language of critique and a language of hope through the

reclamation, transformation, and emancipation of their own lives and communities” (p. 387).

This study revealed that the practice of *testimonio* is a mindful practice that promotes reflectivity and healing in the telling of one’s story by reclaiming strength through one’s evolving identity.

The stories students shared became *Testimonios* or testimonies in the context of power dimensions and systemic oppression inspired by Moraga’s & Anzaldúa’s (1981) theory in the flesh meaning “where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (p. 19). The stories Latinx students are capable of sharing can become *testimonios* that reveal the social injustices they have experienced throughout the course of their life via oratory and written means. In essence, “testimonio challenges objectivity situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance” (Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363). Brown (2003) explained that “central to testimonial is the fact the life story presented is not simply a personal matter; rather, it is the story of an individual who is also part of a community” (p. 420); hence, the act of producing *testimonio* can bring real change to often oppressed and marginalized Latinx students through praxis and action. Cervantes-Soon (2012) was able to “shed light on the life experiences and identity formation of young women coming of age in the south side of the border and reveal the knowledge and wisdom they have gained in their struggle for freedom, dignity, and life” (p. 373). The teacher created a safe space in which students enacted their *testimonios* to reveal their border experiences, which can reveal a lot of pain, but at the same time allow students to gain control through self-authorship as intellectual fighters. Lastly, *Testimonios* can also be prescribed as *consejos* or advice giving in which students offer advice to each other based on their experiences. Cervantes-Soon (2012) explained

that “*consejos* illustrate the pedagogical nature of testimonios, particularly when one considers their close relationship to the cultural situated meaning of *educación*” (p. 386) through which students revealed their needs to teachers who were willing to go against a curriculum that viewed Latinx students in the classroom through a deficit lens.

Lastly, Kasun (2014) conducted a study based on three years of ethnographic research illustrating the transnational, working-class, Mexican-origin families’ ways of knowing and how their ways of knowing were manifested and related to US schooling. The findings indicated that the families exhibited *nepantlera* knowing because they “possessed ways of knowing which allowed them to skillfully navigate the challenges of their lives in many worlds, spanning national borders” (Kasun, 2014, p. 323) as they continually lived in-between the U.S. and Mexico. For example, one of the participants was a high school student shapeshifting across various contexts, including that of the schools, going against all odds across racial divides regarding what was expected of him as a student, while teachers demonstrated a lack of interest for his transnational knowledge and experiences, as well as ignoring families in their aspirations for their kids. He felt that his teachers back in the U.S. would not understand his engagement with his extended family and community in Mexico where he participated in rituals. This was him enacting *nepantlera* knowing because “bridge builders move among conflicting worlds, taking personal risk which include experiencing isolation, being misunderstood and even enduring self-division” (p. 321). Another high school student in the study talked about how he wanted to take honors chemistry and his teacher told him that he couldn’t handle it, however, he did not listen to his teachers and still did it successfully. Kasun (2014) explained that because of his success in helping himself and becoming the only Latino in his advanced classes, and by

helping others become great students as well, “educators could work towards helping to build bridges towards families’ aspirations for their kids,” (p. 322) instead of becoming another barrier for their Latinx students. Kasun (2014) concluded that transnational families and students enacted *nepantlera* ways of knowing and being by skillfully navigating the challenges of their lives in many worlds, “they took risks towards building bridge, managing different cultural and generational expectations at once” (p. 323) to not only survive, but also thrive and push back on narratives placed upon them.

### **Examples of Critical Ethnographic Case Studies in School Settings**

In this section I provide two examples of critical ethnographic case studies that inform my study. Wu (2014) conducted a critical ethnographic case study in one public K-8 charter school to explore the school’s vision of creating an equitable education for linguistically, culturally, and racially diverse students, as well as how students create and negotiate their identities in the context of the school in response to their experiences in school and the larger society. The findings indicated that the teaching practices of the teachers at the school had “a positive influence on minority students’ identity development and academic performance” (Wu, 2014, p. 50) through culturally diverse teaching for learning, embracing linguistic diversity, attending to students’ racialized experiences, and by focusing on social justice issues.

Anthony-Stevens (2013) conducted a critical ethnographic case study that explored an Indigenous-serving charter school in Arizona and their culturally responsive practice with their students by building a school community by connecting mainstream standardized knowledge and local Indigenous knowledges. The findings of this study led to an understanding of how Indigenous families navigated limited school options and policy labels that failed to address the

realities of schooling in Indigenous communities. This study shed light on more equitable and culturally sustaining educational practices highlighting the powerful impacts of human relationships on student learning and surpasses accountability measures that deny students access to imagined futures. Together, these two studies provide important insight on how culturally responsive practices in school settings offer a more equitable learning experience for students who tend to be alienated within the mainstream school curriculum. In the next chapter, I explain how my exploration of the literature informs the methodology for this study.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In this section, I reviewed key literature that informed my study. I provided a macro historical and a micro empirical perspective on issues and barriers still affecting Latinx students. I offered historical information on the hegemonic effects of capitalism and colonization; settler colonialism and the removal of indigenous people; and barriers Latinx students still face within educational contexts today. Then, I cited literature to explain Chicana feminist theory and Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the *mestiza* consciousness, borderlands, and her delineated seven stages of *conocimiento*. This is followed by the history, definitions, and practices of mindfulness and how it has been practiced in classrooms in the U.S. through a Western lens. I also cited literature that informs on Indigenous lenses to mindfulness, followed by an explanation of the theoretical perspective that informs this study, Chicana Feminist theory. Furthermore, I defined *nepantlera* pedagogy and how it has been implemented through empirical qualitative research in classroom settings. This was followed by case studies that explored how Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and *nepantlera* pedagogy have been implemented with Latinx students. Lastly, I cited various critical ethnographies and critical ethnographic case studies that have been conducted in

the classroom with a focus on *nepantlera* pedagogy, the method of *testimonio* (testimonies).

Together, the literature reviewed for this study offered a road map that led to the formation of this study.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This critical ethnographic case study was informed by the historical, theoretical, and empirical content I cite in the literature review, bringing attention to the implications of European ideology on minority “othered” individuals with a focus on the educational experiences of Latinx students in a U.S. classroom. I used the methodological approach of case study because this study is bounded by time and a classroom space in which I collected multiple qualitative data sources for triangulation (Yin, 2018). Merriam (2009) reiterated the bounded nature of case studies when she explained “The case then, could be a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community or a specific policy” (p. 40). This study explored the case of 13 Latinx students in a sheltered ESOL classroom with the help of their teacher during the span of seven weeks. I also applied critical ethnographic methods in this study in reference to how I collected the data (observations, interviews, document collections) to examine how students connected to their lived experiences to make sense of what they were learning all while looking at the research in terms of power, positionality, and colonial agency (Hudson, 2016). Assaf (2014) and de los Ríos (2017) illustrated how a study can be generally described as ethnographic without necessarily being a full ethnography. I wanted to keep the critical ethnographic component as part of this study, because it allowed me to do analysis through a much wider and explorative perspective in connection to student’s reflective processes.

This study is informed by Chicana feminist theory (Bernal, 1998; Bernal et al., 2012; Davalos, 2008; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Keating, 2006) with an emphasis on Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2012) seven stages of *conocimiento* (coming to knowing). My theoretical



perspective informed the content of the unit regarding text selection and what kinds of activities the teacher and I, as the participant researcher, did with the students. I specifically explored how students responded to a culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and mindfulness-based breathing meditations (Hanh, 2017; Yellow Bird, 2014) through a unit that was carried out through bell works, vocabulary instruction, writing reflections, and activities. I took field notes of changes in student thinking, interactions, and ways of speaking and relating to their environment. My intention was to describe how students responded to a culturally responsive text in unison with daily mindfulness breathing meditation. Learning and what was created in the classroom was gathered in the form of student's writing in their notebooks, discussions, and performance in class. This also included their creative work and an end of unit short essay project. I worked with students by employing the concept of caring reflected in Valenzuela's (1999) work and the concept of *testimonios* (testimonies) in my teaching to help Latinx students demand to be heard through oratory means rooted in indigenous storytelling that de-emphasizes a Eurocentric education that is usually found in books. This is a case study carried out through qualitative critical ethnographic methods with the intention of collecting thick description (Geertz, 1973) through detailed field notes to explore a mindfulness driven approach to education in an ESL context and what that could mean for Latinx students in relation to their present well-being, their education, and future aspirations and life goals. Following, I restate my research question:

How do Latinx students respond to a unit informed by Chicana feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and mindful breathing mediation in a sheltered ESOL classroom through the exploration of *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan?

## Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research has its roots in anthropology in early studies that sought to understand groups of isolated people who did not seem to do things or evolve the same way as people living in modern industrial societies did through western and capitalist ideologies that promoted material growth on a global scale (Cooley, 2013). The history of qualitative methods has come about the isolated rebellion of early anthropologists researching colonialism and its connections to race through the study of people who have been historically oppressed by European presence and ideology (Lyman & Vidich, 1994). More recently, because of its focus on the daily experiences of individuals within their localized worlds against the backdrop of a larger global society that promotes western ideology and capitalism, qualitative research in the U.S. and around the world today has become “the most robust and inclusive means of attempting to understand the complexities of education and processes of schooling” (Cooley, 2013, p. 248). When considering the detailed intricacies of teaching and learning, and that school sites have become how individuals are trained to enter participation with society, I conducted a critical inquiry that looked deeply into student’s experiences within an ESOL context that has historically implemented a hegemonic and alienating curriculum. Critical qualitative inquiry “is a call for interpretive, critical, performative qualitative research that matters in the lives of those who daily experience social injustice” (Denzin, 2017, p. 8). With this definition in mind, I specifically attempted to describe Latinx student’s daily behaviors, experiences, and processes of meaning making to understand their educational and more personal struggles in relation to social justice issues preventing them from experiencing transformative learning in ESL contexts in the U.S. I did this with a focus on promoting students well-being and happiness through the

acknowledgement of student's experiences and traumas to promote inner empowerment that resists injustices through the practice of liberating democracy and mindfulness in the classroom.

### **Theoretical Framings**

I drew from Chicana Feminist theory to analyze white coloniality and supremacy through Indigenous worldviews that critiques capitalism and its negative effects on the educational experiences of Latinx students. Chicana Feminist theory allows for a localized, place-based exploration of student's experiences with race, class, gender, and sexuality with the additional factors of immigration, language, religion, and nationality (Davalos, 2008). I specifically drew from Gloria Anzaldúa's work within Chicana feminism to frame Latinx student's experiences living in multiple worlds while also surviving violence, trauma, and displacement through resistance living within a colonizer/colonized state. Student's border identities were explored through their interaction with the anchor text chosen for this study in the process of understanding their literal or metaphorical mixed identities. Furthermore, this study drew from Moraga & Anzaldúa's (1981) theory in the flesh as students shared their stories through a semi structured interview that sometimes led to student's *testimonios* (testimonies) revealing social injustices they have experienced at school and within their own families, their own realizations about life through moments of *conocimiento* (consciousness) in connection to book and the mindfulness practice, and their own keen awareness about their educational experiences. Gloria Anzaldúa's overarching theory of *conocimiento* allowed the students to adopt a double consciousness, intertwined with the act of *testimonio* to express their reflective critical thinking.

## **Critical Ethnography**

Critical ethnography is the doing of critical theory (Madison, 2010). Critical thinking is political activism that can lead to intellectual freedom that challenges given truths and facts in society (Thomas, 1993). In this study, I conducted a critical ethnography case study that draws from a Chicana feminist theoretical framework that critiques aspects of capitalism to address structural accounts of social class, ideology, patriarchy, gender inequities, and racism (Anderson, 1989) in human conduct in relation to how oppressed individuals think and express their thoughts within colonized and oppressive educational settings. These recognitions lead to the possibility of transcending existing social conditions. Critique, which requires reflection, implies that by thinking about and acting upon the world we can challenge both our subjective interpretations and objective conditions. Freedom, as a component of critique, connects the emancipatory, normative, and evaluative features of critical thought (Thomas, 1993). Hegemonic and colonizing historical truths about people in society and western ideology has trickled its way down into teaching practices across educational settings in the U.S. and abroad.

Critical ethnography is an approach that critiques “hegemony, oppression, asymmetrical power relations, and the normalization of these structures in society, in order to potentially foster social change in direct or indirect ways” (Palmer & Caldas, 2015, p. 1). Hegemony in educational contexts is in effect through a colonized curriculum that alienates and oppresses Latinx students. Power struggles between students and teachers within classroom contexts affects students’ potential for learning and closely emulates the relationship between authoritative figures and submissive workers within capitalist work environments. Individuals in a capitalist workforce environment produce things they will most likely never attain, so too in education,

students become alienated from the very education that is supposed to produce the very means by which a quality of life is advanced. Hence, critical ethnography is a way to examine the struggles Latinx students face in classroom settings because it can expand “horizons for choice and widens our experiential capacity to see, hear, and feel” (Thomas, 1993, p. 2) the world through a different perspective that could lead to a quality of life that moves away from western capitalist ideals, truths, and notions of success.

It is important to emphasize that above all, critical ethnography is about taking ethical responsibility towards changing unjust social conditions for individuals who are suffering due to power and control in localized settings (Madison, 2012). Latinx students in urban ESOL settings continue to suffer due to generational trauma that is oftentimes unacknowledged and unaddressed. The power adults hold in school settings in most urban communities is one that allows an oppressive educational system to take hold of students’ lives through a concept of caring that does not fit well with students' cultural identities (Valenzuela, 1999). Due to this reality, critical ethnography emphasizes “the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained and out of reach” (Madison, 2012, p. 6). Therefore, for this study, the analysis of student’s reflective processes in response to culturally relevant literature and mindfulness-based practices that promote deep thinking, reflectivity, and creativity within an ESL classroom context, aligns with a critical ethnography approach that leads to a kind of freedom in which thinking is allowed and promoted. This allows Latinx students the opportunity to reflect critically outside of the current normalized curriculum that dominates ESOL education to push against a kind of social domination that promotes homogeneity and inequality (Schroyer, 1975) that keeps individuals entrapped in a reality that kills the learning spirit (Battiste, 2013) of

individuals. Throughout this study, mindful reflections expressed in writing, discussions, and creative work are supported through the practice of short breathing meditations through brief moments of silence, stillness, and mindful writing. Promoting reflectivity is the most important component of this study towards having students gain inner confidence and empowerment.

### **Emancipation through *Conocimiento* within Critical Ethnography**

In this section I write about and define the term emancipation within critical ethnography. Thomas (1993) explained that “critical ethnography is simultaneously hermeneutic and emancipatory” (p. 4) because emancipation is when the individual realizes alternative realities or possibilities and is able to move away from repression that constrains thought and action within unnecessary social domination (Schroyer, 1975). Language use in ESL classroom contexts is a major component of Latinx student’s experiences in the process of acquiring the English language, hence students create realities of themselves in which they feel “less than” those who speak the English language. Karl Marx (1846/1974, p. 37) explained that who we are should be questioned, as these thoughts only represent an illusory world that does not represent the totality of an individual’s essence. In this study, student’s created realities of themselves are addressed through reflective criticality and culturally appropriate explorations that draw from Chicana feminism through Anzaldúa’s concept of *conocimiento* as “a holistic epistemology that incorporates self-reflection, imagination, intuition, sensory experiences, rational thought, outward-directed action, and social justice concerns” (Keating, 2006, p. 10) to resist oppression in its multiple forms. Students will perform meditative practices in the classroom and at home by incorporating these components of *conocimiento* as they try to make sense of feelings and experiences to heal, as well as learn to feel empowered and motivated to bring about change

within themselves in the classroom context. Anzaldúa (2015) explained, “by redeeming your most painful experiences, you transform them into something valuable, *algo para “compartir”* or share with others so they too, may be empowered” (p. 117). In essence, empowerment can only occur when students share their stories with each other to feel affirmed. Meditating and reflecting on each other’s stories can help students face emotions and feelings they might have been trying to avoid because of a western culture that continually teaches these things have no place in educational contexts. Anzaldúa (2000) explained that *conocimiento* can be reached from spiritual inquiry through creative acts such as “writing, art-making, dancing, healing, teaching, meditation, and spiritual activism—both mental and somatic (the body, too, is a form as well as site of creativity)” (p. 119). These creative acts in a classroom context leads to intuitive knowledge that can be differentiated from knowledge that has been prescribed through culture or ideologies in each context.

## **Methods**

### **Study Participants**

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement reports that the state of Georgia had a 61% EL enrollment growth of Latinx students from the year 2011 to 2019 (GBPI) with Spanish being the most common language at home (78%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In Georgia alone, there exists a large Latinx student population. In 2016, approximately 10 percent of the population were foreign-born individuals with 24 percent of children in low-income families with one or more foreign born parents residing mostly in Gwinnett, Dekalb, Cobb, Fulton, Hall, and Clayton County (Sugarman & Geray, 2018). These statistics are important when considering that the Georgia Department of Education (GDE) promoted an English-only

approach to language learning for Latinx students and resisted the implementation of bilingual programs pushed forth by local efforts (Hammann, 2003). In this study, I use the term Latinx because it is gender neutral. The “X” is meant to represent gender inclusivity and it is the term used in recent studies to push against patriarchal ways of writing about the Latinx population in the U.S. Latinx students may be defined as (1) Individuals not born in the U.S. or whose native language is another other than English, (2) who is native American or Alaskan native from an area where a language other than English is spoken, or (3) who immigrated from another country in which English is not the dominant language and has difficulty in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language (NCLB, Public Law No. 107-110).

I worked with developing and bridging Latinx students from different parts of Mexico or born to parents from Mexico. Developing and bridging are terms used to refer to a student's performance in the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners (ACCESS) test performance. This means that the students I worked with were mostly mid to high performing. I conducted this study in an urban middle school located in a large metropolitan area. The school has a minority enrollment of 65%, with 29.8% being African American students and 25.9% being Latinx students receiving free or reduced lunch. The class I did my study in consisted of 14 students and 13 choose to participate in the study. I focused on the findings of nine students due to their consistent participation in the study. Of the 13 students, 2 were students with Individualized Education Program's (IEP's) who needed extra assistance with differentiated work created just for them, and 2 were continually absent due to having COVID and family related factors. I chose to exclude the finding of these four students due to the limited amount of work they were able to complete and submit by the end of the study. This was



consciously done so that there was cohesiveness between the work that was submitted. The students consisted of 4 boys and 5 girls between the ages of 12 and 13 in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. 2 students self-identified as Hispanic American, 1 student self-identified as Hispanic European, and 6 self-identified as Hispanics. Additionally, 1 student identified English as the primary language spoken at home, 1 student identified the English and Spanish language spoken at home equally, and 7 students identified Spanish as the primary language spoken at home. Lastly, all the students mentioned they had thought-out future life aspirations. Figure 1 is a description of the students who participated in this study.

**Table 1**

*Description of Students*

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Ethnicity Self-Identified</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Primary Language Spoken at Home</b>	<b>Future Aspiration</b>
Amelia	12	Hispanic-European	Female	Spanish	Wants to attend NYU to become a scientist (Interested in genetic engineering)
Gabriel	13	Hispanic-American	Male	Spanish	Build cars and drive cars
Ava	13	Hispanic	Female	Spanish	Investigator
Victoria	13	Hispanic-American	Female	English	Mindfulness doctor or teacher
Aurora	13	Hispanic	Female	Spanish	Professional painter or Illustrator
Anna	13	Hispanic	Female	Spanish and English equally	Professional painter
Daniel	13	Hispanic	Male	Spanish	Do something in the field of technology (inventor)
Leo	13	Hispanic	Male	Spanish	Do something in the field of technology (robotics)

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Luis	13	Hispanic	Male	Spanish	Medical assistant
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### **Sociopolitical Context of the School During COVID-19**

This study took place towards the end of the first wave of COVID-19 in the year 2021 between the months of October and November and it ended the week leading to Thanksgiving break. Unlike my previous experience working with students in a pre-pandemic world, this time felt very different because students had just come back from a year of doing their schooling at home through a computer screen. On my first visit to the school, I noticed students wearing face masks and trying to communicate with their friends as they made their way to their classes. I knew I was about to embark on a journey during a very hard and stressful school when Ms. Miller mentioned that a lot of the students were coming back from a year of having experienced traumatic deaths in their families and close friendship circles due to COVID-19. This became relevant in students bell work responses (questions students would answer before the bell rang and during the first ten minutes of class) as we progressed in the unit. It is also important to highlight that it was a very stressful time for the teachers as well. Ms. Miller and some of her colleagues expressed the pressures they were facing within the ESOL department in relation to their students having to meet the ACCESS test requirements during a very rough school year, because students were still dealing with the stress and emotional hold of being back. Most of the students where lively and excited to be physically back in school, however, it was noticeable that students were re-learning how to be in physical school spaces, with the added burden of trying to make sense of everything that happened to them and the world during their time at home.

### **Selection criteria**

The criteria for this study consisted of selecting an ESOL teacher that works with Latinx students in an urban setting in the state of GA and that would be open to me conducting an implementation with her/his assistance during regular school hours in their classroom. The grade of the students had to be middle or high school level due to the limited research that is out there on Latinx student's educational experiences in grades 6-12. An important aspect of my selection criteria was that I had to be working with a teacher who deeply cares about his/her students well-being and educational success. The teacher who agreed to be part of this study was referred to me by my trusted advisor, whose knowledge, commitment, and experience as a previous ESL teacher working with Latinx students is reflected in her critical published works. I met with the referred teacher via zoom video calls before we met in person.

After two thorough hour-long conversations, the teacher demonstrated great interest in my unit implementation idea and expressed great desire to help her Latinx students through culturally relevant pedagogy and a mindfulness breathing meditation component. However, it was hard for me to begin the study due to COVID restrictions that were impeding me from going into the classroom physically. Furthermore, the teacher did not think the unit implementation would have worked virtually due to the nature of the study. My next step was to reach out to other teachers via email to have a plan B. One teacher reached back saying that she/he could work with me in the Spring of 2022, however, after much inquiry, I was able to conduct my study physically with the first teacher I was originally in communication with. I received permission to conduct my study physically in the classroom with the promise that I would adhere to all COVID mandates. The teacher immediately agreed because she was very invested in

growing as an educator through a more creative and culturally relevant way of approaching the ESL curriculum within her Latinx students.

### **Background Information of Teacher**

Ms. Miller came into this study as the daughter of a Scottish mom and English dad. As a person growing up between varying lifestyles, she understands what it feels like to find comfort exploring the commonalities and differences within cultures. Through teaching English as an additional language, her goal is to help her students learn as much as they can about diverse perspectives and cultures. By incorporating culturally relevant novel studies and daily mindfulness into her teaching, she was able to assist students in connecting to their heritage and beginning their own journeys of self-discovery.

She completed her master's degree in teaching English to speakers of other languages at Georgia State University in 2020. Prior to completing her master's degree, she taught for one year in Thailand and one year in Spain, immersing herself in cultures different from her own. For the past three years, she has been teaching English to speakers of other languages in an urban school district in Georgia. The multilingual learner community she worked with was made up of 98% Hispanic students and the other 2%, a combination from different ethnicities. She is deeply invested in working with Hispanic students and furthering their English, cultural, and socioeconomic development.

Ms. Miller was interested in participating in this study for two reasons, the first being her own interests and experiences with mindfulness and her curiosity in implementing mindfulness practices in the classroom. The second reason was because of the book, *Esperanza Rising*, and the ways in which the author, Pamela Muñoz Ryan navigates between Spanish and English in her

writing. She encouraged her students to exist and enact themselves through their native language and English in the classroom to build their bilingualism and biliteracy. Using *Esperanza Rising* in the classroom was an important way to introduce her students to and mindfulness. But more importantly, the book introduced them to the feeling of belonging within the classroom despite navigating multiple cultures.

### **Data Collection**

I used a qualitative critical ethnographic case study approach within one ESL classroom context during the time span of seven weeks. The methods used are non-participant and participant observation, field notes from my observations, and an audio recorded semi-structured interviews. I took several photographs of student produced work as artifacts to complement the explanation of the findings.

### ***Participant Observation and Field Notes***

In this section, I explain the process of how this study took form. First, I met with the Ms. Miller, the first teacher I was in contact with over the summer of 2021 to make sure she was informed of my intentions and research question. I shared an overview of the six-week unit plan I created to make sure it met the needs of the Latinx student population in her classroom. I wrote initial descriptive field notes on my laptop computer after my first initial meeting to keep record of what was talked about, as well as activities, mini-lessons, and whole lesson ideas we shared. Then I sent the teacher an initial first draft of the unit implementation and she returned it to me with notes and comments on the side of a shared google document. I took the teacher's suggestions into account and revised the first draft of the unit and sent her a second draft. We both decided that we had a good foundation to work from after going over the second draft. I was

able to begin the study in the teacher's classroom space on September 27 of 2021. I meant to go into her classroom closer to the beginning of the school year, but the person in charge of IRB review and approval within the county had not been hired yet. I also had to wait a couple of months to be approved due to COVID restrictions.

I was able to spend the initial two weeks of the study listening, observing, and interacting with students in the classroom while compiling rigorous field notes (Emerson et al., 2001; Jackson, 1990) to acquire foundational knowledge towards answering my research question. I accomplished this by paying explicit attention to what was going on in the classroom and by increasing my awareness of things people usually block out in their daily interactions through a wide-angle lens (Spradley, 2016). I continued to take extensive field notes to make sense of how students responded to the bell work questions, teaching from myself and the teacher, group and paired activities that took place, and the daily mindfulness breathing meditation practice. I noted students' body language and actions, as well as students' interactions with myself, their teacher, and each other. However, I was an active participant throughout the implementation (Johnson et al., 2006) with the aim of getting to know the students as I gathered a detailed and richer understanding of student's reflective and learning experiences. I also created weekly lesson plans and shared them with Ms. Miller on a google drive, by creating and finding appropriate handouts for students to write in, and by co-teaching with Ms. Miller, as well as teaching by myself. Furthermore, I co-taught with Ms. Miller during teaching moments when students were doing their bell work reflection, having classroom discussions, and while working on activities. Lastly, I made the conscious decision to just observe and take notes during specific bell work discussions so that I could capture what students were saying.

### ***Interview: Oral History, Personal Narrative, and Topical***

True to critical ethnographic methods, I conducted interviews that “reflects deeper truths than the need for verifiable facts and information” (Madison, 2012, p. 28) knowing that individuals rely on their subjectivities, memories, yearnings, and polemics revealed through discourse that is infused by communal knowledge, histories, and personal political views. I conducted one semi-formal interview at the end of the unit implementation that involved the following three methods: oral family histories or significant events, personal narratives, and topical explorative questions that helped students form their own *testimonios* (testimonies) about their own learning processes and overall experiences throughout the unit implementation. Combining these three methods helped me acquire a full spectrum of student's experiences in the classroom to address the research question that guides this study. The interview consisted of the following four parts:

1-Opinion Based and Family History Questions

2-Student’s Overall Experience with the Unit

3-Mindfulness Component

4-Looking Forward

I began the interview by asking students opinion-based questions about their experience with the book in relation to previous learning experiences, as well as things that stood out to them about the story, the characters, and bell work (questions students would answer before the bell rang and during the first ten minutes of class) reflections they could remember. Then I asked them questions based on the themes of family and community in “Esperanza Rising” so that they could reflect on their own lived experiences and that of their families. Next, I asked students

about their own reflective processes. I probed with questions that allowed students to think about examples regarding how the unit helped them reflect more deeply. This was followed by broader questions related to the student's overall experience with the unit. I asked students questions about things they mentioned they enjoyed learning about and how it made them feel.

Furthermore, I also asked specific questions about the topics that were covered throughout the unit to understand student's reflective processes more deeply. Lastly, I asked students opinion-based questions related to the mindfulness component of the unit and I concluded the interview by asking students what they would like to see other teachers do in the classroom, as well as about their hopes and dreams for the future.

### ***Photographs***

I took photographs of student's work and other classroom activities glued inside their notebooks in relation to *Esperanza Rising* to document as artifacts and include in the explanation of the findings. These photographs helped me think about the work students did in relation to the things they physically did and said in the classroom, as well as during their interviews.

### ***Student Produced Artifacts***

I collected student's unit notebooks, physical copies of activities completed in class, and end of unit poster project. These artifacts serve as evidence of work created throughout the unit to reinforce and triangulate the findings in relation to what was said, produced, and observed.

### ***Instruments***

The instruments for this study were my physical observations and individual face-to-face interviews with each of the nine students selected for this study. I created a detailed interview protocol after spending six weeks within the classroom to better understand the context and



culture of the students through field observation note-taking. I used my extensive field notes to provide me with the foundational knowledge I needed to craft and edit my questions. I specifically employed interview questions that would elicit *testimonio* (testimonial) responses from the students by asking questions that would tap the student's evolving sense of self, ethnic/cultural identities, and inner reflective thinking in relation to the book and their overall experience with the unit. The method of *testimonio* added to the knowledge making process as students revealed their lived experiences, localized knowledge, and familial histories.

The method of *testimonios* (testimonies) is “an approach that incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one’s life experiences as a means to bring about change through consciousness-raising” (Delgado Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364). The Latinx students in this study benefited from this method by experiencing a re-centering within themselves through culturally appropriate meditative and reflective practices that incorporated their lived experiences against the backdrop of their socialized worlds. Students began to feel empowered as social agents of change within themselves in their conversation with me during their interviews. This emancipatory method is inspired by Moraga and Anzaldúa’s (1981) notion of theory in the flesh, “an organic theory that emerges in urgency and that privileges the real experiences, voices, and knowledge of subaltern women of color demanding attention and action” (p. 374). Applying this concept of *Testimonio* helped the students speak through oratory means rooted in indigenous storytelling that promoted authentic educational experiences.

### **Data Analysis**

Following, I describe my data managing process, strategies, coding, and analysis. I began by doing rigorous field note observation (Emerson et al., 2001; Jackson 1990) by taking

extensive field notes through thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) during each classroom visit. I did this by typing my notes into Microsoft word on my laptop computer, which I later used to check for codes through two reiterative cycles of coding in an Excel spreadsheet to come up with emerging categories and themes to inform the typing of the findings and data analysis.

Interviews with students were audio recorded and transcribed and transferred to a word document on my laptop computer. Student's names were changed to pseudonyms before the coding process began.

I kept interview audio recordings, their transcripts, and field notes dated, labeled, and in password protected file. During the first cycle of coding, I conducted initial line-by-line coding for the interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2016; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I continually journaled my own reflections in the form of comments on the left side of the interview transcripts and field notes document to help me come up with initial codes in the first cycle (Charmaz, 2014) during initial exploration. Then, I assigned meaning to extended passages within student's written responses through analytic interpretations guided by my research question. Figure 1 is an example of how I did line-by-line coding for a section of one of the interviews during the first cycle of coding.

Figure 1

## Line by Line Coding

<p>04:58 Mrs. E: Can you tell me about some of your bell work reflections this semester? Just your opinion on the bell work? What did you think about them, since you had questions, you had to answer?</p>		
<p>05:16 Amelia: The mindfulness thing. I think it's really important. I think it's, it's nice</p> <p>Mrs. E: And also, the many questions you did for Bell work?</p> <p>Amelia: Like, I think you asked us like, our opinion on Esperanza's life before and after Papa died. So, and I wrote that, I think that's like, the fact that she was mean to the little girl in the train. Like, in the middle of, the in between, the life between when Papa died and the life after papa died, that was just kind of a stereotype like the rich girl being mean to the poor girl and those things.</p>	<p>Line 1: The student enjoyed the breathing guided meditations because it's the first thing she think about.</p> <p>Line 2: She thinks mindfulness is important.</p> <p>Line3: She thinks it felt nice.</p>	<p>Zurisaray Espinosa 6 minutes ago This comment aligns with how Amelia (pseudonym) later reflects on mindfulness throughout the remainder of the interview.</p> <p>Amelia also mentioned that the mindfulness component was nice during one of the classroom discussions. Her written reflections on mindfulness are deep and carefully crafted.</p>
<p>06:11 Mrs. E: So that was a stereotype?</p> <p>06:14 Amelia: Yeah, cuz, I have, like, my family isn't all wealthy, but I have some uncles and cousins that are wealthy. Really, really wealthy. And they're not, like mean or something. They, like value things a bit more, which is weird.</p> <p>Mrs. E: Oh, wow.</p> <p>Amelia: Weirder than the things you see in movies or books.</p> <p>06:38</p>	<p>Line 1: Recalling something she wrote that stood out to her.</p> <p>Line2: She referred to an example from the book for an activity she did in class.</p> <p>Line 3: The student thinks that Esperanza was spoiled and did not know how to act when she became poor. She was critiquing the book here, because she thinks it's a cliché to write about a rich girl being mean to a poor girl.</p>	<p>Zurisaray Espinosa January 18, 2022 Topics of stereotype-Prejudice.</p> <p>Zurisaray Espinosa Amelia is critically reflecting about the topics that were covered in the book and making her own connections.</p>
	<p>Line 1: Tapping her knowledge by connecting to what she knows about her family's status.</p> <p>Line 2: Remembering just how wealthy they are and emphasizing it.</p> <p>Line 3: Remembering how they act and how they are not spoiled like how Esperanza acts in the beginning.</p> <p>Line 4: Reflecting on how some rich people are the exception because they also value things in life.</p>	<p>Zurisaray Espinosa Middle class-value things more vs. lower class conflict</p> <p>Zurisaray Espinosa Amelia thinks it's weird that rich people can also value things, but this comment aligns with things she mentions later one about her life aspirations and how she wants to study more to do better. Amelia has life goals and aspires to do good things by achieving a better economic standing for herself and her family.</p>

This initial line by line coding led to the following specific codes for the interviews:

- 1- Hard work

- 2- Family deaths (COVID related)
- 3- Living in community with family
- 4- Initial immigrant experiences
- 5- Internal battles
- 6- Time (not enough time to do things)
- 7- Emotions
- 8- Definitions of mindfulness
- 9- Reflecting on learning
- 10- Lessons learned through metaphors and symbols (related to the story)
- 11- Reflections on important topics
- 12- Future aspirations

Next, I did concept coding (Saldaña, 2016) for the second cycle of coding for the interviews, field notes, and student's written responses to "transcend the local and particular of a study to more abstract or generalizable contexts" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 120). This process led to the creation of an Excel spreadsheet to keep with the organization of concepts and ideas that stood out that led to categories and themes as they emerge in the interpretation of the data for each interview. These concepts and ideas aligned with the codes that emerged from initial coding for the interviews. The following figure demonstrates an example of how I did concept coding in the second cycle of coding in which I outlined concepts and ideas that stood out across interviews.

## **Figure 2**

## Coding Process for Amelia

I color coded concepts and ideas that stood out and created the following six categories for each of the nine interviews:

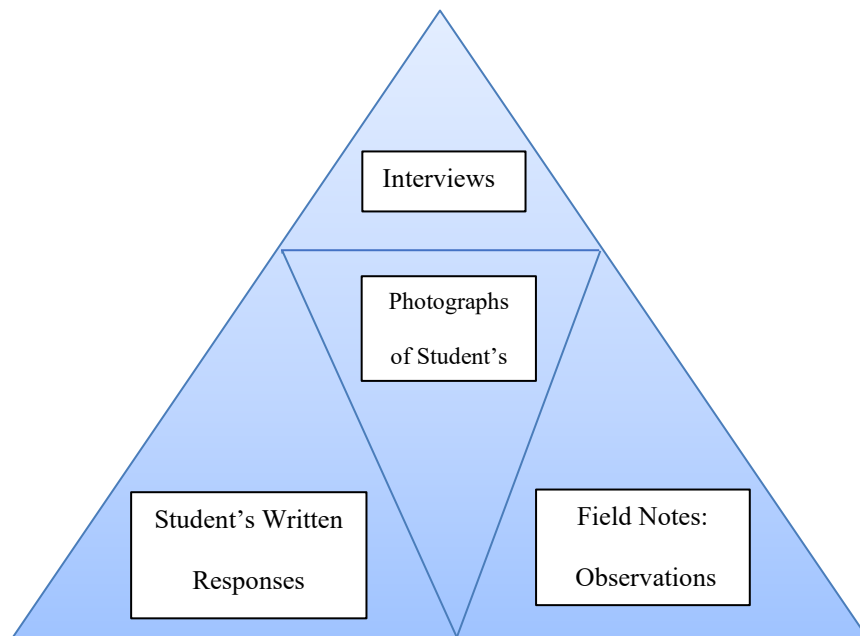
Student	1st round of coding: Concepts/ideas that stood out	2nd round of coding categories:	Findings statement:
Amelia	Hard work-Life aspirations.	Text to self connections to analyse or reflect	Students make connection to events in the text or characters to reflect, analyze, and create meaning through their lived experiences.
	Family death.		
	Meaning of life.	Text to breathing meditation connections	Student reflected about the mindfulness they believed was portrayed in the book and where able to relate it to the breathing meditation taking place in class.
	Stereotype-prejudice.		
	Middle class values vs. her own stereotypes.	Student's reflection on her learning process	Student reflected on their learning by reflectin on how they think they learn best by saying what helps them and compare what they did in this unit to other things they did in other classes or learning environments.
	New to the U.S. 2 years		
	Experienced prejudice at school	Student's reflection on mindfulness and the breathing meditation	Student talked about her own definitions of mindfulness and how the short breathing meditation practice made her feel, as well as the changes it created for them inside and outside of the classroom environment.
	Previous learning boring VS. this one-fun-active learning.		
	Hard work.	Student's reflection and critical analysis of the text	Student reflected on previous readings. Student reflected on characters and their situations. Student reflected on the larger theme of the book. Student reflected on the symbols and important vocabulary for the book.
	Symbols-Phoenix-re-born-everyone changes in life over time. "Don't be afraid to start over."		
	Social justice-can be good or bad	Student's hopes and dreams for the future	Student talks about their hopes and dreams for the present or future.
	Personal level-fight for what is right for you and others.		
	Thinks more about her emotions.		
	Mindfulness-the earth's heartbeat made her reflect about herself internally:		
	Free herself, treat yourself right, doing things better, friends with myself.		
	On how she thinks she learns: Prefers active, discussion and hands-on learning vs. taking notes and memorizing things.		
	Opinion-based learning, what amazed her, book that get's her.		
	Makes connection to how these tools of reflection can help her in science.		
	Thinks the other students also enjoyed the unit but don't know how to show it.		
	Feels good about having a hispanic teacher in the classroom, felt like she could relate to my experiences.		
Bigges takeaway from the unit? Don't be afraid to start over.			
Concept of mindfulness was new to her-how she started to notice more.			
Mindfulness to her felt like someone was doing something really kind for her.			
Tries to appreciate things more now. Doesn't think about death as much			
Makes connection between death and technology, that maybe death won't be a thing in the future.			
U.S. is a hatefull and good place. A little bit of both.			
Loana is bored of ESOL. Does good in ESOL but language art's is harder for her.			
Her father said she has sobervia.			
Future aspiration to go to college at NYU			
Loves sciene.			
Not enough time to read books she likes. Has to study too much.			

- 1- Text to self-connections to analyze or reflect
- 2- Text to breathing meditation connections
- 3- Student's reflection on their learning process
- 4- Student's reflection on mindfulness and the breathing meditation
- 5- Student's reflection and critical analysis of the text
- 6- Student's hopes and dreams for the future

These six categories led to the finding's statements in figure 2. I color coded these to easily refer to concepts and ideas that stood out across the six categories to come up with salient themes and

sub-themes. I came up with themes and sub-themes for the interviews by referring to the color-coded concepts and ideas that stood out and by continually cross-checking them with the analytic memos, reflections, and initial codes for the interviews in the interpretation of the data (Gibson & Hartma, 2013) to have an organized review and reflection of the process.

I also wrote an analytic memo for each collection of comparable concept codes towards more evocative meanings and interpretations across all data sources and kept participants' emotions in mind, as well as that of myself to maintain ethnographic accounts richer by not privileging emotion over reason (Kozinets, 2010) through my analytic memos and reflections. Saldaña (2016) explained that “the primary goal during second cycle coding is to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual, and/or theoretical organization from your array of first cycle codes” (p. 234). Lastly, I conducted a methods triangulation (Guion et al., 2011) between all the data sources through a close examination of the parts and by comparing them by looking for similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Figure 4 is an example of the methods I triangulated to verify the validity and quality of this study.

**Figure 3***Triangulation of Methods*

The findings from the data sets within the four methods reflected in the pyramid reflected themes that aligned with each other. What students said in their interviews was supported by their written responses, field observations, and photographs of their work.

### **Epistemological Theoretical Guide**

I analyzed the findings through a Chicana Feminist Epistemological framework as I refined codes through the concepts of *nepantla* (in-between-ness) and *conocimiento* (ways of knowing) reflected in students' testimonial moments during their interviews, classroom discussion, as well as in their reflective writing. Calderón et al. (2012) discussed that "Chicana feminist epistemologies provide Chicana educators the ability to deconstruct the teacher/student

binary common in all levels of schooling and move toward decolonizing pedagogical models” (p. 519). For this study, I focused on student’s voice and made myself vulnerable as the researcher by sharing my own life experiences towards creating knowledge with the students, versus throwing knowledge at them and expecting them to simply memorize information for a test. A Chicana Feminist Epistemological framework is anti-oppressive social justice work, “a critique of dominant research paradigms but, more importantly, that such work, being both spiritual and intellectual, also requires deep introspection and a vision of something different” (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 514). With this idea in mind, I not only drew on my ways of knowing and *nepantlera lens* of looking at the world through my own lived experiences living in-between worlds as a feminist Cuban woman, but rather strictly focused on the lived experiences of the students through their own lenses as border crossers themselves residing in and out of *nepantla* in Anzaldúa’s (2015) 7 stages of *conocimiento*. I analyzed students’ reflections and moments of *testimonios* by connecting both, the spiritual and intellectual in the sense that the students in this study acquired academic knowledge that will help them in their schooling and gained deep spiritual life knowledge that align with indigenous ways of seeing and being in the world through a more holistic lens. For example, through *nepantla*, students were able to push through their own binary thinking by reflecting on the topics of social class, prejudice, patriarchy, and social justice in their process of understanding the experiences of the characters in the book in relation to their own lived experiences.

Students went above and beyond in their connections residing in *nepantla* when reflecting about every aspect of the unit implementation. The analysis of student’s reflections led to the following themes and sub-themes falling within the six color coded categories:



1. Matured appreciation for life and family.
2. Overcoming hard lived experiences.
3. Acceptance of starting over as part of life.
4. Reflecting and gaining consciousness through life hurdles.
5. Hard work equals success.
6. Countering notions of truth through an evolved knowledge of social justice, prejudice, patriarchy, and social class.
7. Awareness through a broader perspective in connection to the book.
8. Students reflected on their positive learning experience with the unit.
  - Overall reflections on unit.
  - Activity students found most helpful.
9. Students reflected positively on the breathing meditation.
  - Students felt happy and more relaxed.
  - Connecting to emotions through the breathing meditation.
10. Students' unique definitions of mindfulness.
  - Students practice mindfulness through art.
  - Students practice mindfulness through hobbies they enjoy.

These themes and sub-themes were a result of students' reflective processes in their exposure to *nepantlera* pedagogy as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy. The daily mindful breathing meditation aided this process in that it was inclusive of student's ways of learning and relating to themselves and their surroundings as something that needed to be re-affirmed in a pandemic world. This study also demonstrated how students continually paid attention to "the manner in which colonial ontologies are inscribed onto contemporary bodies." (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 524) in relation to their educational experiences. This was seen in students' reflections about their own learning experience throughout the course of this unit and the differences they noticed in relation to previous learning experiences. Students also continually looked inward as I and the teacher posed questions that promoted reflection "to disrupt heteronormativity, classism, and racism" (Calderón et al., 2012, p. 524) by making connections to a text in ways they hadn't done before through the topics covered as vocabulary. Furthermore, students in this study demonstrated a great capacity for deep reflective thinking within themselves about themselves in

the context of their personal lives and the school to heal and learn. This aligned with how Anzaldúa's (2015) work is one that invites individuals to recognize alternate way of knowing and engage in a kind of spiritual and social justice work within their bodies and spirits in relation to who they are and evolve as human beings. Some of the students in this study demonstrated that they resided in some of the seven stages of *conocimiento* and they were able to put themselves back together in the 5<sup>th</sup> stage, in the putting of *Coyolxauhqui* together to reinterpret how they saw themselves moving forward.

The above themes and sub-themes revealed themselves by looking at students' reflections through Anzaldúa's (2015) seven stages of *conocimiento*. For example, students acquired a deeper appreciation for life and family residing in the 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of *conocimiento*, *nepantla* as they made sense of a world in which much death has happened due to a pandemic that has affected us all by sharing creating knowledge with their peers, "through this teaching/learning approach, we become more aware and move into consciousness in relation to the material, social, cultural, and spiritual forces that frame our own coming to self-knowledge" (Mendez-Negrete, 2013, p. 228). The students made connection to themselves, their cultures, and how their lives changed materially because of the pandemic in relation to the death of Esperanza's father in the book. Next, some students achieved praxis and then spiritual activism in the seventh stage by deciding to overcome their lived personal and educational experiences to move on in life with a stronger mindset. Furthermore, some of the students were also able to reflect on their own experiences with prejudice and the immigrant experiences of their parents in the U.S. to talk about how hard work equals success and thus define their identities as hard-working individuals, like their parents, with pride. Some students also pushed back against identities they felt could be assigned

as Latinx individuals in this country by making connections to the some of the characters in *Esperanza Rising* and by explaining how Mexicans are not “dirty greasers” through an evolved sense of knowledge on the topics of social justice, prejudice, patriarchy, and social class.

What is interesting about students’ reflections in this study is that they were also able to reflect deeply on their own learning processes. Although I employed the method of *testimonios* when asking students about their family histories and previous lived experiences in relation to what they learned through the book *Esperanza Rising*, I also asked students about their own personal thoughts about their learning process. This allowed students “to speak what *is* and reimagine the world for what it *could be*” (Saavedra, 2019, p. 180) when talking about the things they would like to do and learn within classroom contexts in the future. This gave students voice, power, and agency over their learning experiences in relation to what they felt helped them learn better. Saavedra (2019) explained how it is important to create conversations that will allow students a space to share what they think to validate their experiences and knowledges in the classroom setting. This also includes how they think they learn best in relation to why they must learn the things they are required to learn at school. There were various instances during activities that took place in the classroom in which some students experienced moments in which they were able to piece together the parts of what they were trying to understand in conversation with others, while some students remained in the *coatlicue* state, in which they felt there was no way out of their own confusion in relation to the information they were trying to understand. Some students found specific activities extremely helpful in their journey towards the fourth stage of *conocimiento* (*el compromiso*), leading to the fifth stage in which they were able to

make meaning of what they were learning by putting *coyolxuahqui* back together as they related what they learned to their own lived experiences and knowledges in conversation with others.

Lastly, students created their own definitions of mindfulness through art and hobbies they enjoyed doing and felt that the breathing meditation led them to feel more relaxed and happier in the classroom setting. In *Speaking across the Divide* in an interview with Inés Hernández-Avila and Domino Perez, Anzaldúa (2003) mentioned the following about adopting an Indigenous identity to define what mindfulness is to her,

Some things are worth "borrowing." We are all on a spiritual journey and yearn for a Polaris star to guide us in a search for a spiritual "home." We're all looking for spiritual knowledge, for inner knowledge, the alchemist's quest for the philosopher's stone. If we don't have an inner spirituality, we try to re-root ourselves in other people's spiritual rituals and practices. The goal of spirituality is to transform one's life. (p. 14)

Anzaldúa (2003) explained that “borrowing” can only be done if it is not something we market as our own, but as a lens that can help us in our mindfulness journey to promote our inner growth with respect, pure intentions, and honesty. In this study, I was able to analyze students’ reflective responses regarding their breathing meditation experience by analyzing what was said, done, and written through a holistic lens that captured the entire experience of the student (human) within the situated context of the classroom, their life experiences with their families through a historical lens, within their homes, and in the present moment as each meditation took place. The mindfulness breathing meditation led them to moments of realizations in connection to *Esperanza Rising* through ancestral knowledge from their parents, from life embodied knowledges they talked about in relation to death, and how they viewed themselves on a personal level and as learners against the backdrop of their situated worlds. Most of the students also felt that art and hobbies like listening to music was a way for them to practice mindfulness. This idea

aligned with the making of art as “a natural cultural mode of expression for American Indians whose development and process are intimately intertwined with their spirits and souls” (Cajete, 2000, p. 52). In that students’ reflections demonstrated that the nature of human beings is to also enact mindfulness through creativity. Lastly, I also analyzed students’ journey to mindfulness by seeing their process through Anzaldúa’s (2015) 7 stages of *conocimiento* and how some of them went through several stages in their process of coming to understand themselves better on a personal level, as well as their evolving student identity.

### **Researcher Positionality**

To address researcher bias within critical ethnography, it is important to begin with the Ethical responsibility a researcher takes on through “a compelling sense of duty and commitment based on moral principles of human freedom and well-being, and hence a compassion for the suffering of living beings” (Madison, 2005) when individuals within a specific context suffer due to underlying conflicts of power and control not easily seen with the naked eye. In this study, I analyzed an urban ESL classroom context through a unit implementation to analyze “what is” to “what could be” (Carspecken, 1996; Thomas, 1993) with the goal of improving educational conditions for Latinx students in the process of challenging an ESL curriculum that limits and represses Latinx identities and communities through hegemonic English language practices. Critical ethnography has a political aim through self-reflection that leads to researcher positionality in the representation of others (Madison, 2005). As the researcher of this study, I took on the positionality of revealing my own subjective biases and focus on the voices of the students, as well as take on an activist stance in which I will intervene through an

implementation to explore the material effects it has within the classroom to explore educational options for Latinx students (Fine, 1994).

Furthermore, positionality is vital because it asks us to acknowledge our own power, privilege, and biases as we are conducting research and teaching (Madison, 2005). My position in relation to this study is one of privilege, because I am a person who currently benefits from all the privileges of a stable middle-class life and have access to an academic world that provides me a lens through which I can acknowledge how power relations play out across educational settings. I am in a position of power because I can make decisions that will have a long-lasting effect on the lives of others. Throughout the course of this study, I continually revisit my power as the researcher within the ESL classroom context of another teacher, as well as continually address the ethical considerations of relating to the students. I made decisions towards students' well-being and represented the students accurately and fairly in writing. I achieved this through personal written reflections in every stage of the study (Davis, 1999) to check my own biases and stance in relation to how I interpret and represent Latinx students' experiences in an ESOL classroom context.

I dove into this study aware that my Cuban immigrant experiences fleeing a communist regime to this country has been more privileged than that of individuals coming from other Spanish speaking countries before the Obama presidency ended the “wet-foot, dry foot” policy that allowed Cuban nationals to stay in the U.S. even if they arrived illegally by boat. I came to this country by plane through very comfortable means when my father was able to leave under his political prisoner status and was allowed to take his family with him. My mother was also motivated to come at the time because my oldest brother was very sick and there was no means

to help improve his health in Cuba. Due to his political prisoner status for his crimes against Cuba's communist state, my father decided that our fate in Cuba would have been terrible if we stayed. In Miami, Florida, upon becoming naturalized residents within the first six months living in the U.S., access to government help was easy to come by. We received help through the aid of food stamps, as well as from family members who were already established here. Unlike many families that come from other Spanish speaking countries, we were seen as legal residents of this country and received help that others still do not have access to when seeking a better life for themselves and their families in this country.

However, our struggle was that of poverty and of not knowing enough about the inner workings of this country. Our poverty experience consisted of not being able to communicate in the English language, my father not knowing how to work the job market, and our extended family ending all ties with us because we were of a lower social class than them. However, despite the social and economic limitations we often faced, we always helped each other, and I became the first woman in my family to graduate high school and attend college in the U.S. This is a privilege I was afforded for being the youngest in my family and able to come to this country at an earlier age to learn the English language and go to college with the aid of my mother's moral support and government funded financial aid. Now that I am an adult, I realize how privileged I was to be able to go to school and study. This is a realization that came to me in my interactions with close Mexican friends and work colleagues of mine with Indigenous backgrounds when I worked as a restaurant cook throughout the course of five years.

I view myself as an insider/outsider regarding the Latinx students I interacted with and studying, because I am the colonizer and the colonized (Villenas, 1996) in the sense that I am not

Indigenous or a person from Central America, but I am of Latina background with similar immigrant experiences as the students. I grew up with a mentality that assimilating to American culture was the way to survive in this country, while repressing my native language and Cuban heritage. However, I have become very aware of the reality of having to live within colonized systems of oppression by reflecting on my own experiences as a Latinx student across educational contexts, and then later as a teacher and doctoral student. I continually struggle with my “own marginalizing experiences and identities in relation to dominant society” (Villenas, 1996, p. 712) and understand that I have biases I need to keep in check. Even though I will be seen as the gatekeeper of knowledge as the person coming from a university to conduct a study, it is not my intention to exploit the students, nor the teacher that will assist me throughout this study. Therefore, a qualitative critical ethnography was appropriate for this study, because it gave me the time and tools, I needed to get to know all the participants of my study on a deeper level through the span of a longer period. I was able to build authentic relationships with the teacher and students, as well as deeply understand the context I was studying with hopes of providing something positive to the educational experiences of the Latinx students.

Lastly, my own personal explorations in mindfulness led me to think of my study through a more holistic lens. I began to expand on my knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy through a lens that also includes student’s mental health and well-being by tapping indigenous knowledge within Chicana feminism theorizing. Indigenous ways of knowing and being has become important to me on a personal level, because as a person who learned the value of work at a very young age, learning how to take care of myself on a more spiritual and physical level is not something I learned in life. My explorations with mindfulness came about a conversation I



began having with a colleague at work, because I mentioned that I always tended to feel shortness of breath, nervousness, among other symptoms ever since I was a teenager. After experiencing what I believe has been complete panic attacks on various occasions in the past four years and after confirming with my doctor, I had to make changes in my life. I began to meditate and incorporate simple yoga movements in my everyday routines. When the pandemic was announced in March of 2020, I also began to meditate while walking around my neighborhood. I also included my daughter and extended family members in my meditation and yoga practice on occasions via Zoom video calls.

Furthermore, Indigenous literature provided me with a more holistic framework of what it means to live a meaningful life. I came to realize that I grew up with a survival mentality that has kept me busy in life with very little moments to just be with myself and attend the parts that have needed healing. I have also experienced a change in my ideological worldview to one that moves away from a western “truth” that have kept me chasing the myth of an American dream I thought was going to bring me fulfillment in life. I have always felt a sense of emptiness that cannot be filled with a professional job, nor through the acquisition of material things. I began to realize the parts of me still hurting were unaddressed traumatic experiences with my family during our early years living in this country, as well as other experiences that have continually made its way to the forefront of my consciousness that need addressing and healing for me to continue this type of work.

### **Overview, Rationale, and Goal of Unit Implementation**

In this section, I provide an overview of the unit for this study. I created a unit that (1) addressed issues of race, class, and gender with Latinx students through literature that is critical

and culturally relevant, (2) was implemented through creative writing exercises and activities that allowed for a classroom space that was inclusive of student's identities, native languages, cultures, and ways of knowing and doing things, (3) was guided by mindful pedagogical practices that drew on Chicana feminist theory and *nepantlera* pedagogy, and (4) through daily breathing meditation practice that students participated in. These components together demonstrated that academic learning, as well as emotional healing in unison with reflective learning can take place simultaneously in the classroom context. The unit implementation specifically addressed Latinx student's holistic emotional and educational needs in the process of becoming successful lifelong learners through education that is respectful of the "comprehensive process of life and learning, undertaken with a cultural experience" (Jacobs, 2013, p. 39). I did this by promoting a safe environment in which students could feel safe to share their thoughts and opinions, and by promoting meaningful discussion through a culturally relevant text students could relate to.

For Latinx students to attain educational success, becoming a successful English speaker should not come at the expense of ignoring one's cultural identity, mental health, or meaningful learning experiences within the ESL classroom context. I drew on Indigenous knowledge that rests on the premise that authentic learning cannot take place if the human and learning spirit inside of a person is not addressed and acknowledged (Battiste, 2013). When students are taught to hate or view their cultural identities as inferior to that of western culture, the process of learning is affected. Therefore, allowing Latinx students to become aware of this socially learned occurrence can help them realize that it's okay to take up space in ESOL classroom context comfortably. Incorporating literature that is written by people who look like them and

incorporating mindful pedagogies that acknowledge their whole being can promote life changing empowerment at a young age.

This unit “weaves the empirical and the symbolic, nature and culture, self and community, power and love into a unified and unique vision of the world,” (Jacobs, 2013, p. 65) because learning without these things is superficial and false learning that negates equity in education for those whom the curriculum was not written. Due to the generational suffering of Latinx students, there is a need for a holistic educational approach in urban ESOL classroom contexts that addresses mental health through the spiritual needs of all students through holistic thinking that intersects teaching, learning, and healing. For this research, spirituality is defined as a kind of learning that connects the mind and the body in the process of learning to promote the well-being of students. Battiste (2004) explained that “many Indigenous peoples around the world continue to suffer trauma and stress from colonialism, genocide, and the continuing destruction of their lives by poverty and government neglect” (p. 71). Latinx students in the classroom experience similar traumas that can be traced back to their own or parent’s immigration stories, when considering that the majority of the Latinx population in the U.S. are of indigenous roots from Mexico and other Central American countries. Therefore, a mindful holistic education is necessary in classroom contexts. The concept of holism refers to the various elements that make up the self, connection to the community, other living things, the earth, and the spiritual, “and reflects Indigenous concepts of the nature of the divine” (Morcom, 2017, p.

123). A holistic Indigenous world view addresses the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual aspects of a person, versus western education that tends to focus on the intellectual.

### **Framing a Holistic Unit with Latinx Students in Mind**

Jacobs (2013) explained that “Indigenous teaching and learning paths are ultimately about cultivating cognition and consciousness via spiritual awareness and reflection on lived experiences” (p. 65). With this idea in mind, Latinx students can explore how their mindful and reflective practices can lead them to becoming conscious of their indigenous or mixed ancestry, and how that consciousness can lead to a path of humanization and empowerment. Abe (2017) explained that an indigenous model for ELL education incorporates tasks that are authentic, engages the community, and are reflective and holistic in nature. In the case of “an immigrant learner, the addition of an Indigenous paradigm could mean the exploration of identity development, empowerment, and citizenship” (p. 34) in connection to language acquisition. With the idea of being inclusive of all the knowledge that makes up a human self, students can tap into their multiliteracies to speak their knowledge and create new meaning with each other. Peat (2005) explained that “within the Indigenous world the act of coming to know something involves personal transformation” (p. 6). Authentic learning entails that student change from within via localized experiences that continually lead to transformation that is in constant flux. To accomplish this, students can try to connect to their learning spirits, “the entity within each of us that guides our search for purpose and vision” (Battiste, 2013, p. 18). This learning spirit

develops in an environment in which individuals feel sustained by developing interconnectedness and wholeness through the calming of the mind.

Learning in authentic ways by acknowledging student's learning spirits could promote inner self discoveries that could lead to questioning and interrogating what is being learned in a piece of text, writing activity, or discussion, as well as manipulating knowledge via creative means to take ownership of the learning taking place. Applying the concept of "being open to feel and experience the vibrations of wisdom via nature, the land, the other, ancestors, and our multiple selves in another way to think about knowledge we gain from and share with the material world" (Saavedra & Pérez, 2017, p. 459) also adds a deeper dimension to learning that may feel more natural to students from all backgrounds when learning is no longer detached from felt and embodied experience. Cajete (2000) explained that "the more humans know about themselves—that is, their connections with everything around them—the greater the celebration of life, the greater the comfort of knowing, and the greater the joy of being" (p. 75). Latinx students who learn more about themselves acquire a way of being that is authentic and outgoing in a world that constantly tells them there is no joy in learning, because in today's curriculum the sole purpose of learning is to assimilate and pass a test. The concept of having a relationship with something or someone, just like the relationship we have with what we are learning, determines the outcome of how our knowledge is spread into the universe. For example, the condition of our ecology today is a result of what and how teaching is being carried out within school curriculums and the relationships human beings maintain locally and globally with living and non-living

beings. Human beings attain happiness when they take the time to get to know the spirit of the land/context in which they live in, while at the same time, appreciating and respecting everything that is taken with the consciousness of giving back every step of the way (Cajete, 2000). This practice of reciprocity is at the core of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

### **Implementation Overview**

This unit was implemented by drawing on Chicana feminist theory, and the concept of a holistic education through *nepantlera* pedagogy (Anzaldúa, 2015; Apple, 2004; Aguilar-Valdez et al., 2013; Baldonado-Ruiz, 2021; Gutierrez, 2012; Lizárraga & Gutiérrez, 2018; Reza-López et al., 2014; Ngo & Chandara, 2021) as a form of culturally relevant and critical pedagogy by emphasizing the interconnectedness of the emotional, physical, and educational needs of Latinx students. To accomplish this, this unit incorporated secular breathing meditation, along with pedagogical practices influenced by students' ways of knowing and being. This approach to the unit helps tailor an already established sheltered ESL curriculum to the needs of Latinx students, while meeting the objectives described within the curriculum. By the end of the unit, students gained experiential learning and important skills that meet state standard reading, writing, and speaking objectives, as well as began to feel empowered as social agents of change within themselves and classroom community.

The teacher and I implemented various pedagogical strategies that emphasized verbal and written reflections that required students to synthesize while promoting their socioemotional well-being through short breathing and positive affirmation mindfulness meditations. This study emphasized a concept of holism in a sheltered ESOL context through a sense of connectedness to

create reciprocal relationships in which students felt cared for (Battiste, 2004), which then inspired students to share their own personal metaphorical borderland stories in response to the reading. The unit helped students tap their border identities to uncover realities that affect their lives in American society. This was achieved by having students tell their stories to help them reflect critically in the writing, hearing, and sharing of experiences to create contextualized awareness (hooks, 2010) as individuals living in two worlds, because “urban youth must be able to see themselves as learners in charge of their own sociopolitical and academic development” (Scorza et al., 2013, p. 19) to gain strength within a hegemonic culture that constantly alienates their voices and experiences. It was important to have students constantly examine how “cultural definitions of gender, race, class, and subjectivity are constituted as both historical and social constructs” (Freire & Macedo, 2005, p. 6). Students were able to reflect on and create new meaning by drawing on definitions through important vocabulary words throughout the unit.

### **Pedagogical Implementations**

Activities in the classroom drew on *nepantlera* pedagogy as a form of a mindful culturally relevant and critical pedagogy that tapped student’s knowledge, history, and evolving identities. Students were pushed to reflect critically and apply their authentic creativity to complete assignments that were tied to the themes of the anchor text to learn new content and express themselves with each other and the teacher. Language and literacy practices reflected student and teacher dynamics, and how new knowledge and meaning making was created.

### ***Culturally Relevant Pedagogy***

Culturally relevant pedagogy can be seen through the lens of mindfulness in the classroom to create a bridge between student’s physical and mental health, and their unique

cultures, identities, and ways of knowing to promote acceptance and living in the present.

Ladson-Billings (2009) explained that “culturally relevant teaching is pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (p. 20). With an understanding of students' cultures in the classroom in the selection of topics, discussions, text, and mindfulness practice that supports a holistic way of learning that moves away from assimilative practices, teachers can help promote student’s evolving identities with open awareness and acceptance. Teachers who build positive relationships with students through the concept of caring so that “the *cared-for* individual responds by demonstrating a willingness to reveal her/his essential self, the reciprocal action is complete” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 21) in the process towards self-actualization. Learning with an emphasis on respect, responsibility, and sociality is at the core of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Teaching through a culturally relevant lens means seeing color, culture, and difference. Ladson-Billings (1995) explained that including the culture and identities of students also means incorporating music, way of dress, and ways of speaking and being. Taking note of all these things via creative written classroom exercise and discussions can help student’s view themselves and their communities more positively. Valenzuela (1999) argued that Mexican’s youth’s concept of caring is embodied in the word *educación*, referring “to the family’s role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning” (p. 23). The concept of *educación* is inclusive of student’s parent’s and home knowledge that is oftentimes ignored in ESOL classroom contexts. Overall, these concepts of caring are holistic in nature because it works from the premise of acceptance. As students become more knowledgeable and comfortable through these concepts of caring in



the classroom, they too will learn to act through their authentic identities in their process of becoming more caring individuals themselves.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is the opposite of subtractive education that overlooks issues of race, power, and culture. Ladson-Billings (1995) explained that “students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, morals, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162). To accomplish this, teacher/s are encouraged to include culturally relevant text that validates and celebrates Latinx’s backgrounds to promote creative writing and active classroom discussions. For example, Lopez (2011) incorporated culturally relevant pedagogy and critical literacy, as well as performance poetry with her students through a conceptual model that allowed students to construct their performance poetry based on the text and their own experiences. This process led to student’s understanding each other, the injustices they face in society, and how oppression works as they shared their opinions about school. Another example would be García & Gadde’s (2012) after school writing project in which they implemented a culturally and linguistically responsive literacy instruction model with Latina students to examine issues of race, power, voice, and linguistic identity through culturally authentic literature. The findings drew from the students’ funds of knowledge through work discussed and produced in an after-school context. By drawing on the idea that students bring with them their own knowledge and ways of learning to the classroom, the teacher/s in this unit will help students understand that what they know and how they learn has a place in the classroom setting. The students will feel empowered in their complex identities and use *testimonios* (testimonies) to author themselves in finding their voices.

### ***Towards a Nepantlera Pedagogy Rooted in Indigenous Knowledge***

Anzaldúa (2015) explained that achieving *conocimiento* is made up of seven stages with *nepantla* being a pivotal stage during which you can view life as fluid suspended in two worlds “exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to ‘see through’ them with a mindful, holistic awareness” (p. 122). Through *nepantlera* pedagogy, Latinx students can place their experiences as located between worlds and transformation can begin when students begin to make sense of those worlds. Allowing students, a space in which they can express multiple perspectives through notions of *nepantla* to move away from repressed thinking, is an important component towards activism centered in social justice practices. Ultimately, achieving moments of *conocimiento* has a spiritual activism component for social change (Keating, 2006). Spiritual activism may reflect itself through student’s empowerment and what they do with that empowerment in kindness towards others.

It is important to understand how colonizing ideologies work in ESL contexts and how *Nepantlera* pedagogy, falling under Chicana Feminist epistemology, can serve as a mindful and culturally relevant pedagogy that can help Latinx Indigenous students succeed in ESOL classroom settings. Motha (2006) found that ESL teachers embrace the supremacy of the English language while repressing student’s native languages through a monoculture that is dominated by whiteness and as one that paints Latinx students as inferior, whereas culturally relevant pedagogy can counter these hegemonic teaching ideals through a form of teaching that engages students through their lived experiences, native languages, and cultures (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This kind of democratic teaching can become emancipatory when combined with mindfulness-based

practices for Latinx students through *nepantlera* pedagogy. Reza-López et al. (2014) described *Nepantlera* pedagogy as a kind of pedagogy that moves “toward social justice and human dignity that includes, among many other aspects, respect for students’ and their families’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds” (p. 110). They draw on Anzaldúa’s (1999) concept of *Nepantla* as a space in the middle of worlds with contradictions to inform an ever evolving identity that can lead to socially just praxis that is reflective and emancipatory (Freire, 1978), however, I concentrate on Anzaldúa’s (2015) concept of *Nepantla* as part of her delineated 7 stages towards *conocimiento* and how teachers can mindfully work with their students to understand and live in *Nepantla*, while also understanding the concept of *conocimiento* “as an epistemology that tries to encompass all the dimensions of life, both inner—mental, emotional, instinctive, imaginal, spiritual, bodily realms—and outer—social, political, lived experiences” (Anzaldúa, 2020).

It is important to note that *Nepantlera* pedagogy can lead to a kind of holistic education that addresses the needs of Latinx students through meditative practices that assists learning that push students towards critical thinking, discourse, and inner empowerment. Even though the concept of *nepantla* has mostly been discussed within the context of Dual Language Immersion (DLI) spaces (Freire, 2016; Reza-López et al., 2014; Venegas-Weber, 2018), I believe it can also be applied in ESOL spaces through the help of teachers who are knowledgeable or can be taught about *nepantlera* epistemology as a culturally relevant pedagogy when considering that *conocimiento* is “a conscious-raising tool, one that promotes self-awareness and self-reflectivity (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 178) that can be used as a mindful and reflective pedagogical strategy in ESL classroom contexts with Latinx students. Furthermore, simple mindfulness based practices help Latinx students fight injustices through “the bodily feeling of being able to connect with

inner voices/resources (images, symbols, beliefs, memories) during periods of stillness, silences, and deep listening or with kindred others in collective actions” (Anzaldúa, 2020, pp. 152-153) to reach authentic knowing collectively to push against a world catering to individualism and that believes pursuing thinking, pleasures, and passions are bad things (hooks, 2010). By creating a connection between the mind and body, students enact their most authentic creativities and inner inspiration towards real transformative change in a hegemonic educational system.

### **A Place-based Perspective in an Urban Context**

Furthermore, the unit also aims at helping students understand their life experiences from a place-based perspective. Tuck, McKenzie & McCoy (2014) explained that Indigenous people’s understanding and practices of land can include urban land with a critical dimension that uncovers settler colonialism. Place allows people to understand geographic, cultural, political, and economic landscape (Calderón, 2014). For example, students with border experiences are shaped by territory and land in ways that highlight the violent history of colonization in the U.S, however, in order for these experiences to be revealed to students, language plays an important role in how power relations are maintained (Abe, 2017), because when ELL students are unable to critique language in text, this knowledge remains hidden to them, and thus a holistic education is never attained. From an Indigenous point of view, the land is a map for the soul because the earth is a living soul, and it is from our relationship with the land and all living beings that we learn how to treat each other (Cajete, 2000). Indigenous children first learn about relationships through understanding that human beings should live in harmony with the land to maintain balance and harmony in the universe. This idea extends to all the relationships human beings

form, including living and non-living beings. In this unit, the teacher/s attempt to teach students in relation to their contextualized experiences in an urban setting and how their experiences can be re-framed through a holistic educational lens with the aim of achieving wholeness.

### **Tapping Border Identities**

This unit also taps students border identities (Anzaldúa, 2012) through the experiences of the characters in “Esperanza Rising” by Pam Muñoz Ryan in relation to that of the student’s in the classroom as individuals living in two worlds, because “urban youth must be able to see themselves as learners in charge of their own sociopolitical and academic development” (Scorza et al., 2013, p. 19) to gain strength within a hegemonic culture that constantly alienates their voices and experiences. This unit helps students gain this kind of strength by tapping into their border identities to uncover un-previously seen realities that affect their lives in American society. This is achieved by having students tell their stories to help them think critically in the writing, hearing, and sharing of experiences to create contextualized awareness (hooks, 2010). I create a community environment with the students so that everyone has access to a space in which they can make their voices heard in relation to identity construction along geopolitical, institutional, and home communities. Freire (2000) discussed that “authentic reflection considers neither abstract man nor the world without people, but people in relations with the world” (p. 81). Students will situate themselves within their contextualized experiences as they try to make meaning of the text in relation to the larger world they inhabit as one that is always transforming. Garza (2007) successfully applied border pedagogy by exposing her culturally diverse students

to the experience of crossing language borders through a kind of contextualized immersion which helped her, as well as her students to gain a deeper understanding of the “othered,” and linguistic diversity through experience. In this unit, students are encouraged to use their native languages as they learn English in the telling of their stories when negotiating meaning or trying to communicate. Like in Garza’s (2007) study, it is a goal that students will learn to share deeply and listen to each other to take the first steps to challenge social injustice and promote equity. I explore student’s concepts of borderlands by drawing on Anzaldúa’s (2012) construction of the Chicana/o identity through the mestiza consciousness as one that is “cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems, *la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war*”(p. 100) while dealing with different versions of reality and opposing messages on how to be and relate in the world.

ELL teachers can implement this concept of holism beyond themselves in an ESOL context through a sense of connectedness and creating reciprocal relationships in which students will feel cared for (Battiste, 2004). Therefore, *Nepantlera* pedagogy is appropriate for this study because it draws from a spiritual indigenous holistic awareness were “you are exposed, open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from inner feelings, imaginal states, and outer events, and to ‘see through’ them with a mindful holistic awareness” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 122), which Latinx students can enact through their lived experiences and cultures. This led students to feel empowered “intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20).

Lastly, that students also draw from their funds of knowledge which are “generated through the social and labor histories of families and communicated to others through activities that constitute household life” (González et al., 2005, p. 18) to mindfully reflect on their thoughts, emotions, and their own learning processes.

### **Reasoning for Meditative Practice in the Classroom**

It is imperative to promote mindfulness based educational practices tailored to the needs of Latinx Indigenous students in sheltered ESL classrooms. It is of high importance for Latinx Indigenous students to learn how to harbor self-compassion without judgment within school contexts through a cultural mindfulness lens that will offer a different perspective to life. Exposing Latinx students to a mindfulness-based education informed by Chicana feminist epistemology with its roots in indigenous knowledge will allow for a space in which students will be able to reframe how they view themselves in a western world that paints them as second-class citizens. Meditative practices in the classroom are implemented through the notions of self-acceptance through culturally based mindfulness practices, and through a healthy exploration of self and community. Silent and positive affirmation breathing meditation (Thick Nhat Hanh, 2017), and reflective writing (Garretson, 2010) emphasizes a spiritual dormant side to learning in such a way that the mind and body are connected. This is followed by critical discussions that are culturally inclusive of students’ multiple identities in relation to what is being taught in the classroom to enhance understanding.

Latinx youth often face additional stressors that can lead them to depression, disassociation, and a sense of worthlessness (Dearorff et al., 2003). Due to these outcomes,

another goal of this unit is to nourish student's hope and sense of self-worth to help them manage stressors through inner physical and mental awareness through writing. Garretson (2010) expands on the idea that using writing as a meditative practice with Latinx students through freewriting is an effective strategy in which students can scan their thoughts to understand and develop them further through language. Self-acceptance plays a role in this process in the sense that students must trust the silent meditative breathing component of the practice by suspending judgment, while "strengthening the belief that prelinguistic knowing is robust, if elusive, and will gradually emerge in words if the writer simply opens himself up and allows that process to occur by freewriting regularly" (p. 54). For this unit, this process will be implemented through gradual scaffolding practices that begin with silent sitting meditation as students learn new vocabulary and writing strategies they can later be creatively implemented in their free writes, creative writing assignments, and discussions.

Mindfulness breathing and positive affirmation meditation offers students a way to connect their mind and body to heal within an educational setting embedded with historical colonization that has affected African American and Latinx individuals. I draw from Michael Yellow Bird's (2019) keynote argument during a training held in Chippewas of the Thames First Nation in which he spoke about how mindfulness can heal emotions, reset genetic expressions, noting that running, sleeping, laughing, meditation, and diaphragmatic breathing are processes towards achieving mindfulness. Barrios (2019) explained that during this presentation Michael Yellow Bird conducted a full body scan meditation to demonstrate its effect against stress and trauma. The individuals in this specific training expressed they felt less stress and were able to



focus better immediately after the full body scan meditation practice. Therefore, throughout this unit plan, students will be guided through a daily short breathing meditation practice that could last up to three minutes through appropriate scripts that build on the student's sense of inner peace and clarity to support their learning processes.

### **Promotion of Students' Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing Skills**

Drawing from some examples from the literature in the past twenty years, there are successful ways in which ESOL teachers have engaged ELL students in discourse (Goldsmith, 2013; Mohr & Mohr, 2007; Motlhaka & Wadesango, 2014), second language literacy (Haneda, 2006), writing (Lin, 2015), reading comprehension (Praveen & Rajan, 2013), and academic literacy (Perez & Holmes, 2010). I drew from these empirical studies to explain how the teacher and I help the students build upon their speaking, reading, and writing skills to also ensure academic success in the classroom. Mohr & Mohr (2007) found that teachers can engage less proficient ELLs in discourse during teacher-led question-and-answer sequences by rephrasing or clarifying questions, waiting an appropriate amount of time for students to respond, and understanding student's previous learning experiences in school contexts. In this study, the teacher and I assist students by supporting through repetition, by scaffold learning through instructional talk, and through direct questions with an appropriate wait time to facilitate student's responses. Motlhaka & Wadesango (2014) drew on Freire's participatory approach through the concept of listening to enhance ESL learning, which allows students time to critically think about their educational goals and identify their strengths and weaknesses in the

production of knowledge in a cooperative learning environment that feels like a safe space for learning. We do this by allowing students time to think and working with their peers daily, and by asking them about their learning processes and what they can do to improve on their learning. Like in Mohr & Mohr's (2007) study, the teacher and I elicit students' thinking through speech production that can be promoted through communication by offering diverse perspectives.

Like in these studies, for this unit, we do our best to elicit student discourse through the teaching practices and activities while also keeping Chicana indigenous ways of teaching and learning in mind that promotes learning through oratory means, by doing, and by experiencing. Lin (2015) described Latinx student's writing difficulties and how teachers can help them overcome their writing difficulties, teaching activities should also include (1) psychological emotional and sociocultural aspects of writing that include word choice, (2) adjusting to America thought pattern, writing fluency, cultural needs/rhetoric conventions, and (3) student's emotional needs. These findings align with Indigenous ways of teaching and learning because it points to the spiritual component of student learning via writing. In this unit, we address students' writing needs by attending to their psychological/emotional needs and giving them written feedback and talking to them when they need someone to talk to. Furthermore, Praveen & Rajan (2013) found that using graphic organizers is effective when implemented with Latinx students in reading questions that involve (1) identifying the main idea, (2) finding supporting details, (3) dealing with vocabulary, (4) fact and opinion, (5) and making inferences. Using this model motivated students to create their own as they read passages and improved their creativity by making more

meaning of what they were reading. For this unit, we used graphic organizers to help promote creativity and the organization of thoughts for students to learn concepts and build vocabulary.

Lastly, Perez & Holmes (2010) point to the importance of addressing Latinx's sociocultural, linguistic, academic, and cognitive dimensions to help students develop the academic literacy needed in secondary content-area classrooms. The authors concluded that effective classroom practices are those that implement cognitive strategies that build on Latinx student's prior knowledge, how to summarize, take notes, and make inferences based on existing knowledge. We do this through the selection and implementation of *Esperanza Rising*, a culturally relevant Young Adolescent (YA) book that pushes Latinx students to think and reflect to perform cognitive strategies. The metacognitive strategies taught students how to monitor their own learning by using graphic organizers, anticipation guides, and chapter outlines, as well as how to self-assess their own understanding by modeling the thinking processes out loud. These strategies help promote reflective thinking while learning English as a second language. Lastly, the social/affective strategies allowed students to work in cooperative groups with more advanced peers to support comprehension and elaboration of key learning, and model questioning strategies students used to clarify their understanding as engaged in academic tasks.

### **Unit Essential Questions**

- How does our community and family history affect who we are in the present?
- How do our experiences cause us to change and grow?
- How can we effectively bring about change when faced with injustice in society?

- How does language and appearance affect how people are treated in society?
- How does a place shape our identity and experiences?

### **Anchor Text Rationale**

I selected the text “Esperanza Rising ” by Pam Muñoz Ryan because it is a book that is already taught within the curriculum with multiple awards and highly regarded to be used with middle and high school aged students. The following is a summary of the book.

Esperanza Ortega lives in Aguascalientes, Mexico, in 1930 and is the daughter of wealthy landowners on her family's ranch with her mother, father, and grandmother. The day before Esperanza's 13th birthday, her father is murdered while working on the ranch. Her uncle Luis reveals he now owns their land. He offers to continue to care for them and their ranch if Esperanza's mother, Ramona, will marry him. When she refuses, he burns down the ranch. Esperanza's grandmother, Abuelita, is injured during the fire and is sent to a convent where she can recover. Esperanza and the rest of her family decide to travel to the United States. When Esperanza's family arrives in the United States, which currently in the grip of the Great Depression, they settle in a farm camp in Arvin, California. Esperanza begins to adjust to her new life but still fantasizes about Abuelita rescuing her from poverty. Ramona contracts Valley fever, and the doctors are unsure if she will survive. Esperanza, desperate for money to support herself and pay her mother's medical bills, takes work on the farm camp despite being underage. She stockpiles money orders in the hopes of one day sending them to Abuelita and allowing her to travel to the United States. Tensions rise in the camp as migrants from Oklahoma flee the Dust Bowl and look for work in California. Some workers go on strike to try to improve working conditions. Following a massive demonstration by the strikers, the farm owners call immigration

officials to round up the demonstrators. However, many of the people deported were natural-born American citizens who had never been to Mexico. Esperanza has a breakdown and then an argument with her friend, Miguel, because of this event. The next day, they find that Miguel has left to seek work in Northern California. When Ramona recovers from her illness, Esperanza proudly goes to show her mother the money orders she saved, only to discover that they are missing; Miguel took them when he left. However, Miguel used them to secretly travel to Mexico and retrieve Abuelita. The book ends on the day of Esperanza's 14th birthday and Esperanza has finally learned to be grateful for what she does have: her family reunited, friends who love her, and most of all: hope.

Selecting the appropriate YA text was important because the overall goal of this study was to allow students a safe space in which they could feel empowered to make meaningful, reflective, and critical connections by tapping their own experiences and emotions. This is a book that teachers can easily incorporate into their ESOL English curriculum through the implementation *nepantlera* pedagogy as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy as the book is based on the intricate experiences of Mexican individuals of mostly indigenous backgrounds struggling to survive as farm workers in Mexico during the great depression. Overall, the themes in the book allowed space for students to explore their cultural and border identities that were easily weaved with mindfulness-based practices, allowing students to attain a sense of calmness. This book also lent itself to the creative process of students through examples in the book that exposed students to a non-western lens. Lastly, the themes promoted a holistic education that has the potential to humanize the current curriculum for Latinx students through characters students can easily identify with to develop deep and meaningful ways throughout the story.

**Process Overview of the Unit:**

The agenda of Ms. Miller's fourth period classroom daily for six weeks took the following form on the smart board in front of the classroom through six PPT presentations:

- Bell work question and writing reflection activities
- Short mindfulness breathing meditation practice script title and intention, with serene background and music playing
- Vocabulary chart activity to fill in with the assistance of the students
- Activity or reading (*Esperanza Rising*) for the day with questions, instruction, or examples.
- Exit ticket question or work completion
- Fridays: Review and quiz on Kahoot.

Ms. Miller and I introduced students to a western based concept of mindfulness and had students compare it to an indigenous lens to mindfulness by providing students with a video explanation and animation. Considering that one of the main characters in *Esperanza Rising* is Zapotec, I and Ms. Miller made sure to point this out to the students to explain how Esperanza and her mom were described as different from their servants in Mexico. This was followed by a brief historical explanation of Mexican farmers forced to find work in the U.S. during the 1920's and 30's during The Great Depression, a few years after the Mexican Revolution. Students drew from the topics of social class, social justice, patriarchy, and prejudice to explore how, especially Mexican Indigenous individuals were viewed and treated in Mexico and in the U.S. Students used this information to make connections to their own historical understanding and present experiences as they conceptualized how events that took place in the past can affect them in the present. Next, I explain the process of what the unit looked like.

Throughout the unit, I seized opportunities to teach important concepts I thought were important for the students to know. For example, I set the stage for an introduction to the book

by showing the students a trailer of *Esperanza Rising* with a handout of the script for the trailer; went over an explanation of what inspired the author to write such a book; explained western vs. Indigenous views to mindfulness; talked about the importance of home for a particular bell work question to connect with students on a deeper level; led the daily breathing mindfulness meditation and positive affirmation scripts; and modeled and provided examples for work, activities, or vocabulary with students on an almost daily basis. Furthermore, Ms. Miller and I would tweak the weekly and daily lessons as we progressed in the unit. These decisions were made depending on how much time we had left to do what was planned or based on how students were understanding what we had planned. We guided and helped students during every part of the process by doing the following:

- Re-reading, explaining, and modeling what questions meant
- Providing students with clear differentiated instruction and constant re-direction
- Constantly posing why, how, what questions
- Providing concise and simplified power point slides that students could understand
- Using videos, visuals, and audios to teach
- Using chapter summaries of *Esperanza Rising* for students to take home
- Providing students with a physical copy of the *Esperanza Rising* book
- Providing students with three to four reading comprehensions questions to take home.

Ms. Miller and I accomplished all the above by constantly communicating with each other via text and voice messages through the WhatsApp phone application, as well as by constantly emailing each other with information or materials to use in class. When the process would become complicated, Ms. Miller and I would talk through things with respect, always mindful of each other's worries and situations. We chose to trust each other during moments of great stress and created a partnership that was fueled by friendship, and casual moments of venting and laughter during her planning period.

## **Materials**

We provided each student with a notebook and a copy of the book for them to keep under their chairs in the classroom. We incorporated interactive videos, PowerPoint presentations, and handouts so that students were able to keep up with classroom content and discussions through differentiated means. We also created google accounts for the students where we uploaded summaries of each chapter for the book, as well as an entire pdf file of the book itself. Lastly, I lead short mindfulness breathing and sitting meditation practices through easy-to-follow scripts appropriate for middle school students.

## **Unit End Goals**

Students will achieve these following goals at the end of the unit:

- Students explore their thoughts and emotions through reflective reading and writing and short breathing mindful meditation.
- Students explore, reflect, and analyze their own lived experiences and knowledge with the aid of the anchor text.
- Students think critically and discuss with their peers to co-create knowledge.
- Students draw from their multiliteracies to take part in class discussions, work with their peers, conduct research, and work on their end of unit project.
- Students build upon their knowledge of vocabulary.
- Students build on their narrative writing skills through reflective and opinion-based bell work questions that promote thinking.
- Students make connections to the themes in the anchor text by making connections to their own experiences and that of the characters and events in the story.
- Students learn about plot structure in relation to chronology of events in a story.
- Student's practice listening, speaking, and writing to meet state standard objectives.

## **Duration of Unit Plan**

This unit plan implementation took six weeks to complete with a total of seven weeks of being in the classroom. I actively created the weekly day to day lessons and co-taught lessons,



mini-lessons, or activities with the teacher. I went over and implemented mindfulness in the classroom by adapting mindful breathing meditation to younger students, as well as the reflective writing components as the teacher and I covered the chapters of the book each week. The teacher and I helped students understand vocabulary, character development, chronology of events, and conceptual understanding of plot structure. During my weekly meetings with students, they drew from their reflective in-class writing exercises for the week in unison with the weekly assigned chapters to discuss the major themes in the book. Students were able to voice their knowledge, thoughts, opinions, and arguments in relation to the text on a weekly basis. Exposure to artwork portraying Indigenous and western symbols found in “Esperanza Rising” were used as examples to stimulate learning on symbolism. The weekly assigned chapters were accompanied by activities during the forty-five-minute time frame of classroom instruction with one end of unit project that required students to write two short reflective essay responses on two of the major themes in “Esperanza Rising.”

### **COVID 19 Adaptations**

This unit was adapted to the current COVID 19 situation and CDC guidelines. The teacher and I wore a mask and sanitized on a daily and continuous basis. Technology aided the process of implementation because it allowed us to put information on a smart board located at the front of the class. This allowed students to know what was happening daily without us having to get too close to the students. The teacher sanitized student’s desks on a weekly basis, and we made sure that everyone kept their masks on while on school premises. We also opened the windows of the classroom so that air would circulate when we felt it was too stuffy inside the

room. The short breathing meditation also helped us ease student's anxiety regarding mask wearing and everything that was going on with COVID overall.

### **Assessments: Formative/Summative**

Below is the informative, formal, and summative assessment for the unit:

- Informal: The teacher and researcher observed student's working in pairs and in groups, as well as through whole classroom discussions to informally assess conversations. The teacher and researcher checked for student's understanding of themes, vocabulary acquisition, and critical reflective thinking through the reflective writing activities that occurred throughout the unit.
- Formal: The teacher and researcher checked student's unit notebooks, reading comprehension questions, and quizzed them weekly on Kahoot.
- Summative: Students were assessed on the major themes of the book through an end of unit quotes and short essay response project.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

In this section, I explained my methodology. I conducted a critical ethnographic case study informed by Chicana feminist theory with an emphasis on Gloria Anzaldúa's seven stages of *conocimiento*. I provided a brief explanation on qualitative methodology with a focus on critical ethnography and expanded my theoretical framing. Next, I explained my methods and provided detailed information on how the study and unit plan curriculum took form and was implemented. I also provided an explanation of the interview protocol and explained the gathering of data through photographs, artifacts, and instruments. This was followed by an explanation of how the data was analyzed through a reiterative process of coding that led to salient themes. Furthermore, I provided an overview of my epistemological theoretical guide and my positionality as the researcher. Lastly, because a major component for this study was the unit curriculum, I provided a detailed overview of the unit, as well as explanations of the pedagogies I drew from in the attempt to create a more holistic unit curriculum in an ESOL classroom with

Latinx students. With careful planning and implementation, the unit was built to fit within an already existing curriculum in which we did not have to deviate much from the state-mandated standards. The Young Adult (YA) text *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) is also a book that is typically taught in middle school English classrooms. We tweaked how we implemented the curriculum to promote learning that is holistic by addressing Latinx students' barriers with writing, reading, and speaking through teaching, and scaffolding strategies that work from the premise of care and love, alongside mindfulness practices that incorporated active reflection and short breathing meditation.

#### **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

This study consisted of a unit implementation informed by Chicana Feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and short breathing daily meditation in connection to the Young Adult (YA) text *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). I used these data sources to explain how

student's responses addressed the following research question for this study: How do Latinx students respond to a unit informed by Chicana feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and mindful breathing mediation in a sheltered ESOL classroom through the exploration of *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan?

I outline how 9 Latinx students responded to the unit implementation in a sheltered ESL (instructional approach used to make academic instruction in English understandable to ELL students) classroom. I describe student's physical and verbal responses during field observations, their written reflective responses in their notebooks, and end of unit project. It is important to highlight that I do not include the analysis of the findings in this chapter, because I chose to focus on a detailed outline of the findings to provide the reader with a holistic overview of student's responses. In this chapter, I outline the findings and in chapter five, I provide a detailed analysis of how students responded to the unit implementation through Gloria Anzaldúa's seven stages of *conocimiento* by focusing on student's reflections and highlighting "aha" moments the students' experienced. The findings resulted from a rigorous and recursive process of coding and data analysis of the field observations, semi-formal open-ended interviews, and student's writing. Considering that this study required the analysis of several components, I include the findings from three data sources to answer how students reflected during a six-week unit implementation through moments of *testimonios*, and verbal and written reflections in the classroom.

### **Findings Overview**

I write the findings for the field notes organized into categories, starting with week two by painting a picture of what happened through the gradual progression of student's physical and verbal responses to the bell work (questions students would answer before the bell rang and

during the first ten minutes of class), breathing meditation practice, teacher-led instruction, and paired and group activities during each week of the study. The field notes demonstrate the daily pedagogical processes and decision making of the researcher and teacher in connection to student's behaviors and verbal responses. Followed is the written findings of the interviews that I organize student's responses into themes. The interviews demonstrate students' reflections of how they connected to the book *Esperanza Rising*, the breathing mindfulness practice, and the activities that took place in the classroom. Lastly, I organize the findings from student's written responses by organizing them into categorical skills they performed in their responses to the daily bell work questions and the breathing meditation practice.

Students' interactions and verbal responses during field observation are organized under the following categories:

- Bell work reflections and students' responses
- Teacher led instruction on mindfulness and students' responses
- Teacher led instruction and activities on *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) and students' responses
- Teacher led instruction on new vocabulary and students' responses.

Students' reflections from their interviews are organized into six categories containing the following themes and sub-themes:

1. Matured appreciation for life and family.
2. Overcoming hard lived experiences.
3. Acceptance of starting over as part of life.
4. Reflecting and gaining consciousness through life hurdles.
5. Hard work equals success.
6. Countering notions of truth through an evolved knowledge of social justice, prejudice, patriarchy, and social class
7. Awareness through a broader perspective in connection to the book.
8. Students reflected on their positive learning experience with the unit.
  - Overall reflections on Unit.
  - Activity students found most helpful.

9. Students reflected positively on the breathing meditation.
  - Students felt happy and more relaxed.
  - Connecting to emotions through the breathing meditation
10. Students' unique definitions of mindfulness
  - Students practice mindfulness through art
  - Students practice mindfulness through hobbies they enjoy.

Students' written reflections in their notebooks in response to the bell work questions are organized through the following main categories of skills they were able to perform:

- Predictions and educated guesses about the story
- Analysis of Esperanza's evolution
- Analysis of specific statements through the bell work questions
- Opinions of important events and on the topic of patriarchy
- Reflections on the Breathing Meditation Practice

Lastly, the end of unit quotes poster project demonstrated what students learned from the main themes in the book through two short essay responses. I organized this section by explaining students' reflections on the main themes of the story through the quotes they chose to analyze. They did this in relation to themselves and by drawing symbols during one of their bell work reflections and for their final project poster work. Overall, the findings demonstrated how Latinx students respond to a unit informed by Chicana feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and daily breathing meditation in a sheltered ESOL classroom context through the exploration of the culturally appropriate YA text *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000).

### **Field Observation Findings**

In this section, I relay students' responses and interactions during the bell work (schoolwork that students are doing when the bell rings as the first task of the class period) which was a time when students would write and share a reflective response to a question displayed on the smart board located in front of the class in two to three sentences. I also relay

their personal experiences and opinions on statements related to the book, on the topic of mindfulness, and the daily breathing meditation. Lastly, I relay students verbal and physical responses when the short breathing meditations were taking place and when they worked together in pairs or in groups. I do this by including moments when the teacher and I taught new concepts and when students worked together reflecting on topics that led them to understanding the themes in *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000).

### **Bell work reflection and students' responses**

On the first day of the study, we displayed the following question for bell work in English and Spanish: What is mindfulness? *Que es crear conciencia?* At first, students were very quiet staring at Ms. Miller and I with puzzling looks shaking their heads saying they didn't know what mindfulness meant. Some began to write, while others stared outside the window or the ceiling. When Ms. Miller first mentioned it was time to start the new unit with this bell work question, Gabriel (pseudonym, as are all student's names) blurted "finally" and proceeded to write on his notebook. After a short while of seeing that some students had not started writing, Ms. Miller guided the students in their writing by modeling sentence starters like: "I think mindfulness is..." and "I think mindfulness means" so that everyone could write something down. Students who had not begun writing started to write in their notebooks. I helped in this process by providing students with visual examples and by posing questions that would help them with their writing and thinking.

On day three, students did a bell work that helped them tap their senses. Students wrote about something they saw, heard, felt, tasted, and smelled. I proceeded to explain the importance of being aware of our senses as part of being a mindful person. Students listened quietly as Ms.

Miller, and I modeled something for each of our senses. Most student took some time to write something down and after a while, Aurora volunteer to read her response: “I can see trees. I can hear rumbling of bushes. I can feel the blanket on me. I can taste my dry mouth. I can smell the air freshener.” The other students nodded in agreement when she read her reply out loud, but no one else volunteered to share their answer. Other times, we had bell work questions asking students more personal questions to promote deep reflection. During week three, a bell work question was for students to write about a family member or adult in their life that gives them good advice. Two students volunteered to say the following after writing something down:

**Gabriel:** “My mom gives me advice so that I can do good in life by making good decisions.”

**Amelia:** “My grandmother, who died recently, used to give me a lot of advice and my parents give me the advice that I should work hard to be successful in life.”

Then we asked students to turn to their peer next to them to share their responses if they did not want to share out loud with the class. Students did this in unison and some even had short conversations about the kind of advice their parents or family members have given them.

By week three, a bell work question that promoted thinking and reflection in connection to the book was: How do you think Esperanza’s life and that of her family’s will change after papa’s death? Students answered the following during initial discussion:

**Victoria:** “They will struggle because they will no longer be rich.”

**Gabriel:** “They will be poor.”

**Amelia:** “They will have to get used to a different life.”

**Anna:** “Things will be different for them.”



**Daniel:** “They will be like everyone else.”

This is an example of how Ms. Miler and I continually asked students questions about the action taking place in the first couple of chapters of the story so that students would continue to reflect on their answers, keep up with the chronology of events in the story, question and infer what was happening, as well as what was going to happen to the main characters in the book. Some students remained quiet, only sharing with their peers when asked, while others continued to say things and have short discussions with the assistance of Ms. Miller and myself as a class.

I was able to teach a class session by myself during week four when Ms. Miller had to proctor a test with a group of eight graders. I used this opportunity to connect to the students on a deeper level through the following bell work question: Think about the place where you or your parents were born and reflect about what you like/d about that place. Amelia replied: “I visit Mexico with my family often and love spending time with family living there and the smell of the food.” Then I tried to relate to the students by reminding them that I was born in Cuban and that I went back to visit when I was twelve years old. I talked about how hard it was to come to this country and leave everything I knew behind to start over with my family. After, I proceeded to say that in the book, we see Esperanza struggle to move from her native home to a different country where she must start over in a new home that looks nothing like her old home. Javier, sitting at the back of the class and who didn’t normally talk, blurted: “I wouldn’t like that.” I used this opportunity to say that most people would have a hard time moving to a new place, especially if they lost everything they had and that it’s okay to feel sad. Most students nodded in agreement with Amelia and Gabriel blurting out “yes.”

During week five, some students continued to be shy during the bell work reflection because it was always the same students raising their hands when it was time to share. Ms. Miller and I decided to use a virtual name wheel with an arrow that rotated and randomly landed on student's names. The following was a particular bell work students were able to reflect on very deeply: Do you believe that people can really accomplish all their dreams in America if they work hard enough? The virtual wheel landed on the following students:

**Gabriel:** "My grandparents came from Mexico, and they had to work really hard to attain everything they have today."

**Ava:** "If you work really hard, you can be successful in America."

Most of the students nodded and then Amelia volunteered to say:

I half agree, and half disagree. For example, in this country if you have luck, you are successful and sometimes you have to be beautiful to have a lot of success. We all know we are beautiful in our own way but if you're trying to be a model, you have to have luck. I just have a reality mindset. People can work hard and not win, but some people are given more opportunities to achieve those goals.

Most of the girls nodded in agreement, as well as a few of the boys who remained quiet. Ms. Miller and I looked at each other and I proceeded to say, "yes, this can be true in some cases, but you can also be very successful if you do your best through hard work." Amelia looked as if she wasn't convinced after Ms. Miller, and I expanded on this thought.

During week five, more students reflected during the bell work discussion when we asked: Is it possible to be poor and rich at the same time? How so? Ms. Miller used the digital name wheel to volunteer students again. The following are some of the student's responses:

**Victoria:** “I’m rich if I have a regular house and family.”

**Luis:** “You don’t have to have the biggest house to be rich.”

**Leo:** “You can be rich if you’re poor because you still have your family.”

**Gabriel:** “The homeless don’t have much, but they value anything you give them.”

**Amelia:** “Regarding qualities and emotions, you can be rich. Qualities don’t require money.”

Then Amelia proceeded to explain that the poor can also have bad qualities though a quote she read from the cover of the book. Amelia expressed that not all rich people are the same in that they don’t value things, because sometimes poor people don’t value things either. Amelia’s response demonstrated that she was very invested in the question and as if she was talking from experience. Overall, student’s responses demonstrated they were doing their best to be active in their reflections.

The following bell work question also promoted discussion: How do you think life in California will differ from Esperanza’s previous life? How do you think Esperanza will react to the change? The following are some of the student’s responses:

**Daniel:** “Because she moved to a different country, she’s nowhere as near as wealthy.”

**Aurora:** “She has to start over.”

**Daniel:** “I would feel sad if I had to start over. Leaving your house is sad.”

**Victoria:** “She might start changing because she’s going to be a peasant.”

Students were drawing on each other’s replies to further their thinking in relation to themselves and what was happening in the book. Three students opened their books to the chapters we were reading for the week to see if they were answering the questions correctly. Then, Ms. Miller and

I proceeded to go over how Esperanza was feeling and behaving during this part of her journey in the book.

Another important bell work reflection question that promoted thinking and reflection during week five is one in which we asked students if they would strike for something when Marta's character began to strike for better living conditions. At first, most students mentioned they did not know what the word strike meant, and we provided them with an example and gave them more time to think about the question in relation to what was happening in the book. Ms. Miller then asked: "What would you strike for?" The following are replies from some of the students:

**Amelia:** "People strike when there's a lot of complaints, not a lot of money."

**Victoria:** "A strike is like a warning."

**Leo:** "When a worker will not do their job."

**Aurora:** "Lack of opportunity and not getting paid enough."

**Amelia:** "Back in Mrs. Vasquez class, social studies, we talked about strikes."

After these replies, three students spoke up at the same time saying the following: "because they are tired of working." This discussion demonstrated that students were trying to figure out what a strike was within the context of the book by tapping their own prior knowledge. Most students understood that Marta was striking because her life and that of the people around her wasn't good, and she was trying to do something about it.

The following bell work question also promoted good discussion during week five: "Esperanza demonstrates growth and maturity in chapter nine. Why is it important for her to become more responsible?" Two students had the following replies:

**Victoria:** “At the beginning, she showed off her wealthiness, like basically showing how others were unequal. At the beginning she was prejudice with people.”

**Ava:** “Now Esperanza has to take care of her mom and pay hospital bills.”

These responses demonstrated that students were thinking about Esperanza’s change throughout the book by talking about how she used to be and how she changed to take care of her mom and become the bread winner of the family. This was the same day that Ms. Miller and I went over the topic of social justice. We showed a YouTube trailer of the documentary “Precious Knowledge” to help students think about social justice in relation to their heritage. Then Ms. Miller motioned the Black Lives Matter movement and the feminist movement as examples of social justice. This was followed by comments from the following students:

**Victoria:** “strikes to get better housing and working conditions. Marta fights for better housing and pay.”

**Gabriel:** “There are pros and cons to striking.”

**Amelia:** “With a strike, you can take action.”

However, most of the students leaned towards not striking. When we were done with this discussion, Daniel blurted: “We are almost done with the book!” and most of the students made wining sounds saying that they wanted to read another book.

Towards the end of week five, we also had students answer the following bell work question: Do you think everyone in society has equal opportunities to succeed? Anna replied: “No, I don’t think that, because social status affects the opportunities people have.” Then Ms. Miller asked the class: “Do you agree or disagree?” Four students raised their hands to not

agreeing and four students raised their hands to agreeing. One student volunteered to get up in front of the class to spin the digital name wheel. The wheel landed on the following students:

**Aurora:** “They don’t. Maybe they can’t afford education.”

**Daniel:** “Everyone would have the same life.”

**Victoria:** “Sometimes when you’re a girl, you don’t get as many opportunities as a boy.”

**Daniel:** “Not everyone is fit.”

These responses were taken into consideration as Ms. Miller explained the answers to the rest of the class by contextualizing based on what was happening in the book. Lastly, there was one bell work reflection question towards the end of the unit students were too shy to answer because they had written very personal responses. We asked them to think of a time when they were disappointed and how they coped. Gabriel was reluctant to share when the virtual participation wheel landed on his name and Amelia shared a very hard experience about her aunts by explaining that she felt they allowed her grandmother to die. Leo did not want to share his answer when the digital volunteer wheel landed on his name, though I noticed he had written something down on his notebook. After a moment of awkward silence, I explained that maybe this bell work reflection was too personal for them to share. I made myself vulnerable by sharing something disappointing I had to overcome in my life, and then made a connection to why mindfulness is important as we move through hard times in life so we may overcome them in a healthy way, just like Esperanza was able to through the guidance of those who cared for her.

### **Teacher led instruction on mindfulness and students’ responses**

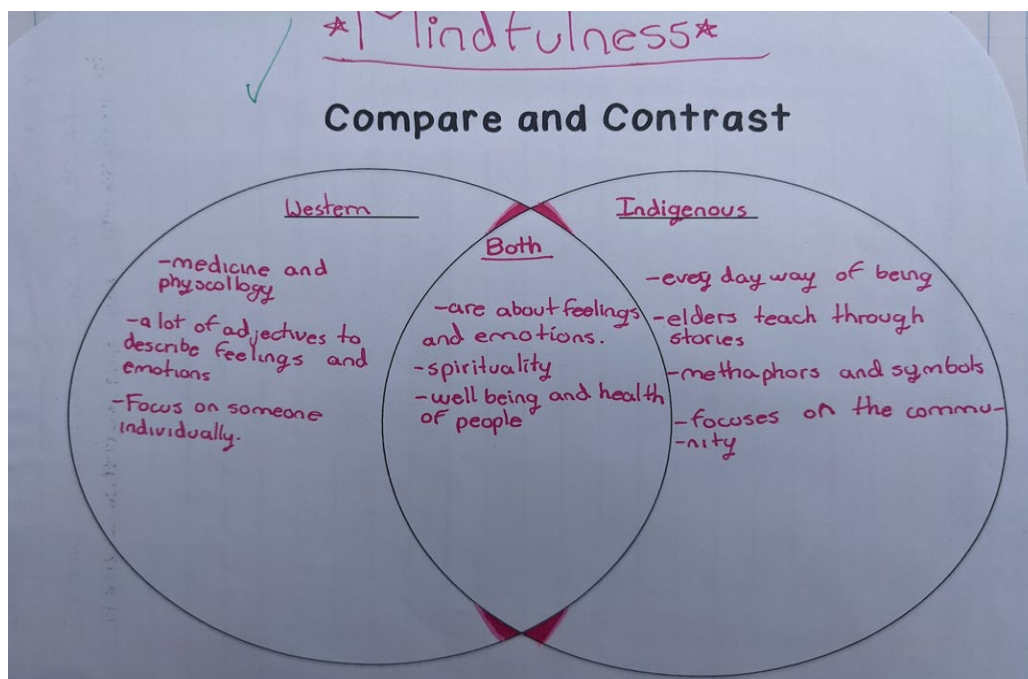
To help students understand the concept of mindfulness, I showed them a jar filled with water and glitter and asked them to imagine the glitter being the crazy thoughts in their minds. I

explained that whenever they feel anxious or worried, they could grab the jar, shake it, and wait for the glitter to settle as their thoughts also settle. Several students raised their hand to grab, shake, and then place the jar on their desk. I began the short breathing meditation practice on the second day of the study by having students conduct a body scan meditation. I began by talking about what a body scan is and why it's important to be aware of our bodies. Some students closed their eyes and sat back on their seats as they rested their hands on the table. Three students played with their pencil and stared at the ceiling, while others remained with eyes open sitting sideways staring outside the long classroom windows to the left of the classroom. Over time, Ms. Miller and I helped students become more comfortable with the daily breathing meditation by giving them more direct instruction on what to do with their bodies and hands during each practice. Sometimes, we would instruct them to cross their arms and place their heads on them with eyes closed so that they could focus on their breath, and other times we would tell them to be observative of their surrounds by tapping their five senses with music playing in the background.

An important activity I did with the students to help them understand the concept of mindfulness on a deeper level was a Venn diagram comparing and contrasting a western and Indigenous lens to mindfulness. I reminded students of what mindfulness was by mentioning the jar activity again and then explained mindfulness through an indigenous lens through two short YouTube video clips. I helped students do the Venn diagram (refer to figure 4) through direct instruction by comparing both views, and by asking them questions as I taught.

#### **Figure 4**

*Comparing and Contrasting a Western and Indigenous lens to Mindfulness by Amelia*



Students were quiet but interested throughout this beginning process, except for Amelia who raised her hand to say: “They compared because they both have spirituality, feelings, and emotions.” I used this opportunity to emphasize the mind and body connection and how we should work towards being healthy in our minds so that our bodies may be at peace in the present moment. Then I proceeded to explain how they were about to see Esperanza go through many changes that was about to affect her way of thinking.

It is important to point out that I performed each breathing mediation with an intention in mind. For example, one breathing meditation focused on positivity and breathing. I gave students specific instructions on what to do with their bodies as I read the script and walked around the class. Students remained in their seats with eyes closed and heads on their arms crossed. When the meditation was done, most students raised their head stretching and saying that they felt



calm. Another example was a breathing meditation titled “What I like about myself”. When I did this meditation, some students simply closed their eyes and relaxed their shoulders, while others crossed their arms on the table with heads down. When the meditation was done, students said comments like, “that was nice,” or “now I feel more relaxed.” On this day, Amelia told me that the practice made her feel good about herself during a side conversation after class ended.

Next, another breathing meditation practice students seemed to enjoy during week five was titled “Imagine You’re on a Cloud.” I noticed that all students put their heads down on their desks with arms crossed without being instructed to do so, and some were even smiling as I urged them to imagine they were on a cloud tapping their five senses to picture a scenery. Students raised their heads very slowly and calmly when I was done, as if they were used to the process. This reaction was very different from the first week when most of them didn’t close their eyes or tried to relax their bodies. When the bell rang on this day, Gabriel mentioned he enjoyed this meditation the most, because he was having a hard time in his life. Lastly, another mindful breathing practice that stood out was one in which I guided students through positive self-affirmations. Amelia, Victoria, and Anna thanked me after this meditation by saying they were grateful for having me in their class, because it allowed them to think and feel things differently by being more positive.

### **Teacher Led Instruction and Activities on *Esperanza Rising* and Students’ Responses.**

We introduced students to *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) by showing them a YouTube video trailer. We did this to provide students with an idea of what *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) was going to be about. I promoted initial critical thinking by asking students to think about the title of the book and its meaning in Spanish. Amelia said that it meant

to be re-born, because the title of the book in Spanish is *Esperanza Renase*. Then I explained that we all go through life changes and stages, and that maybe Esperanza was going to change in some way throughout the book. Before we had the students begin reading, we also had them become more familiar with the author. We showed students three short video clips of the author talking about what inspired her to write the book as students answered three questions while they followed along. I paused the videos and re-read the questions to the students several times so that they could answer. On another occasion talking about the author of *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) there was a moment when Amelia asked why they didn't put an accent on "Papa" and "Mama" in the text, to which I replied: "maybe the author chose to do it like that. If we think about how the author has a grandmother from Oklahoma and a grandmother from Mexico, I infer the author chose to write it this way, because she lives in two worlds. Maybe she chose to write 'Papa' and 'Mama' without accents, because that is how it is said in English in a southern English dialect." Ms. Miller felt this was a good answer because I modeled how to infer, an important skill to teach students since they were having a hard time deducing information from the book from evidence and reasoning.

Then, we proceeded to have students begin reading by following along to an audible of *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) found in YouTube. We progressed with the reading by covering a chapter a week in class, assigning one for homework, and by covering specific sections with the audible playing in the background in class. Students were also assigned three to four reading comprehension questions a week for their chapter reading at home. During the second week of the study, students continue to read *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) by reading out loud in class. Amelia volunteered to read once and then Ms. Miller read to the class

as I walked around making sure everyone was on the right page. After she was done reading, Ms. Miller asked the class: What are some themes you are beginning to see develop? We gave them a clue by saying that they should think about the grandmother's advice. Ms. Miller referred them to pages fourteen and fifteen and instructed them to work in pairs. Students helped each other find two themes to write down in their notebooks as we walked around assisting them. Ms. Miller and I continually referred them to the right sections within the text while questioning them. We also gave students stapled summaries of each chapter of the book to provide differentiation at home for students who were having a hard time keeping up with the reading on their own because they were not answering all the reading comprehension questions for homework. By the third week of the study, we had students listening to an improved audio version of the book we downloaded through Audible, an online audiobook subscription service.

Ms. Miller and I also felt it was important for students to understand the metaphors and symbols in the story on a deeper level after teaching some through a weekly vocabulary chart activity during the first two weeks of the study. We created an activity involving strips and images so that students could fill out a chart explaining the metaphors and symbols through their own words in writing. We placed the strips with quotes and images within a folder in the middle of groups of four to five students that worked together through specific guiding instructions. Students drew from what they read in the strips and referred to the images in conversation with each other to guess the metaphor or symbol. Some students naturally took the lead, while others followed instructions and made connections to what the leading students were saying by talking about it within the group and writing it down on their own paper as well. Ms. Miller and I walked around helping those who had not written anything down on their paper by probing with

more questions to help them reflect based on what they had read in relation their own experiences. This assistance helped students make their own connections reflected in their writing (see figure 5).

### Figure 5

#### *Symbols and Metaphors Group Activity by Anna*

Sentence Frames:

\_\_\_\_\_ is being compared to \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ represents \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ is important to the story because \_\_\_\_\_.

SYMBOL	What two things are being compared?	Explain the symbol/metaphor and why it is important to the story.
Fire	The fire represents as a phoenix.	it is important because its like being reborn.
River	The river represents a wall.	Tiver is important because it is like a wall seperating Esperanza and miguel.
Esperanza's Doll	The doll is being represented as memories of her dad.	The doll is important to the story because it is like esperanzas memories of her Dad
Roses	The roses represent the dad.	The roses is important to the story because it was like the roses new the Dad from esperanza says.

On week three, I had side conversations with students who expressed the following regarding their experience with the book and the collaborative activities in the classroom:

**Gabriel:** “This is beginning to get hard, but it’s different and fun at times because I get to work with someone.”

**Emily:** “I like learning about this story because I can identify with it.”

**Johana:** “I didn’t realize what symbols and metaphors were at all before now.”

**Luis:** “I like the father. I think he’s wise because he said many interesting things.”

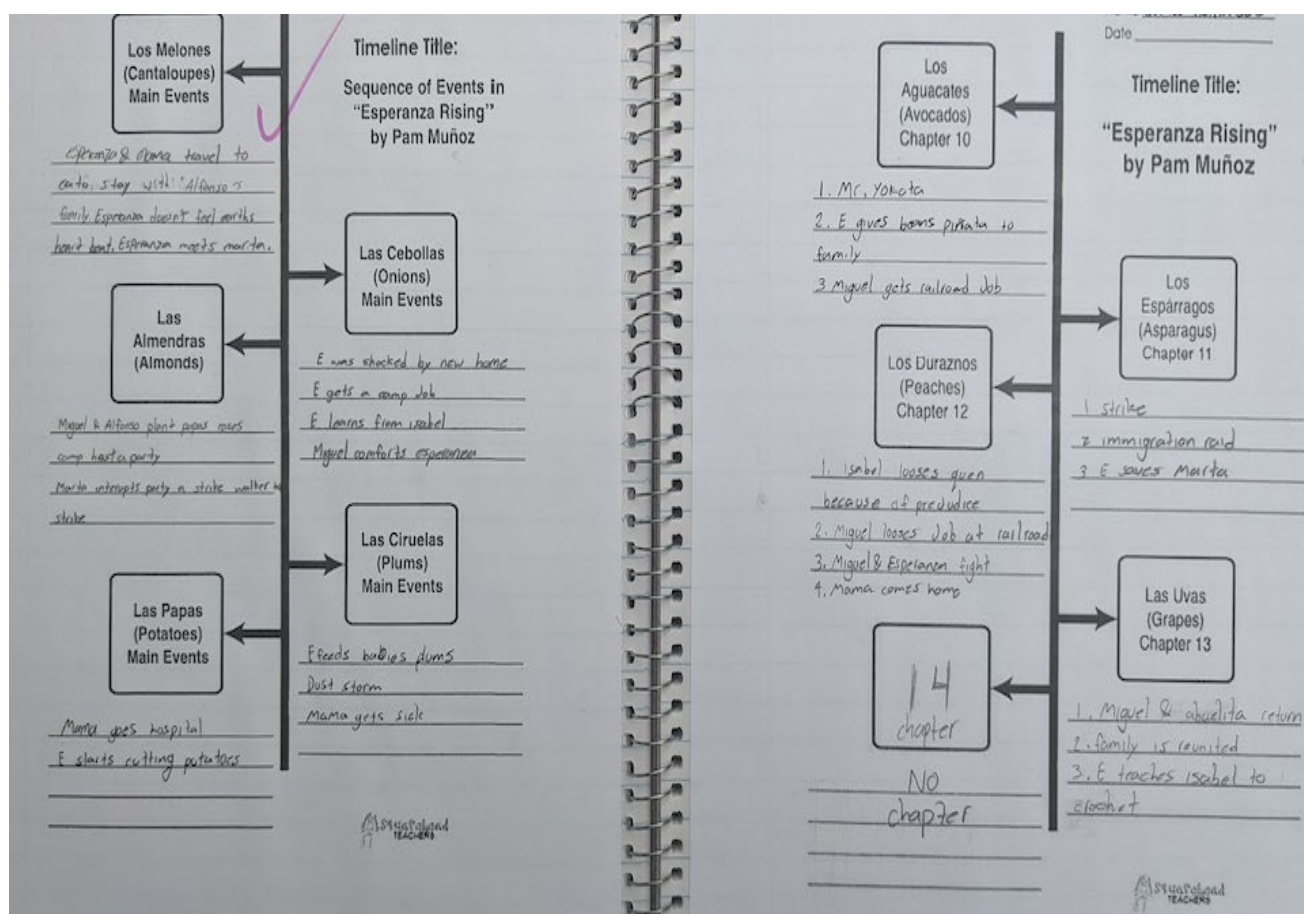
Furthermore, most of the students expressed their desire learn and do more activities in partners when working together. It is also important to highlight that student did well on their Kahoot quizzes. Kahoot is a game-based learning platform that is used as an educational technology promoting learning through games and multiple-choice quizzes. Ms. Miller and I had students review what was going to be on the weekly comprehension quiz through a game and then had students take a quiz of ten questions within Kahoot. Most students continued to do well on their reading comprehension quizzes throughout the progression of the unit, with only two or three students scoring between 50% and 60% each time. Lastly, we also graded student’s notebooks on a weekly basis. This allowed Ms. Miller and I to provide students with feedback on their writing and it also showed us that we needed to provide students with more time on their bell work reflection.

We gave students a timeline of events sheet to fill out because it was important for them to be able to keep track of the events as they happened in the story. We had students work in pairs to help them with this activity (refer to figure 6). At first, students struggled with identifying the main events of the story because they couldn’t find them on their own. I reminded them about the chapter summaries we handed out to help them and walked around assisting them while Ms. Miller referred them to pages of main events in the story. Some of the students were

able to work on their own and help their peer, while others still needed our assistance. We had students working on the timeline of events till the end of the unit. Ms. Miller and I continually assisted with the timeline by going over the main events and by filling it out together a class. Ms. Miller would often ask students to share their timeline answers.

**Figure 6**

*Timeline of Events in Esperanza Rising by Leo*



During week five, we also did an activity a few students mentioned stood out to them during their interview. The activity consisted of students categorizing strips with passages of

events in of when Esperanza's Papa (dad) was alive and after Papa is gone (refer to figure 7). Students took the strips out of a zip lock bag they were each given as they worked in pairs. I noticed students became very focused organizing the strips, reading each quote, playing with their positions on the table, and gluing them on to their notebooks under the categories. Students talked and corrected each other after they had each organized their strips. Ms. Miller and I walked assisting some students as they worked. We gave students guided help by reminding them of their task by saying things like "remember that we are focusing on the topic of social class as you organize the events depicted in the quotes in order." Both, Ms. Miller, and I felt this activity was successful because all the students were able to glue the strips under the right category in their notebook by working together.

### Figure 7

*Before and After Papa was Alive: Categorizing Strips of Events Activity by Daniel*

When papa was alive	After papa is gone
<p>"But they did not board the fancy car with the compartments and leather seats or the dining car with the white linens. Instead, Alfonso led them to a car with rows of wooden benches, like church pews facing each other, already crowded like peasants" (p. 66).</p>	<p>✓            "Esperanza had never been so close to so many peasants before. When she went to school, all of her friends were like her" (p. 66).</p>
<p>"The compartments had seats of soft leather, and she and Miguel had bounced happily upon them. Later, they ate in the dining car at little tables covered in white linens and set with silver and crystal" (p. 64).</p>	<p>"But this time, she was buried beneath mountains of guavas and could not wave to anyone. There was no comfort. And there was no Papa" (p. 65).</p>
<p>"She wore the beautiful blue silk dress and could still see Miguel standing at the station, wearing a bow and tie and practically shining, as if Hortensia had cleaned and starched his entire body" (p. 64).</p>	<p>"On the return ride, she and Miguel, with their noses pressed against the window, and their hands still sticky from the fresh mango, had waved to every person they saw" (p. 65).</p>
<p>"When the waiter came and asked if there was anything he could bring them, Esperanza said, "Yes, please bring lunch now" (p. 64).</p>	<p>"Esperanza stood at the station in Zacatecas, tugging at the second-hand dress. It didn't fit properly and was the most awful yellow. And even though they had been out of the wagon for some hours, she still smelled like guavas" (p. 65).</p>
<p>"The men and women dressed in their hats and fancy clo smiled and chuckled at what must have looked like a dot father and two privileged children" (p. 64).</p>	<p>"But it is not easy to get a job in Mexico. You need <i>una palanca</i>, a lever, to get a job at the railroads. I had no connections, but your father did. Since I was a small boy, he gave me his word that he would help me" (p. 74).</p>
	<p>"When you scorn these people, you scorn Miguel, Hortensia, and Alfonso. And you embarrass me and yourself. As difficult as it is to accept, our lives are different now" (p. 70).</p>

Another activity that stood out to students in their learning process during week five was the pentagon foldable activity (refer to figure 8). Students explored the major topics of

patriarchy, social class, and prejudice in the book by cutting the outline of a pentagon and folding its flaps, on which they wrote quotes as examples for each of the topics inside the flaps with the page numbers written on the outside. Initially, some students stared at the instructions on the power point slide on the smart board for a while and mentioned they didn't understand. Others took to working quickly, however, most of them struggled with skimming through the pages we listed for them because they kept raising their hand for help. Ms. Miller and I guided them by telling them to open the book to the first page on the power point and started skimming by reading over the passages. I continually asked them: "So, what topic do you think is being represented there?" Students would always give me a good answer, but Ms. Miller did mention that they were not used to doing this kind of work. Most students were halfway done with this assignment by the time the bell rang the day we did this activity. This activity was hard for two students with Individualized Education Program's (IEP's) sitting at the back of the classroom. These were students with individualized education program plans who needs special education to meet their needs. Ms. Miller and I dedicated more time to guide these students by sitting next to them, guiding them through questions like the one's mentioned above, walking them through the thought process of why a quote represented a specific topic, and by giving them hints as to where the answer could be found on the page. We also gave these students extra time to finish their work on other days.





he would strike homework, which I found interesting because most of the students complained about having to do the reading comprehension questions for homework in their interviews.

### Figure 9

#### *Think/Pair/Share Activity by Leo*

Think Pair Share \_\_\_\_\_

Write your topic on the line above. Then, list the required information in the following areas as indicated.

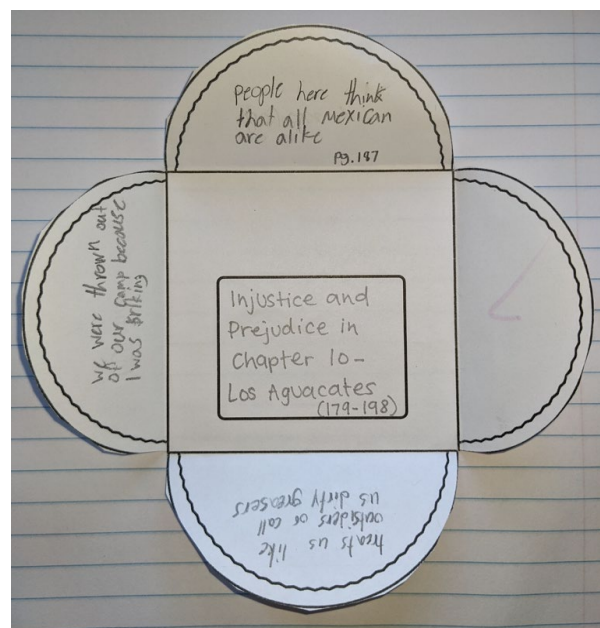
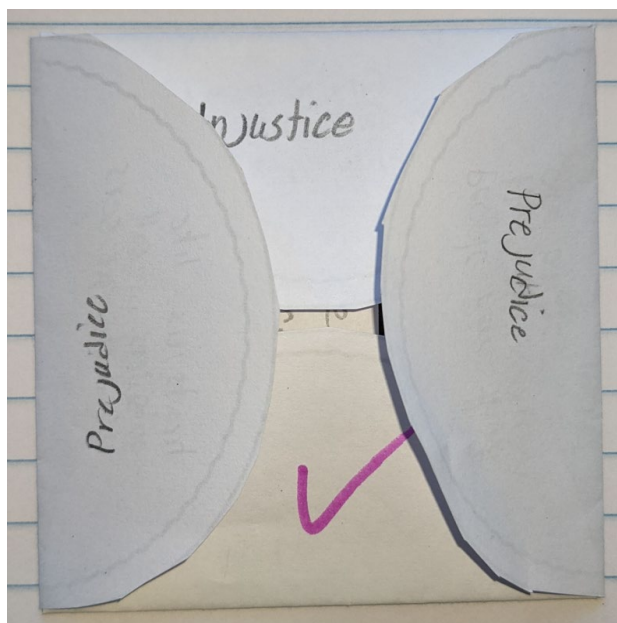
What I thought...	What my partner thought..	What we decided to share..
<p>I wouldn't strike because if you get caught you can't earn money and you will separate from your family. if I don't strike I can earn money and be with my family.</p>	<p>My Partner would keep working because he doesn't want to separate from his family and he can earn money</p>	<p>we both agree because we don't want our family being separated &amp; we can earn money.</p>

During week five, Ms. Miller and I also led an activity on the topics of prejudice and injustice through a square shape foldable activity (see Figure 10) students had to cut and then write examples for each topic through quotes taken from passages in the book. Like in the previous foldable shape activity, I continually redirected students to their work and reminded them of the steps they had to take to arrive at passages that contained quotes that were examples of prejudice and injustice. Some students still struggled with this task because they struggled

with understanding main ideas by skimming and finding passages in the book. I gave extra attention and guidance to the usual two students with IEP's sitting at the back of the classroom. Overall, most of the students were able to complete this activity successfully with less help since they had more practice now.

### Figure 10

*Square Foldable Activity by Daniel*

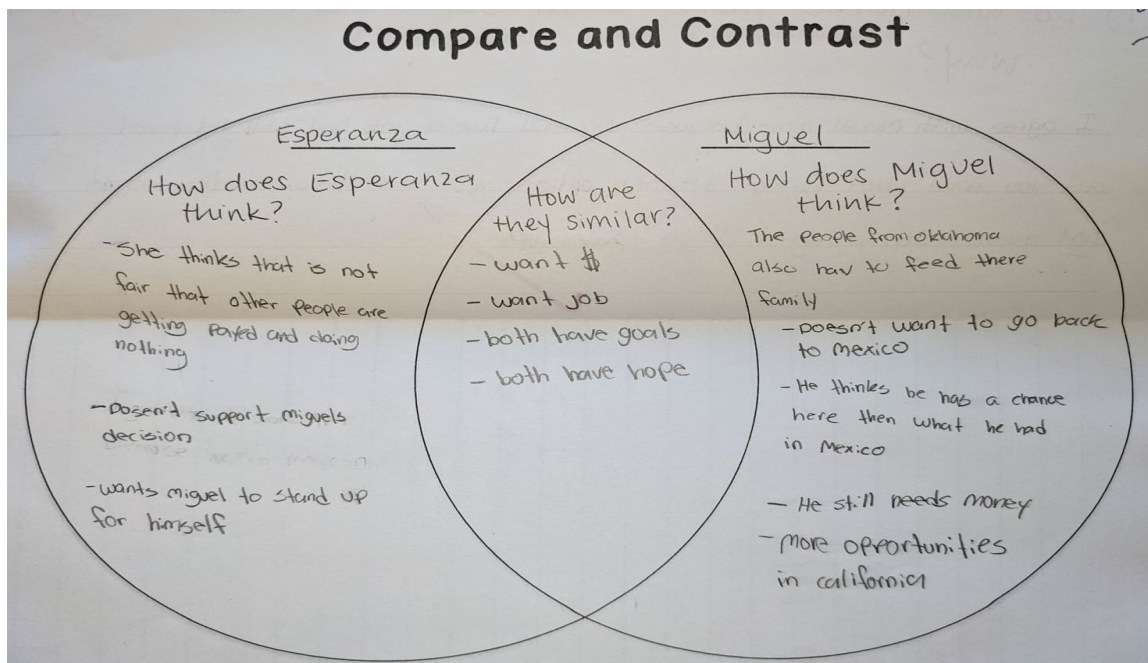


During week five of the study, students also completed a Venn diagram on Miguel and Esperanza in which they compared and contrasted their characters to promote deeper reflection about how the characters viewed their life experiences, as well as for students to be able to compare themselves to the characters in the story (see Figure 11). This activity was successful,

because every student was able to write a short essay response about who they agreed with the most by explaining why.

**Figure 11**

*Venn Diagram and Short Response by Ava*



① Do you agree more with Esperanza or Miguel?  
Why?

I agree with Miguel more because you still have a job and still get payed  
and you don't want to lose the only option you have because they might  
not even listen to Miguel if he speaks up.

In her work, Ava wrote about how she agreed with Miguel since risking being expelled from the work camp was not worth him speaking up. Most students discussed the same reasoning as a

class with each other and decided they agreed more with Miguel than with Esperanza by saying the following:

**Gabriel:** “Miguel is more mature than Esperanza.”

**Amelia:** “Although both of them are right, Esperanza is being very mean when she talks to Miguel, and she should be more patient because of the situation they are in.”

**Victoria:** “I would have done what Miguel did.”

During the last week of the unit, students finished reading the last chapter of *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) in class by following along to with the audible in their books as Ms. Miller and I walked around making sure students were on the right page. After we finished reading the entire book, Ms. Miller went over plot structure (refer to figure 12) so that students had a clear idea of the structure of the story.



Figure 12

*Bell Work and Plot Structure Example by Amelia*

Wednesday Bellwork  
 Choose one quote you like from the book, "Esperanza Rising".  
 Write the quote in your notebook and explain (if) how you can relate to it.

- Quote "Don't be afraid to start over" and "There are no roses without thorns".

- I went through A LOT of difficulties this year, it was painful, sad, horrible, difficult but at the same time ~~difficult~~ beautiful like arose.

Setting	Rising Action	Climax	Falling Action	Resolution
Esperanza has a perfect life, she is the wealthy daughter of a ranch owner.	Papa is killed by bandits.	Miguel disappears with Esperanza's money.		Miguel returns from his journey with Abuelita.
Main characters: Esperanza, Mamá, Abuelita, Papá, Miguel, Alfonso, Hortensia	The tios burn down the ranch when Mama refuses to marry Tio Luis.	Esperanza reaches a breaking point and tells Miguel she has no hope for the future.		Mama comes home from the hospital.
Setting: El Rancho de las Rosas, Aguascalientes, México	Mama and Esperanza secretly move to the U.S. with Miguel, Hortensia, and Alfonso. They leave Abuelita behind.			Esperanza has grown stronger and regains hope for the future.
	Esperanza has trouble adapting to her new life and chores.			Esperanza celebrates her 14th birthday with her family.
	Mama gets sick and goes to the hospital.			
	Esperanza must work in the fields to make money for mama's hospital bills.			
	Esperanza saves money to pay for Abuelita's journey.			

Students organized the plot structure of *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) in their notebooks by gluing strips with events from the book under the following categories: Setting, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. After students organized these in their notebooks, some students volunteered to share their responses to the class while others checked if their strips were placed under the right categories before gluing them in their notebooks. Lastly, we also introduced students to the end of unit project and had them working on them for

the rest of the week in class. This project consisted of students selecting two quotes from *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) representing two major themes from the book and write two short essay responses about what each quote meant to them and how it related to Esperanza's life. Then students had to create a small poster with symbols that related to the quotes and reflections they made. Ms. Miller created a station towards the back of the classroom to help struggling students with their writing. She aided students by probing them with questions to help them reflect on the two quotes they chose to write about. Some students struggled with coming up with personal examples of how some of the quotes related to their life, but eventually they would think of something to write about. The students that were able to finish their posters by the end of the week were able to include creative symbols that portrayed what they wrote in relation to themselves.

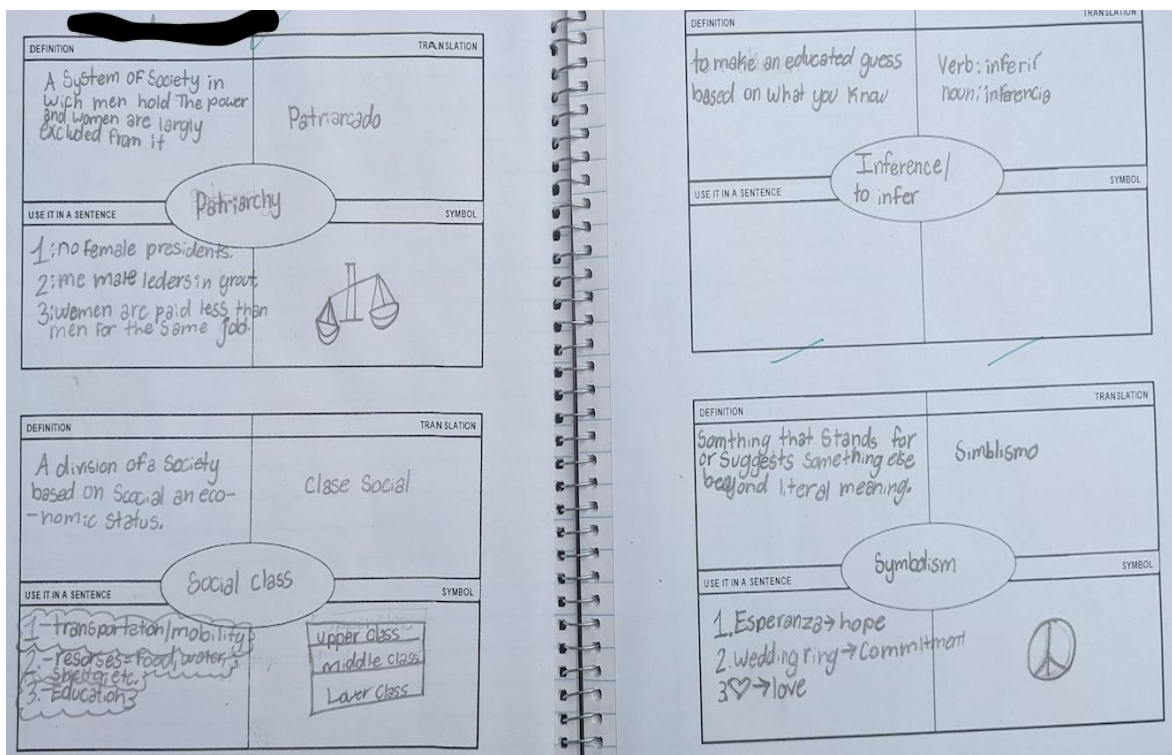
### **Teacher Led Instruction on New Vocabulary and Students' Responses**

Ms. Miller and I taught new topics or concepts on a weekly basis through a vocabulary chart activity. For example, we taught the following vocabulary in order as we read the book: social class, prejudice, patriarchy, perseverance, and social justice. We also taught the following literary devices so that students could understand the themes in the book: Metaphor, inference, and symbolism. Understanding the vocabulary and literary devices helped students make sense of the book as they reflected throughout the unit (refer to figure 13). For example, when Ms. Miller taught "metaphor" she began by asking the students if they remembered what a metaphor was. Several students took guesses, while most remained quiet. We proceeded to show students a short You Tube video clip explaining metaphors to help them with their vocabulary chart on "metaphor." Some students participate by providing funny metaphor examples and Ms. Miller

laughed with them while providing her own. After that, students glued their charts inside their notebooks, like they did with every new vocabulary they learned throughout the unit.

**Figure 13**

*Weekly Vocabulary Chart Activity to Teach Topics and Literary Devices by Anna*



Ms. Miller and I taught symbolism through the vocabulary chart activity, and we showed a video of general symbols most individuals are familiar with around the world. Then, I took the role of explaining that Mexican culture has indigenous roots, and that indigenous people use symbols to communicate. This was followed by a video and explanation displaying different indigenous symbols to provide students with examples. Afterwards, I helped students with an activity in which they had to draw symbols representing their own identities or cultures in their notebooks



by modeling my own symbols and then walking around assisting students by posing questions. Students drew and talked about the following symbols in their notebooks: a cross referring to their faith in God, a heart for love and family, a soccer ball representing the sport they love, a Mexican flag representing their culture, an art easel with a canvas for their love of art, food and drinks they enjoy eating, a four-D cube for their love of playing the video game Roblox, the letter A for Avengers because they watched the movie with their family, the peace sign for family and friendship; and happy and sad faces to demonstrate emotions.

During week three, we went over the topic of patriarchy with students through the vocabulary chart activity. Ms. Miller asked the class: “have you ever heard women saying, ‘smash the patriarchy’?” Student demonstrated excitement for this topic by raising their hand and participating. The following is an example of what two students said:

**Gabriel:** “Men always voted, and women didn’t have the right to vote.”

**Daniel:** “Maybe women don’t have power in the white house.”

Amelia, Victoria, and Ava nodded in agreement when these two students said these comments.

No student raised their hand in agreement when Ms. Miller asked if they believed that women make less money than men, and no one raise their hand in agreement when Ms. Miller asked if women made more money than men. Then Ms. Miller pulled up a woman’s median earnings chart/statistics across races when compared to what the average white man makes, showing that women make less money in the work force. This generated good discussion amongst the students, and the female students grunted and crossed their arms upset by this information.

Victoria said the following: “that’s not fair” to express her disapproval. Amelia, sitting behind her also talked about issues in her family regarding money, and Ms. Miller used this moment as a

Segway to teach about Tio Luis through a character analysis sheet students continued to fill out throughout the unit to understand the characters in the book better.

During week four, another topic we taught as a new vocabulary word, and that caught students' attention was, social class. First, Ms. Miller and I provided students with examples of social class. When Ms. Miller asked the students what they thought social class was, they said the following:

**Gabriel:** "If you are of a high social class, you can buy a car."

**Leo:** "You can buy more things."

**Luis:** "You can have food and shelter,"

**Aurora:** "You can have more education."

Then, Ms. Miller asked students the following question: What social class does Esperanza belonged to? They all replied in unison: "to the lower social class," and some continued talking by saying "because of what she's going through" at the same time. Then Ms. Miller proceeded to show the students a visual of a social class in society. She made connections to what Esperanza and her mother were going through in the book and how they belonged to the low social class in the U.S.

Lastly, during week five of the unit, another important topic we taught as a new vocabulary word was, prejudice. When Ms. Miller and I were going over prejudice, the following two students volunteered to speak:

**Amelia:** "In sixth grade a student asked me if I lived in a cabin in Mexico in the dessert,"

**Gabriel:** "The word 'peasant' is prejudiced, but mama is kind and talks to everyone on the train."

Ms. Miller then proceeded to ask the rest of the students about how Esperanza was acting during the train ride on her way to California, and most of the students nodded in agreement that she was acting spoiled. Ms. Miller was able to cover the topic of prejudice and tied it to social class by asking students how they would have acted in such a situation. Most students agreed that they would not have acted as spoiled as Esperanza, because they expressed that they know what it's like to start over in a different place while struggling to start a new life with their parents.

### **Themes that Emerged from the Interviews**

In this section, I explain themes that emerged from the interviews. The interviews allowed students a safe space to share their thoughts and opinions on the topics covered throughout the unit in relation to their lives to understand the major themes of the story, the purpose of the breathing meditation, and their own learning process. I arrived at the following themes after color coding students' responses into categories and then analyzing them through a Chicana feminist epistemological lens revealing the following:

1. Matured appreciation for life and family.
2. Overcoming hard lived experiences.
3. Acceptance of starting over as part of life.
4. Reflecting and gaining consciousness through life hurdles.
5. Hard work equals success.
6. Countering notions of truth through an evolved knowledge of social justice, prejudice, patriarchy, and social class
7. Awareness through a broader perspective in connection to the book.
8. Students reflected on their positive learning experience with the unit.
  - Overall reflections on Unit.
  - Activity students found most helpful.
9. Students reflected positively on the breathing meditation.
  - Students felt happy and more relaxed.
  - Connecting to emotions through the breathing meditation
10. Students' unique definitions of mindfulness
  - Students practice mindfulness through art
  - Students practice mindfulness through hobbies they enjoy.

### **Matured appreciation for life and family**

Some students reflected on the meaning of life and had deep realizations that led to moments of *conocimiento* they didn't think about before reading the book *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) in their interviews. Amelia, Gabriel, and Anna had life realizations and made connections to the book. Amelia reflected on recent deaths in her family and how she became more conscious about life after reflecting on how some of her family members are no longer with her. She connected this realization to Esperanza's experience of losing her father and how Esperanza became more conscious of the people around her after she lost everything.

**Amelia:** "I lost my grandmother, my grandfather, my uncle, my cat, and God, like in the range of five months. So, after that, I started like, value life more, because my mind kind of wasn't conscious of that before. So, I became more conscious of death and those things of death. There that happened. So, I think Esperanza especially becomes more conscious of that and becomes more conscious that she isn't superior to the people around her, but she's just like, born with a different luck."

Like Amelia, Gabriel also had a life realization that made him more conscious by reflecting on how not everyone in life achieves happiness because they have so many problems. There were moments during his interview when he talked about how hard it was for his mom to find a high paying job and how his father still lives in poor conditions in a very small apartment in Mexico. This thought process may have led Gabriel to this realization in connection to the experiences of the characters in the book.

**Gabriel:** "I realized that not all people have a good life and that it's hard, and that some jobs as well. Some don't overcome their problems to be happy."

Lastly, Anna also had her own life realization that made her more conscious by reflecting on how she might be perceived by other people who may not treat her well because she's Mexican. She also felt that there is a good side to everything in life by reflecting on how her family is always there for her and how that makes her feel strong in other parts of her interview. Anna may have come to this realization by reflecting on how prejudice is portrayed in the book.

**Anna:** “It did help me think more about how other people see me as. Probably not right now so much as back then. But probably some things people assume about me if their family taught them things about other, like races. Probably how they think of me or also how family is always around you. You're never alone. Because your family will always be there for you.”

### **Overcoming hard life experiences**

Amelia, Gabriel, and Victoria made connections to characters or events in the text by tapping their own lived experiences or that of their families in their realizations related to how they overcame hard life experiences. Amelia reflected on how she had to leave her hometown in Mexico when things were not going well. She experienced death in her family and the dynamics of her family changed drastically, including the shock of moving to the U.S. There was a moment during a side conversation when Amelia told me that family is everything to her because most of them are always there to support her through hard times.

**Amelia:** “Like my cousins are like my little sisters because and like my older middle sister, because their mom died. So, my aunt died. So, we traveled, the six of us here to Atlanta, and we traveled the thirteenth of September of two thousand nine. So, I wasn't like even ten yet. I was nine when we traveled here and it shocked me a lot, like leaving

my hometown, leaving where I had lived all those years, it just like, I don't know, it just feels weird. Just, I was so shocked by everything I saw.”

Gabriel talked about how he identified with Esperanza’s character. Throughout his interview, he talked about many hard moments in his life leading to realizations he did not expect to become conscious of. For example, there was a time when he didn’t want to share his bell work response about an upsetting time in his life because his grandparents had just recently passed due to COVID, and he was struggling to cope. Gabriel reflected on how sad he felt and how he had to mindfully remind himself that his grandparents are still with him.

**Gabriel:** “I went through a hard time, like Esperanza did, and I had to overcome it. It was personal. I think it was a personal problem where it said, I don't remember, but I think it was about like, what was one challenge that you had to overcome? And I put down when my grandparents died, because they had died that week, and I started to have tears going down my face. I remembered that it's going to be okay and that they're still with me.

Lastly, Victoria reflected on her own family and realized how they always give her life advice regarding things that stress her out, such as homework and doing good in her classes. She reflected on how her family is always there to support her, like Esperanza’s *Mama* and *Abuela* in the story.

**Victoria:** “Sometimes my mom and my grandma. Being like, give me advice. Like, if I panic over something, they will just tell me that's it's going to be okay. And then they would give me something.”

### **Acceptance of Starting over as Part of Life**

Amelia, Gabriel, and Ava had moments of realizations that led to consciousness by reflecting on the metaphors/sayings in the book. For example, they experienced meaningful realizations through *abuelita's* saying in the book when she expressed to Esperanza that she shouldn't be afraid to start over in life through the symbol of a phoenix being re-born from its ashes. Amelia mentioned the metaphors/symbols made her reflect more on the concept of starting over by providing simple examples and by talking about the reality of the day-to-day process of living and having to work hard in life. She also expanded on this idea in other parts of her interview when talking about her daily routine and future life aspirations. Amelia emphasized how no one stays the same because we have more experiences as we grow older in life.

**Amelia:** “No matter how much hard work you've done. Don't be afraid to start over. It's like math or science or when you're doing a drawing, just erase it all because it went bad. I mean, every day won't be easy, because somehow, I mean, change is part of life, you are reborn, and I mean, it doesn't matter. You don't want to, but you will eventually be reborn. You will mentally change the things you'll like, mentally change.”

Likewise, Gabriel reflected on the theme of starting over and had a realization when he talked about a family member in his life who was doing bad and then he/she was able to do good. He talked about how this person worked hard start over and then explained how no one is good or bad in life, because they can always change their course.

**Gabriel:** “There are people that I know that were alcoholics, drug addicts, and all that and they stopped doing it. They went to a mental hospital. I don't know what they are

called, and they changed the personality and now they don't drink as much or do drugs as much.”

Lastly, Ava also reflected on the on the theme of starting over because she reflected on how one of her uncle's died and she knows what it feels like to have to move on when a loved one dies in the family. Ava reflected how she really enjoyed how the book ended because the characters were able to resolve their main problem, which was reuniting with *Abuelita* at the end, even though they had to accept that *Papa* was not going to be with them.

**Ava:** a tough situation I've had is when one of my uncle's died and it was a tough time because everyone was really sad. And it was just off. But after a while, we just got over it. And we just moved on. Although it was really sad, we still moved on from that, but we're still remembering.

**Ava:** “It was a Phoenix or something. Yeah, that one. It was really cool because they actually did start over, and it ended up being a good thing, because at the end of the day, they were all together, although they weren't with papa, they were together, and they were happy that they were still together.”

### **Reflecting and Gaining Consciousness through Life Hurdles**

Gabriel and Victoria also had moments of realizations that led to consciousness by reflecting on the metaphors/sayings in the book. Gabriel made a reflective connection to his life through the following saying by *Abuelita*, “There is no rose without thorns” (p. 14). He reflected on his own experiences with his friends and how they are both not perfect and capable of hurting each other, just like a beautiful rose that has thorns and can hurt you.



**Gabriel:** “I like the one that says, ‘every rose has its thorns’, because every person has a moment that has really made them feel down or problematic and not everybody is perfect. This is a bit the same as me, and if the person has friends that don't like each other, this will make the other person sad.”

Next, Victoria reflected on how the characters in the story went through ups and downs, and like how a rose has thorns, life is not perfect and smooth all the time. Then Victoria talked about hard moments in her life when somebody dies because it's hard for her to focus and then talked about a recent death in her family and how she struggled to focus on school.

**Victoria:** I think there's one with a rose and I feel like that one was good, because I remember very well that there would be thorns on the rose, and then that kind of like symbolizes the life of other people, and there would be some bumps on it.

### **Hard Work Equals Success**

Amelia, Luis, Leo, and Anna had moments of realizations that led to consciousness about how hard work equals success in life when thinking about how Esperanza had to work to help her mom, and how Miguel always continued to work regardless of the strikes that were happening. Amelia made a connection to Esperanza's and Miguel's work ethic in relation to how she tried to do the same in her life by having a good work ethic herself. There was a point in the interview when she talked about having the discipline to run every morning to feel better, as well as work harder in school so that she can get into New York University (NYU).

**Amelia:** (When talking about Esperanza) “So, she starts working and she realizes that anyone can be anything they want. If they, like, work for it. That's what they struggle with. On top of that, she's like, no, look, you're still poor. She tells Miguel and he

responds with well, I have patience and I will wait till I'm what I want to be. I will wait patiently, and I will keep working because you get what you work for.”

**Amelia:** “When you take your time and know what hard work is, you like, know that. You have to do like everything, like that single phrase that Miguel said, you get what you work for.”

Luis also talked about how hard work pays off when referring to the advice his father often gives him. Throughout his interview, Luis talked about fun things he does with his family. His comments were mostly centered around his desire to work hard to be able to help his family financially in the future.

**Luis:** “I know my dad tells me, like if you work hard enough, you can do it, just things like that because he doesn’t want me to work like how he does. He works at a restaurant, does the *yarda* (yard work). Yeah, like so he wants me to go to college and have a better life.”

Next, Leo also talked about how hard work equals success by reflecting on Esperanza’s character development regarding how she matured and started to do better for her family through hard work. Furthermore, he also reflected on how his own family gives him a good quality of life. He referred to them as being middle class because there was once a time when he couldn’t even watch his favorite cartoons due to his parents not being able to afford the channel.

**Leo:** “Esperanza rised. She worked. Took care of babies. It made her become a little tougher to do hard work.”

**Leo:** “I mean, I used to watch Nickelodeon cartoon network as a kid but then that changed.”

**Ms. E:** “Why?”

**Leo:** “Cause couldn't have money and that cartoon for a long time.”

**Leo:** “My family works really hard to get money and to pay money. Mexicans work really hard to reach their goal”

Lastly, Anna also made a reference to how hard work equals success by reflecting on her mom’s successes in relation to society’s prejudiced view of women as weaker. Anna also mentioned that her family is middle class and can buy things they don’t really need because of their good economic standing in life.

**Anna:** Because I feel like, just because women are supposedly weaker or not as hard working as men, we work. A lot of us work the same amount or even more than men. That's just the way people look at things and I feel like it's not really fair. Just because we're a woman doesn't mean we can do less things than other people.

**Anna:** “I would think that my mom probably is kind of like Esperanza’s mom, because Esperanza’s mom is kind of hard working, and my mom has a lot of things and she's hard working too.”

### **Countering Notions of Truths through an Evolved Knowledge of Social Justice, Prejudice, Patriarchy, and Social Class**

#### **Social Justice**

Some of the students analyzed and reflected on the book through the topics of social justice, prejudice, patriarchy, and social class. Amelia and Ava reflected on the topic of social justice through Marta’s character. Amelia achieved a better understanding of social justice by reflection on Marta’s decision to strike for better working conditions for herself and the people in her work

camp due to the unjust treatment they were receiving. In conversation with her peer during the quote's foldable activity, she talked about how Mexicans didn't have food, water, or appropriate shelter to live in. In her interview, she expanded on the idea that social justice is treating people justly by doing what is right for everyone.

**Amelia:** "It means to seek for what's right, for not only you, but those around you? I guess. Like Marta, right? She wanted to, mainly for herself and for her mom, good conditions and better work conditions and she wanted like, better payment and better housing, right? But she also wanted it for the people around her. That's kind of what motivated her to do this strike."

Ava also felt that she understood the topic of social justice through Marta's decision to strike. In her interview, Ava reflected on how the Mexican workers at the camp didn't make enough money to maintain their families and that it was reasonable for them to want to strike because working every day for so little money is unjust. Ava came to this understanding by reading about the terrible conditions of the families living in little shacks or tents, and children going hungry for days during the quotes foldable activity and talking about it with her partner.

**Ava:** "I think it's fair to do one because if you were working hard and it wasn't enough or gave you enough, like for you and for your family. So, you would have to strike with people or yourself, you know, and because it wouldn't be fair to be working so hard and every day just to get a bit money and like housing and all that."

## **Prejudice**

Gabriel, Anna, and Leo reflected on the topic of prejudice. Gabriel felt that you can't judge a person by how they look because they may be lying. This idea aligned with a comment he told

his peer during the quotes foldable activity when he said that Esperanza was still acting like she was rich in the train ride to California when she was already poor. He also thought the rich should help the poor because they have more than enough money to do so. He also explained this to his peer by talking about a moment during the train ride when a beggar asking for money received money from the poor instead of the rich people walking by him.

**Gabriel:** “I think that it’s a bad idea. You shouldn’t base looks to create your view of a person, because some people can be looking homeless on the street and may be rich in their life and be lying just to get money. Yeah, and I think that the richer people are the higher the class. They should help the poor instead of just wasting money on stuff that they don't really need.

Anna reflected on prejudice by explaining that you can’t judge a book by its cover. In her interview, she also explained that they called Mexicans dirty greasers in the book and defended them while including herself as part of them by saying that they are just regular people that work harder than most other people. Anna was analyzing the baseless comment made about Mexicans in the book and felt upset by the idea that she herself could be called such a terrible thing because of the way she looks or the kind of work she and her family does.

**Anna:** “I think prejudice is really like, I think a bad idea to have, because not everybody. Just because you look a certain way doesn't mean you are how you look. It doesn't mean like you belong in a certain place or something.”

Lastly, Leo also disagreed with prejudice by citing how Mexican’s were called dirty greasers in the book. Leo’s tone of voice hinted at how upset he was making this comment when he was discussing his quote on prejudice with his friend during the star shaped foldable activity.

**Leo:** “I think it's unfair to judge someone by not knowing who they really are. I remember that she said something about someone that I know that Americans, from I don't know where from, that they think that they're that Mexicans are dirty, and they only work for a certain job. That made me feel like angry because it's not true.”

### **Patriarchy**

Gabriel, Ava, Victoria, Anna, and Daniel reflected on the topic of patriarchy.

In his interview, Gabriel expressed women already have enough problems in their life, to also deal with the egos of men and their need to be respected on everything in relation to what is happening in the book. There is also a point when he talked about how his mother is a single mother who had to work hard to achieve the position of manager at her job without the help of anyone to provide for him.

**Gabriel:** “I disagree with that, because women, they also have problems in their life that they can't overcome, and I feel like women are equal. Just because of their sex, doesn't mean they are less equal than those men that can probably hurt someone a lot if they realize that they're not getting as much respect as other people are.”

Ava also disagreed with how patriarchy was enacted in the story. In her conversation with her peer during the quote's foldable activity, as well as in her interview, Ava talked about how Esperanza had to struggle with her mom after her father died and how she had to work to pay her mother's hospital bills herself. Ava reflected on how this proved that she was as strong as a man because she could provide for her family.

**Ava:** “Well women, they can also be like, some of them can be better than men, because some men are not that strong. But women, they can go beyond also. And they can do

better. But it's not fair that they treat men better than women just because they are men and are paid more. That's not a great thing to do.”

Next, Victoria also reflected that patriarchy is a bad thing in society and compared it to the present moment. Victoria explained in her interview that the women in the book were able to see Marta’s strength and maybe felt that they could also be strong themselves.

**Victoria:** “Yeah, like back then the women were not able to take power over the men, but these days they are now. Women weren't strong, but now they think they do because they see what the other women did.”

Furthermore, Anna was also against patriarchy and felt very passionate about her opinion. She felt that she works just as hard as any boy her age and talked about how her own mom is like Esperanza’s in that she has worked hard for the family to progress in this country.

**Anna:** “Just because women are supposedly weaker or not as hard working as men, we work. A lot of us work the same amount or even more than men. That's just the way people look at things, and I feel like it's not fair because, just because we're a woman doesn't mean we can do less things than other people.”

Lastly, Daniel also felt that patriarchy was a bad thing in society because he felt that everyone should be treated the same because no one is better than anyone else. This is a comment he also made in class during the vocabulary lesson on patriarchy.

**Daniel:** I mean it’s bad because they should get treated equally. With women and men. Like, for example, like supposedly men get paid more than women and that shouldn't be fair because if he has all the control that means he can do whatever he wants, and others might not like what he does.

## Social Class

Ava, Aurora, and Anna reflected on the topic of social class. Ava reflected on the topic of social class based on what was happening with Esperanza and her family in the story. In other parts of her interview, she talked about how you can read what Esperanza was thinking through her perspective and how she felt about the things she was going through in the book. She talked about how this gave her insight into how people feel when they are going through tough situations. Ava also felt that it is mean to treat people differently due to the way they look or social status, because we all feel the same things on the inside.

**Ava:** “Each person is the same no matter what, even if they have money. They can treat them differently only because they have money, and then there's other people that don't have money. It is just kind of mean because you could say that you're giving better things to rich people and then poor people are just there with nothing. Some of them don't even have a house, and that's just not fair for them to live through that.

Next, Aurora also reflected on the topic of social class through Esperanza's experience. Here, Aurora was reflecting by inferring that Esperanza's actions were wrong because she was about to be poor like the little girl and didn't even know it. She proceeded to say that Esperanza was about to start struggling a lot in life and expanded on this idea by saying that Esperanza was about to experience the same treatment she was giving the little girl.

**Aurora:** “It made me feel bad because she, she was not used to being poor and she was used to being rich, and she didn't want, like, I think how she referred to the peasants not to touch her or anything. She didn't know she was going to become one of them. She didn't want to be near her or wanted her to touch something that was hers and I didn't like that,



because I knew she was going to become one of them anyway, so she could have treated the little girl more nicely.”

Lastly, Anna also reflected on the topic of social class and had a similar view. There were moments during the interview when Anna talked about how everyone in life goes through ups and downs and we are never the same all the time. Anna felt that everyone should at least have access to all the necessities in life so that everyone has a chance at success.

**Anna:** “Because a lot of time, just because you have less money doesn't mean you're different from another person. I mean, just like, I feel like social class doesn't really, I don't think non one needs to be in a place because we all at some point will probably, well, I don't think everyone, but most people at some point will be in the lower class. If everyone or most of the people are in lower class, a lot of people won't have enough things or resource. So, I don't think we really need social class.”

### **Awareness through a Broader Perspective in Connection to the Book**

Anna and Daniel made connections to characters or events in the book by talking about their lived experiences with their families and how they overcame them. Anna reflected on the harsh conditions the characters had to endure in the book, and on how Mexicans like them made her think about how she and her family would have been treated during the great depression.

**Anna:** “It made me feel more aware of how probably my family would have been treated if they came to America at the time that the book was written.”

Next, Daniel reflected on the characters of Esperanza and Miguel when they fought about their differing views when Miguel lost his job. Miguel believed it was better to be patient, but Esperanza was losing hope and becoming impatient like Martha. In his interview, Daniel

explained that he felt the book helped him think about the process of making decisions in his own life because of reading the character interactions in the book.

**Daniel:** You have to think about, like, who had the better idea. Like if Esperanza thought that Miguel should stand up and like not let him get control over, or just like, or like Miguel, to just to leave it alone. It helps you like, make the decisions better, and it helps you like think if you should do that, or you shouldn't.

### **Student's Reflected Positively on Their Learning Experience**

#### **Overall Reflections on Unit**

Amelia and Victoria reflected on their learning processes by talking about how Ms. Miller and I implemented the unit. Amelia felt that learning with other's is much better than learning by herself. Amelia was always willing and excited to participate by being the first to raise her hand, say a comment, or get her work done. She enjoyed talking with her peers during classroom discussions by starting the discussion or adding more to it when answering the bell work questions. Amelia also appreciated that we didn't just have them taking notes while we taught. She mentioned how she enjoyed the continual daily interaction with us, as well as when working with a partner, because she felt like she could voice what she was thinking, felt validated, and would make more sense of what she was learning through the book. We would often have side conversations about what she was learning in relation to her life experiences. Amelia's interview demonstrated that she truly knew the information that Ms. Miller and I taught throughout the unit. Our interview was natural, and she didn't talk as if she was trying to recollect something she had memorized from a handout.

**Amelia:** “I mean, I think it's a really good way of like teaching a book. It's really different of how I'm used to, because my last elementary school, they just like told us, oh, yeah, read the book, read the book with us and then you make a summary. Just you do it and that just became, that just, like, made the whole thing really, really boring. Yeah, but if others are, like constantly helping you and you're discussing with them, and you participate, and they participate back and it's just like a discussion, it's really fun. I mean, all the things we did, I think it's like a more fun way of learning than just taking notes and those things. I like taking notes, but that's just me. I mean, sometimes I just don't memorize things, and I don't memorize things and I'm just there just blindly taking notes, which is not good, because you're not learning like anything at all.”

Furthermore, Victoria referred to some of the things that Ms. Miller and I did that helped her. It is interesting to note how well Victoria was able to pick up on what we did as teachers to help her understand the book. She was very reflective throughout the entire study and would also continually ask me or Ms. Miller questions every time she was confused about something. At first, she was very shy, but then she became comfortable as she began to understand the vocabulary words on the topics in the book. Victoria also worked well every time she was with a peer and enjoyed all the hands-on activities. This is reflected in how nicely she maintained her notebook and how well she did all her work.

**Victoria:** “I like how you guys would explain to us if we didn't understand it and then y'all would give us some examples. It was, while we glued in, or made the star, and we had to get in every page, but and we had to do like the prejudice and the social class, and I remembered I didn't know what prejudice meant. So, I think it was you that came, and you

like you said, the definition of it and you gave me an example, and then you told me to read the page where the example was on.”

### **Activity Students Found Most Helpful.**

Ava, Victoria, Anna, and Leo talked about how the timeline of events helped them learn and remember the story throughout the unit. Ava was always concerned about remembering what was happening in the story and she felt the timeline helped her keep up with the work. Victoria liked how the activities she glued in her notebook helped her remember what she was learning. Furthermore, Anna reflected on how the timeline was helpful in relation to how writing things down really did help her remember more. Lastly, Leo also liked keeping up with the main events of the book through the timeline when asked about something he enjoyed doing throughout the unit. Leo especially liked that he could recall what was happening in the book every time he would go back to class.

**Ava:** “One activity is, probably talking about it, like when we had the timeline about every chapter, we could like, think about it, like the main idea of each chapter, and we can get caught up and like, if we ever don't remember something, we could always go back, and they're the notes to some of the questions we did for homework, and yeah, that helped with my work, because I saw it and I remembered stuff so I could do my work, and then put some of that information in.”

**Victoria:** “And it was kind of easy, because of the of how we just like, we're able to learn about the things and then like how we just had to glue stuff in our notebook, and we could just go back to remembering it.”

**Anna:** “It also helped me by knowing that a lot of time, if I'm reading something, or writing something down, or mostly reading, probably a timeline is best for remembering things.”

**Leo:** “Describing the main events, because it was basically like turned the whole book for small parts about how Esperanza ended in the book. Like I almost knew almost all the information but not everything.”

### **Students Reflected Positively on the Breathing Mindfulness Meditation**

Students reflected on the short breathing mindfulness meditation in relation to how it made them feel and in connection to the book. They did this by reflecting on their personal thoughts, by making connections to characters in the book, and by talking about things that helped them feel relaxed in their lives during the interview.

### **Students Felt Happy and more Relaxed.**

Amelia, Gabriel, Ava, and Victoria had the following initial responses on how the mindfulness meditation made them feel:

**Amelia:** “This feeling like when someone just does something really, really kind and you were like, aww, so that's what it felt when we were like doing meditation that just friend feeling.”

**Gabriel:** “It made me feel calm and good. Like, the stuff that happened to me recently out of my head, and uh, led me to a point where I was happy.”

**Ava:** “Well, it made me, like, oh, first, when we did it, it was really calming and also you could like just relax and think about tough things.”

**Victoria:** “Um, I think I liked it. Because we get to pause, like, an every, like, we get a start, like in the beginning to get a pause from and we can really start (de)stressfulness from all the other classes. Sometimes, it would be hard, because I would get like, I would start panicking and I would just start drawing on my, like paper that I had out, and like that, I’m just listening to you. Drawing kind of helped me out, because then I could just really solve the stressfulness from my mind.”

Amelia talked about the concept of mindfulness as something new to her. In her interview, she talked about how she started to notice more through her breathing and by tapping her senses when she became more comfortable with the practice. She always took part of the breathing meditation practice by following directions without hesitation and always looked more relaxed afterwards. Next, Gabriel also talked about the positive effects the breathing meditation had on him even though he struggled with being still at first. He started to take it more seriously after the first three attempts by putting his head on his arms crossed on the table and taking deep breaths. Ava also talked about how nice and calm the breathing mediation made her feel overall, however, she would normally sit facing the left side of her desk with eyes open when we first began the practice. She became more comfortable with the practice over time when she began to place her head down on her arms resting on the table with her eyes closed. Lastly, Victoria mentioned that she liked the breathing mediation because it was a time for her to pause and relax. Initially, she struggled with closing her eyes but eventually, she started to close her eyes with her head down on her arms resting on the table when Ms. Miller would play relaxing music in the background during the second week of the study. By week three, most students were closing their eyes and relaxing with eyes closed on their tables through the breathing meditation.

Furthermore, Anna, Daniel, and Leo also reflected the following on how they felt happier and more relaxed through the breathing meditation practice:

**Anna:** “I think it was a good thing to practice, because it helped me relax more on what was happening that day because sometimes, if I have a test that day, another class that I haven't done yet. Uhm. I would, I would kind of be nervous about taking the test, because I don't know if I would remember everything and the mindfulness practice, helped me, kind of calm down and try to do my best on the test.”

**Daniel:** “Because like, if like, like a kid took a test, and like, they came back and they were stressed, like, and they did one, like one mindfulness and they still had that on their mind, they could do another one and it can help them relax.”

**Gabriel:** “Yes, I think it does because usually, I'm not that happy all day but when the fourth period, I started being happy, and since all my friends are in there. I make like jokes or something and make them happy. I try to make their day better because I don't care about myself too much and care about other people more than I care about myself.”

Anna reflected on how the mindfulness breathing meditation helped her calm down. Anna would constantly worry about her grades because she mentioned in her interview that she felt like she had to pass every quiz so that she can get out of ESL. Next, Daniel talked about mindfulness and how calming down can help with school related stress. He viewed the mindfulness breathing meditation as a tool to use at any moment of the day. He also talked about not wanting to do bad on tests because then he would be grounded by his mom but at the same time, mentioned that he was used to getting bad grades. Lastly, Gabriel felt that the mindfulness breathing meditation made him feel happier and calmer. He did not know how to explain why he

felt better after the breathing meditation, but he would just feel like he could joke around with his friends to make them laugh. He just knew that he was calmer and happy in the moment being near his friends so that he didn't have to think about his own sadness.

### **Connecting to Emotions through the Breathing Meditation**

Ava, Victoria, and Amelia had realizations that led them to become conscious of their emotions during breathing meditation. Victoria reflected on emotions she began to have during a breathing meditation practice that asked her to think about emotions as if they were colors. She felt that she could control her emotions better by becoming more aware of them, and by focusing on the present moment.

**Victoria:** I think I liked it when we think about the colors, and I think that one was the one where we were saying what those colors meant to us. I really like that one, because I feel like the colors can show the emotions, and at that time it wasn't really stressful. I felt like I could focus my other things and on what we were talking about.

Ava mentioned that she remembered the mindfulness breathing meditation practice the most because sometimes she was having a hard time and it would help her feel better before getting to work in class. During side conversations, Ava talked about how she sometimes has drama with some of the girls at school and the practice just helped her concentrate more.

**Ava:** “Something I would remember it be the mindfulness practice every day before we start even reading a book or doing our work because you were feeling, so you're better and we're like have bad memories, your morning or something. You just sometimes, it just doesn't go normal every day.”



Lastly, in her interview, Amelia also talked about feeling more alive when she goes to the gym to deal with her emotions in a healthier way. She mentioned that she feels guilty when she doesn't go to the gym because she wants to do the right thing all the time, however, she came to realize that she's too hard on herself. She also talked about how she had different emotions bubbling inside of her with the intention of finding internal balance so that she can be happier.

**Amelia:** "I mean, I think a lot about my emotions and generally when I'm just you know, when I'm not doing when, I just like, sometimes, not sometimes, most of the time, I wake up at five in the morning to go to the gym and do all my responsibilities. I feel like each emotion is like a different person. You know, like that movie from Disney? Like the angry guy and happy girl."

### **Students Definitions of Mindfulness**

#### **Students Practice Mindfulness through Art**

Gabriel, Ava, and Anna had realizations that led them to become conscious of how they implemented mindfulness in their lives after school while the study was taking place:

**Gabriel:** (When talking about art) "It makes me feel calm because it's something that I enjoy doing. I have a lot of drawings in my house, but sometimes I don't draw a lot because I have schoolwork and all this stuff I worry about, and sometimes, like 30 minutes, I cry every day or something, because the old memories start coming back when I had times with my grandparents and people who have died."

**Ava:** "Like, one thing I like to do a lot is to draw and paint and I do that, but since we moved, I really don't do it much, because I just don't have time. Sometimes, only like, sometimes in the weekends when we're not doing anything, I just do it. Since I really like

it, I enjoy it and I get inspirations from other people. So, I do it, and then it's just really fun to do.”

**Anna:** “Well, I practice, I do practice mindfulness at home while I'm painting or skateboarding. It makes me feel like I can express myself on a blank piece of paper or canvas, because I can draw with it what I want, and then I can add the colors that I want, and it just makes me feel like, it's, I can really express myself through the paintings that I make. A lot of the times, I think about something that's happening that day or something that will happen that day. Like, if I'm going anywhere that day or while I'm drawing it, I would think about that or how I feel. When while I'm painting it, I don't really. I think I'm more focused on what paints I'm going to put than what I really should, like, think what I was thinking about. So, I think during while I'm drawing it, I think more than when I'm painting.”

Gabriel talked about drawing as something he did to practice mindfulness. This was a very powerful reflection by Gabriel because he mentioned that he had never talked about his sadness with other adults before his interview. He also mentioned that drawing really helps him calm down when he's alone in his room, however, that sometimes he doesn't even have time to be creative because of all the work he has to do for homework this school year. Like Gabriel, Ava talked about how she practiced mindfulness in her life by being creative through art. Ava expressed that she's at peace when she's drawing and painting, however, she also talked about how she doesn't have enough time or space in her house to do it consistently. Lastly, Anna also talked about how she practiced mindfulness at home by being creative through art. Based on what she learned about mindfulness from the study, Anna said that expressing herself creatively

and feeling good about it is a form of mindfulness to her, because it makes her feel at peace in the moment. It is important to note that Anna took her time to reflect on her artistic process and how it made her feel while she was doing it. She explained that she thinks more when she's drawing than when she's painting. To conclude, she also mentioned that she wants to be a professional painter when she grows up, and that she's currently painting her backyard fence to practice for a neighborhood art project she wants to develop.

### **Students Practice Mindfulness through Hobbies**

Furthermore, Victoria, Daniel, Leo, and Luis had realizations that led them to become conscious of how they practiced mindfulness at home during the study. They reflected below:

**Victoria:** "Sometimes I just listen to music, or I like to listen to this person, either on YouTube and they will just talk about life and how can go past through those moments. I think it's mindfulness."

**Daniel:** "I want to listen to music. I just like, sometimes with work, if I listen to it, and I'm doing work, it helps me concentrate a little bit."

**Leo:** "Sometimes I get bored in school but have fun with my friends in person. When I'm playing games, we're not really seeing each other, but we talk together, and we start playing."

**Luis:** "Playing sports and video games. I feel energetic and active. Just having fun, I guess."

Victoria talked about practicing mindfulness at home by listening to music or to people talking about positive things. Then she explained how she found a podcast in YouTube and how it helped her think more positively about life. She correlated the things they say in the podcast to

the breathing mediation scripts I read in class, because she felt that the message was similar. To her, the message was to be able to feel good and happy in the present moment, even if you have many problems in life. Next, Daniel also reflected how he practiced mindfulness in his life by listening to music at home while the study was taking place. I observed Daniel raise his hand on several occasions to ask Ms. Miller if he could work with his earbuds on and Ms. Miller would normally allow him if he did his work. Furthermore, Leo talked about how he practiced mindfulness at home in relation to feeling at peace when he played sports or video games with his friends. It is interesting to note that Leo mentioned how he is always bored at school but that he finds interacting with his peers at school calming. Lastly, Luis also mentioned that to him, mindfulness is playing sports and playing video games. He reflected that he's not thinking about anything and just focusing on the moment when he plays. He also felt that talking to his friends and doing work with his peers in the classroom was relaxing, because he didn't feel pressured to do everything on his own and felt like he could confirm if he was doing a good job or not.

### **Students written Reflections and Thinking**

Overall, most students did reflective writing that aligned with their interviews, and classroom verbal responses and behaviors during field observation. In this section, I add to the finding by sharing how students reflected critically in their writing through the following categories and sub-themes:

1. Students written reflections and critical analysis of the book
  - predictions and educated guesses about the main characters in the story
  - analysis of specific statements
  - reflection on important major events that happened in the book,
  - reflection on the topic of patriarchy.
2. Student's written reflections on the breathing meditation practice.
  - students evolving definitions of mindfulness.

- how students practiced mindfulness on their own.
  - what students did to deal with tough life situations.
3. Student's written reflections on the major themes and symbols in the book through their end of unit projects and notebook responses on symbolism.

### **Written Reflections and Critical Analysis of the Book**

#### **Predictions and Educated Guesses about the Story**

Students would often make predictions and take educated guesses about what would happen to the main characters in the story to make sense of what was going on. The following are responses from some of the students:

**Amelia:** "Well, maybe the uncles seem a bit weird, and Esperanza said she didn't like them, so maybe, they'll take the ranch and treat Esperanza differently, which will show her they're not as bad as she thinks. They have a wealthy family and they're more than happy. Another option is that the uncles will take the house and be the antagonists of the story. She will no longer be wealthy. She will be helping others and herself, working hard to make money. Second, life will be much worse thanks to the upcoming great depression. She will probably be dramatic and make a complete fuss about it. She will have to go through grief while working her butt off."

**Gabriel:** "It will be different because she's not rich and she doesn't have a deed. She will probably get spoiled, and she will want everything she had back then in the rancho."

**Daniel:** "Their life will change by not having much money and by not getting that much respect, and there will be sadness."

It was not hard for Amelia to predict that the uncles could be evil when considering her own real-life experiences with her aunts. Amelia also predicted how Esperanza's life was going

to be like in California after leaving her home in Mexico. Amelia did not read *Esperanza Rising* before the study. She was making these predictions based on what she saw happening in the first three chapters of the book. Gabriel also wrote about how Esperanza's life was going to change in California. Gabriel talked about his prediction based on how Esperanza was acting before she became poor. He thought that Esperanza's mom and everyone around her would continue to spoil her so that she could have everything she's always had. It came as a shock to Gabriel that things didn't turn out that way and that Esperanza started to mature in a different way. Lastly, Daniel made the prediction that Esperanza and her mother will not get respect without the presence of their father, and that they would suffer in the years to come because they would not have money. In his interview, he also mentioned that they suffered because the uncles held all the power and were forcing them to do things they didn't want to do.

The following students also made predictions about what would happen to the characters in the book:

**Victoria:** "Papa's death will change their life because they won't smile as much as they used to because he brought joy to the family. I think that life for Esperanza will be different in California because she is poor. No papa, no home, and no food, and she has no friends. She was mean in the past, but I think she will start being nice because she will realize that she isn't wealthy anymore and she is a peasant."

**Anna:** "I think life will be different because it's almost like a new start. She is not as wealthy. I think she is going to act kind of selfish for a while until she realizes she is not wealthy."

**Ava:** “She won’t have everything she wants like before and she will need to get used to it. She will probably not like it at first, but she will get used to it.”

Victoria made a prediction about how the characters would feel. She focused more on the loss of the father, than on the material wealth the characters had just lost. She also reflected deeply about how their life would be different in California. She explained how mean Esperanza treated the poor little girl on the train by not letting her hold the doll her father gave her for her birthday in her interview. Victoria also predicted that Esperanza would become humbler when she realized that she is just like that little girl. Furthermore, Anna made the prediction that Esperanza and her mom would have to start over and that it would take time for Esperanza to adjust. Most of the students wrote about how it would take time for Esperanza to adjust. Ava also wrote about this when referring to Esperanza and was very confident that Esperanza would get used to her new life because of her personal experiences having to accept changes in her own life. Daniel, Leo, and Luis, not included here, made similar predictions.

Some students reflected on Esperanza’s evolution as a person. The following students wrote the following:

**Luis:** “She only cared about herself and didn’t care about poor people, but now she got a job and cares for others, and she has to be more responsible because she needs to take care of her mother.”

**Daniel:** “She is not as wealthy as she used to be, and she can’t do all the things she used to do in Mexico. At first, she didn’t do anything, and her servants did anything for her and now she has to work, and she treats poor people like normal people because she used to not talk or like poor people.”

**Amelia:** “She now understands both sides of the river and that they are not anything but one and the same. She has become capable of working by herself. She works, avoids showing off, understands poor people and takes care of them and is independent. It is important for her to be more responsible now because she has to work and take care of the cabin/house.”

**Victoria:** “Esperanza shows her maturity and growth in chapter nine because on page 178 it says that she starts working to pay for her mother’s bills.”

Luis was able to notice that Esperanza changed and adapted to her new life by working hard. He may have made this reflection by making a connection to his own family and how his father had to adapt to life in the U.S., because they had a baby and could not go back to Mexico to work. Daniel had a similar opinion about Esperanza’s growth as a person. Daniel was able to make the connection that Esperanza grew because she had to start doing things for herself. Most students grasped the concept that working hard, and life experiences causes a person to mature and change their ways. Amelia provided more details about Esperanza’s growth in her writing in connection to how Esperanza changed as a person and referred to an important metaphor in the story about social class. Lastly, Victoria used every opportunity she could to cite the book in her writing because she felt more comfortable with giving her opinion with support from the book for her comments. Her example of Esperanza paying her mother’s bill demonstrated Esperanza’s growth for taking on such a responsibility. This correlates to a moment during her interview when she talked about how her own mother had to do what Esperanza did when she came to this country. Aurora, Ava, and Anna, not included here, had similar written response about Esperanza’s development.



### Analysis of Specific Statements

Students were asked to analyze and write about the following statement by Miguel: “even the poorest man can become rich if he works hard enough.” The following are responses from some of the students:

**Amelia:** No. Why is that even a question? Although I half agree because, sadly, society doesn't work like that. Yes, someone can work hard and achieve their goal, not just in the U.S., but everywhere, but luck is also a factor for greatness. No, this is not a fixed mindset, more of a reality mind set. See, poor people can rise from poverty, but they have to have good luck for that too, and of course, above all, work hard. Many people say the U.S. is the land of freedom and opportunities, and I'm not denying it. It's just, it isn't the only one.

**Gabriel:** “I do believe this is true because my grandparents were from Mexico, and they were poor, and they first lived in a trailer. Then they got a job, then bought a house, but they didn't have enough money to pay rent, so now they live in a trailer with a nice car and a big yard.”

**Leo:** “I believe that Miguel's statement is true because you can never take a shortcut to your goal. Also, it takes work to reach your goal. Working hard can make you rich but too hard is too much for someone to handle.”

Amelia had many stories to say of her own family and experiences and she demonstrated to be wise beyond her years through this written response with only two years of learning English in this country. This response demonstrated how Amelia has thought about the realities of life at such a young age in this country and her ability to connect to some of the experiences of the

characters in the book. Gabriel tapped the experiences of his grandparents in this deep reflection of the statement by explaining how they never gave up even though they struggled. He felt that his grandparents were successful because they achieved their dreams in this country. Anna, Ava, Luis, and Daniel all reflected on this statement in the sense that if you work hard enough you can achieve any goal. Leo's response differed from Anna's, Ava's, Luis's, and Daniel's in that he added a critique to his reflection. It was important for him to point out that working too hard can exhaust a person and this shows how Leo was trying to reflect on this statement further by not only thinking about what it means to be successful, but also on the process of how one feels trying to be successful.

Students also reflected on and wrote about the following statement for a bell work reflection in relation to the book: "It's possible to be rich and poor at the same time." Some students had the following responses:

**Victoria:** "I think that it is possible to be poor and rich because on page seventy-six Carmen said, 'I sell eggs to feed my family.' She sells eggs for money but spends the money for her family. She has money but only for food and not anything else."

**Amelia:** "Regarding money, no, but regarding qualities and emotions, you can be poor and rich on respect, knowledge, culture, kindness, happiness, understanding, intelligence, and these qualities don't involve money. However, I do disagree with the statement in the first pages of the book, 'the rich are richer when they become poor, than the poor when they become rich.' This statement is based on pure believing in a stereotype and not true at all. I'm sorry, but this is just not true and that's a fact."

**Anna:** “you can be poor in money but rich in happiness, kindness, love, etc. Like the lady said on the page.”

Victoria wrote her reflection by citing the “egg lady” from the train, explaining that she was rich because she has her family and her garden and that’s all she needs in life. Next, Amelia emphasized the stereotypes that exists in society regarding rich and poor people. She also talked about this during her interview by explaining that she has family members who are wealthy, but that they are also good and wise people. She believes that someone can become rich and remain humble and good. Lastly, Anna also wrote a reflection like Victoria’s and Amelia’s referring to the ‘egg lady’ from the train as an example of how someone can say they are rich of many things without money. Most of the other student’s had similar responses.

### **Reflection on Important Major Events that Happened in the Book**

Students wrote reflections in which they were able to formulate opinions based on specific events in the book. Two events students wrote about where about the strikes and when Miguel and Esperanza argued about the right way of thinking and acting in their new life. Some students had the following responses:

**Amelia:** “Social status affects the opportunities of people. Miguel should stand up to those dumb, prejudice, and racist guys, and stop blindly believing in life, instead of himself. Life sometimes won’t just give you rewards. Sometimes your best is not enough, and you have to try harder. I would continue working, sine it would be more convenient to me, but I really don’t think I have anything to fear from Mexico either. I have nice family there.”

**Gabriel:** “I don’t think that society has equal opportunities because there are rich people who get whatever they want while some people who are poor don’t have much resources. I agree with Miguel because life is not going to be easy all the time. There’s going to be changes so you work hard to overcome those challenges.”

**Victoria:** “I think that it is not fair to deport people because they might have a reasonable reason and they just want money. I agree with Esperanza because I don’t think it’s fair for him just because people from somewhere else and steal his job after he has worked very hard for that job.”

Amelia wrote about how it is not okay to deport people for striking and was upset about how the Mexicans were being treated in the book because she understood that it was unjust, although she would not strike herself. It is interesting to note that most of the students would not strike and contradicted themselves when writing about how they agreed with Esperanza more than with Miguel. Next, Gabriel wrote that Mexican’s strike in the book because they didn’t have access to equal opportunities and does not believe it is fair to deport people for striking, however, he would also not strike. Gabriel agreed more with Miguel in that he felt that it was better to be patient and continue working until better opportunities come around. Lastly, Victoria explained that it is not okay to go with the flow of things if it is affecting you and others, but at the same time thought about the consequence of what would happen if Esperanza where to strike and felt that working under terrible conditions was better than the alternative. These responses demonstrated the deep thinking that students were doing, because they were thinking about what they would realistically do by thinking of the consequences. Aurora, Anna, Ava, Leo, and Daniel had similar reflections and opinions, and would not strike either.

### Written Reflections on Patriarchy

Lastly, students wrote reflections on the topic of patriarchy as follows:

**Amelia:** “Women don’t have power. Women don’t traditionally own land. This is what the lawyer mentioned when talking to Ramona about the lands of her dead husband. Tio Luis’s proposal to Ramona, saying that women can’t live without men, and tells her, for her own good, she should. Mama has to give up her house and land, as well as money. The family has to move thanks to the corrupt men, Tio Luis and Tio Marcos in power.”

**Gabriel:** “Patriarchy affect Mama and Esperanza’s decision because now they will lose their home, because now there is no man to rule. They should let Mama rule because no woman needs a man.”

**Anna:** “The way they get treated and how much money they own. Their social class went from upper class to lower class.”

**Ava:** “After papa died, they lost everything and had to move to the U.S.”

Amelia was able to recount what was happening to the women in the story through the lens of patriarchy and how it affected them because they had no power. In her interview, Amelia mentioned that Esperanza’s family struggled because of what her uncles did to them, and that they didn’t have to go through so much pain in life. Gabriel had a similar response with the addition that they never needed to rely on a man to begin with. Next, Anna made a connection to how patriarchy affected Esperanza’s family social class due to them not being perceived as having power in society. Lastly, Ava reflected on how Esperanza’s father was everything to the family and how they were forced to move to the U.S. so that they didn’t have to be separated.

### **Student's Written Reflections on the Breathing Meditation Practice**

Students reflected on the practice of mindfulness through their writing by including their own definitions of mindfulness, how they practiced mindfulness, and what they did to deal with a tough situation in their lives. Their written reflections on mindfulness and their experience with the breathing meditation aligned with the things they said in their interviews and how they behaved in class while the practice was taking place. Overall, students took part of a daily short breathing meditation for six weeks and became comfortable with the practice over time, expecting it every time they were in class. Most students enjoyed and took steps to begin the initial stage of reflecting about mindfulness, and they would have to continue the practice and write about mindfulness to develop a more evolved concept of what it means to be mindful.

### **Students Evolving Definitions of Mindfulness**

The following are written responses from some of the student's evolving definition on mindfulness:

**Amelia:** "Mindfulness is a good quality to have. It means to accept the awareness of your thoughts, yourself and your surroundings in the present moment."

**Victoria:** "I learned that mindfulness means peace. I also learned that there are many ways to stay calm. It can also help with stress and anxiety."

**Aurora:** "I learned that mindfulness is something that can relax and help us be aware of our surroundings."

**Ana:** "I learned mindfulness is being aware of your thoughts."

**Ava:** "I learned that mindfulness is when you can feel calm and think positive about yourself."

**Daniel:** “I learned that with mindfulness, you can focus on yourself and your thoughts when something makes you feel comfortable or safe.”

Most of the students acquired a clear and simple definition of mindfulness by writing that practicing mindfulness is a way to feel calm and positive by being aware of your thoughts and surroundings in the present moment. Amelia clearly understood this definition of mindfulness; however, Victoria used the word peace to help with stress and anxiety in her definition of mindfulness. This aligned with some of the things she talked about in her interview. Ava wrote that mindfulness is when you feel calm and think positive about yourself, implying that having positive self-esteem is a way of practicing mindfulness within yourself. Furthermore, Daniel explained that mindfulness is when you focus on yourself and your thoughts when something makes you feel comfortable or safe. His written reflection also aligned with his voiced opinion about his experience with the practice of mindfulness in the classroom. Lastly, Ava simply wrote that being mindful is being aware of your thoughts. This aligned with some of the things Ava said in her interview in relation to her feeling like she thinks and reflects more because of the things we had her do in class.

### **How Students Practiced Mindfulness on their Own.**

Some of the students also wrote about how they practiced mindfulness on their own before and during the study. The following are their written responses:

**Leo:** “Going to the park helps me practice mindfulness. I play video games that don’t make me mad. Another thing is, I eat something good.”

**Amelia:** “I cry, draw, go to the gym and run, take a deep breath and think deeply about it or I just write some random story idea I had.”

**Aurora:** “Something I do is draw so I can calm myself or sleep. Maybe trying to escape out of something I don’t want to be in or trying to make a plan to escape.”

**Victoria:** “Sometimes I just listen to music, or I like to listen to this person, either on YouTube and they will just talk about life and how can go past through those moments.”

The students written responses ranged from very simple activities to more intricate things or routines they do daily as part of their mindfulness practice. For example, Leo talked about going to the park, playing video games that are easy to win, and eating something to feel good when he’s having a hard time. In his interview, Leo reflected that mindfulness is when you try to understand yourself and what makes you feel good by also avoiding what doesn’t. Most of the boys had very similar written responses. The boys tended to talk about doing activities they enjoyed that helped them calm down. The girls, on the other hand, had more intricate answers. For example, Amelia said that she does a variety of things like drawing, going to the gym, running, crying, breathing, and writing made-up stories to calm down. She talked about issues in her life she felt she needed to handle by doing these things. Aurora also wrote about how she draws to calm down so that she can escape her bad thoughts and be able to sleep. Both, Amelia, and Aurora’s written responses aligned with the things they said and did throughout the study in relation to how they are both artistically inclined, as well as how they both like to be active in their mindfulness practice. Lastly, Vitoria talked about how she listens to music and a mindfulness podcast on YouTube that helps her calm down because they talk about how to overcome hard times. She mentioned in her interview that she has adults in her life who also talked to her about mindfulness and referred her to the podcast.



### **What Students Did to deal with Tough Life Situations**

Some of the students also wrote about what they did to deal with tough situations in their lives. The following are responses from some of the students:

**Victoria:** “Something that helps me deal with a tough situation in my life is music and sleeping. They both help me escape reality.”

**Anna:** “Something I do is listen to music or paint.”

**Ava:** “Something I do to help me deal with my life is get over it and do something new that will make me feel better.”

**Daniel:** “When faced with disappointment, I ignore it, but if it always reminds me of it, I do something that keeps me distracted.”

**Leo:** “Something I do that helps me deal with tough situations in life is by talking to someone who can make me understand what’s going on with me.”

These responses reflect how students tried to deal with tough past life situations. It is important to point out how most of the students wrote and talked about some form of escapism to practice mindfulness, because it made them feel good not to think about their problems. Victoria wrote that she listened to music and slept. Anna also listened to music, and painted, and Daniel also talked about escaping his problems by doing anything to keep him distracted. Ava and Leo deviated from these responses by saying that they faced their problem head on. For Example, Ava mentioned in her interview that she just tried to get over it by coming to terms with it, and Leo talked about how he sought help by talking about his issue with someone and by changing what he was doing to feel better.

### **Written Reflections on Major Themes and Symbols in *Esperanza Rising***

Students made connections to the major themes and symbols in the book by writing about them in their notebooks and end of unit projects. Their responses aligned with some of the things they said during their interviews and class discussions in relation to the following quotes: “Do not be afraid to start over” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 15), “there is no rose without thorns” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p.15), “Look at the zigzag of the blanket. Mountains and valleys. Right now, you are in the bottom of the valley and your problems loom big around you. But soon, you will be at the top of the mountain again” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 51), and “Wait a little while and the fruit will fall into your hand. You must be patient Esperanza” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 2). Amelia reflected on the first two quotes through her written reflection and drawn symbols in her end of unit poster project (refer to figure 14). There is much depth and connection in how she was able to reflect on her life through these two major themes in the book.

Figure 14

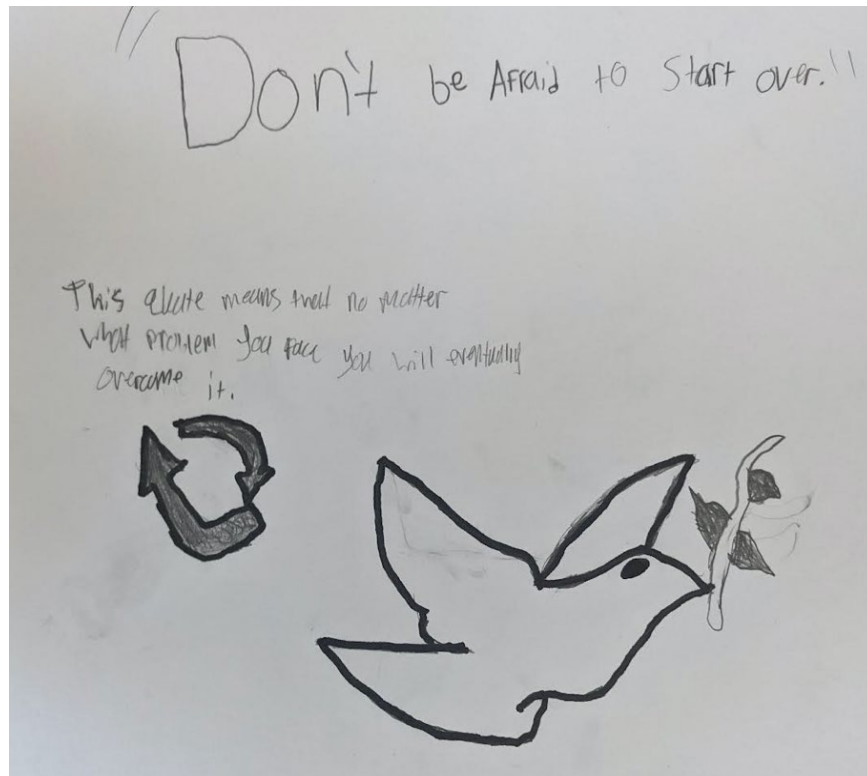
*Final Project Poster Example by Amelia*



Gabriel also reflected on the quote “Do not be afraid to start over” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 15) in his final poster project (refer to figure 15). Gabriel explained that drawing the symbol of two arrows in a circular motion was appropriate because it represents the cycle of life, and then explained that the bird holding the stick with thorns symbolize that you can still fly and be successful in life, even if you are faced with hard moments you carry within yourself everywhere you go.

## Figure 15

*Final Project Poster Example by Gabriel*



In her interview, Victoria spoke about having to overcome hard moments in life and reflected on the following quote: “Look at the zigzag of the blanket. Mountains and valleys. Right now, you are in the bottom of the valley and your problems loom big around you. But soon, you will be at the top of the mountain again” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 51). She reflected on this quote (refer to figure 16) for her final poster project. The explanation for this quote aligned with things she said and wrote about throughout the study, because she constantly talked about worries in her life, including her schoolwork. Victoria did not have time to submit her poster for

the two quotes but submitted the written work and drew symbols (refer to figure 17) to represent herself when thinking of her own identity. She mentioned that she was planning on including them in her poster during a side conversation while she was working on her project during the last couple of days of the study.

## Figure 16

### *Final Project Poster Example by Victoria*

Short Response Directions:

1. Type short response answers here. (OR) If you have neat handwriting, you may choose to write your answer (after it has been spell checked) directly on your poster.

Quote 1: "LOOK at the zigzag of the blanket, Mountains and Valleys. Right now you are in the bottom of the Valley and your problems loom big around you. But soon, you will be at the top of the mountain again."

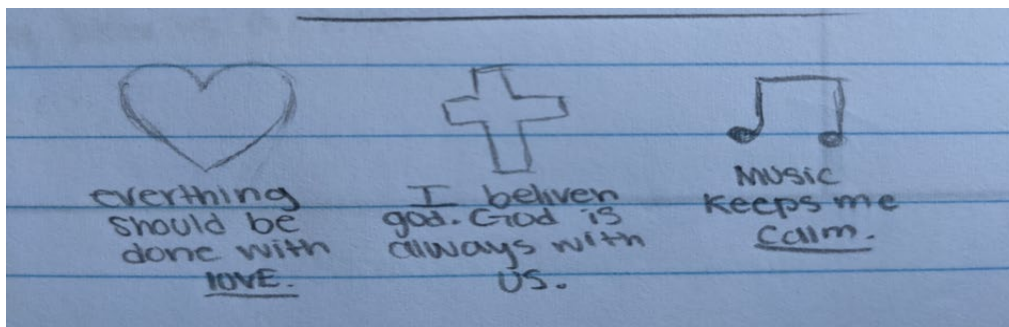
Short Response 1:  
 This quote means when you are in a problem you have to climb to get out of it. This applies to Esperanza because she didn't know how to work but she learned because Miguel helped her learn and she was very proud of herself. This applies to me because my grade wasn't the best so I studied to be successful because I practiced every night and it felt very good. ✓  
 ↑  
 practiced

Quote 2: "There is no rose without thorns"

Short Response 2: This quote means there is no life without ups and downs. This applies to Esperanza because her father had died and she moved to start over. This applies to me because my grandma died and I started a new life and put the past behind me.

**Figure 17**

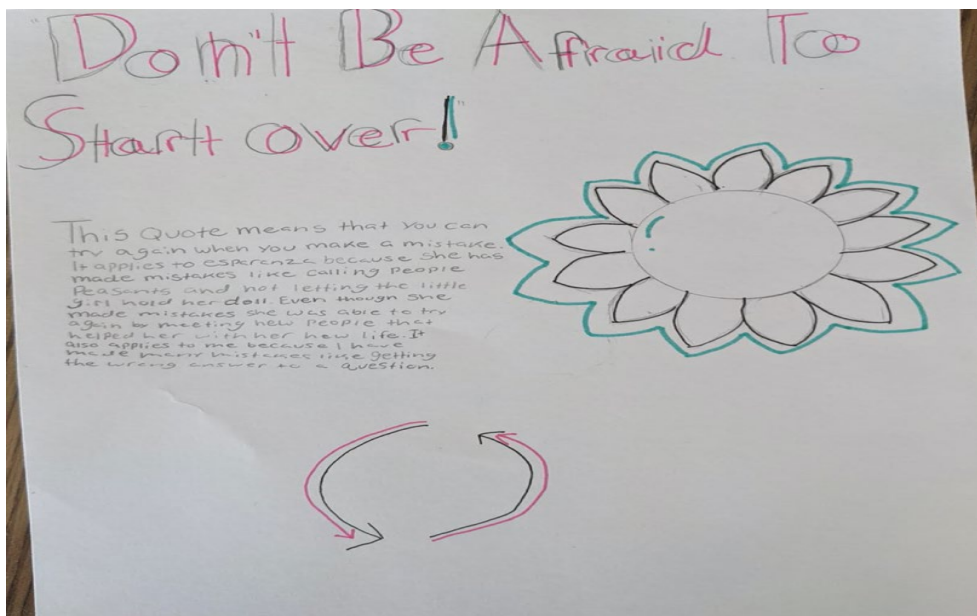
*Identity Symbols Activity by Victoria*



For her final project, Aurora wrote about the following quote as well, “Do not be afraid to start over” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 15). She drew two arrows symbolizing the cycle of life and a sunflower symbolizing how much Esperanza grew over time (refer to figure 18). In her writing, she made a connection to herself regarding the mistakes she made when working on her assignments in class.

**Figure 18**

*Final Project Poster Example by Aurora*

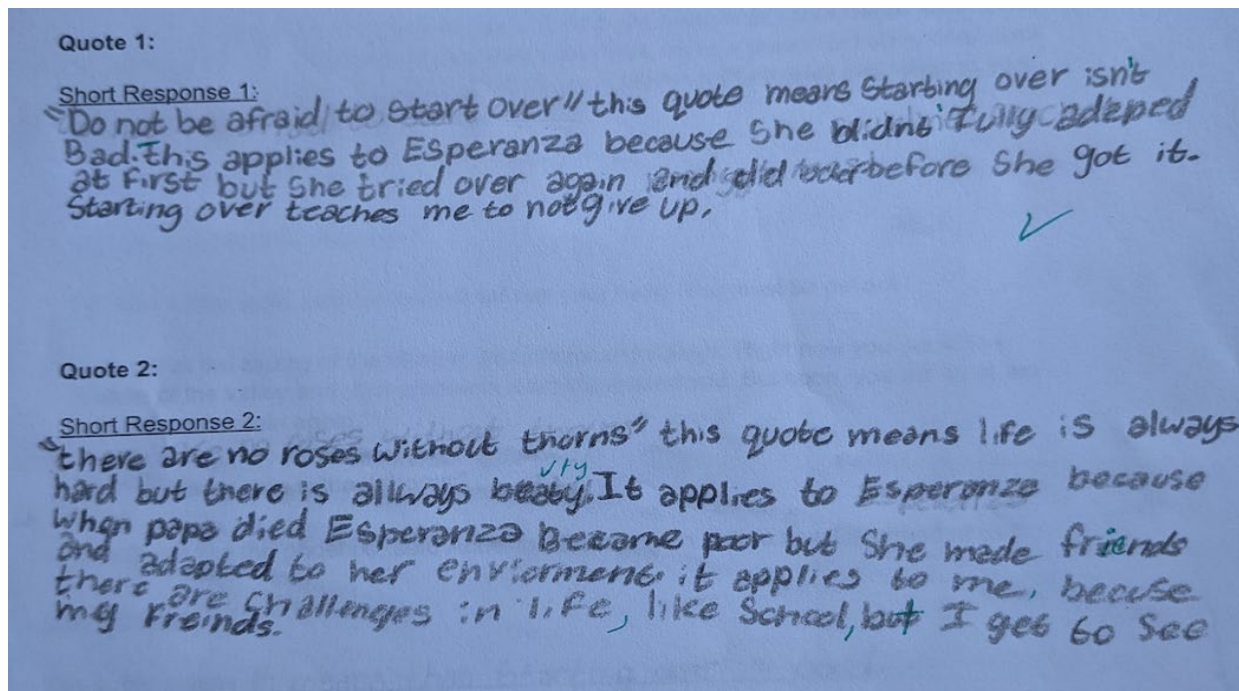




For her final unit project, Anna also reflected on the following two quotes: “Do not be afraid to start over” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 15) and “there is no rose without thorns” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p.15). Although Anna did not have time to do posters for her quotes either, she did have time to write her reflection on these two major themes in the book (refer to figure 19). Her explanation for the quotes aligned with things Anna spoke about in her interview regarding the connections she made to mindfulness and moments when she spoke about her family and the book. Anna also drew symbols (refer to figure 20) representing her own identity, which she was planning on including in her poster board as well.

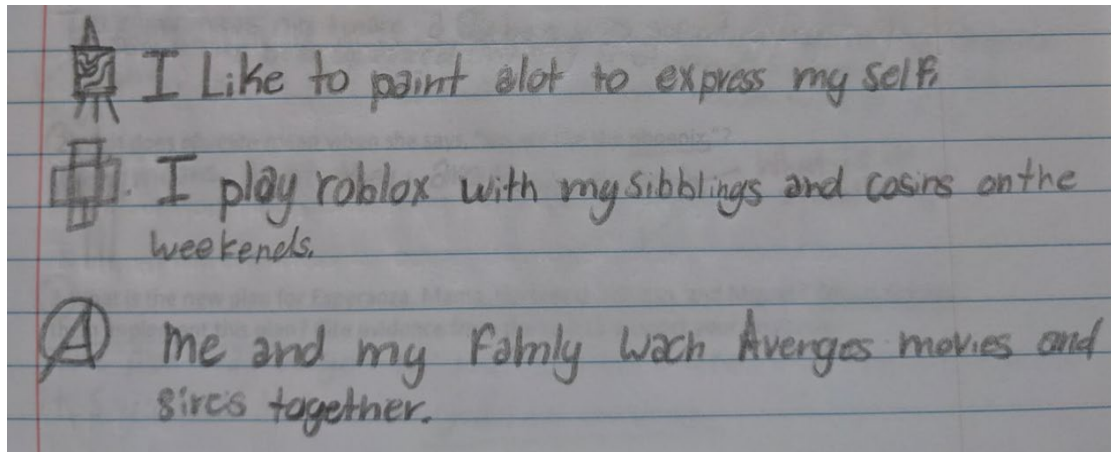
### Figure 19

*Final Project Written Example by Anna*



**Figure 20**

*Identity Symbols Activity by Anna*



For her final unit project, Ava reflected on the following quotes: “Do not be afraid to start over” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 15) and “Look at the zigzag of the blanket. Mountains and valleys. Right now, you are in the bottom of the valley and your problems loom big around you. But soon, you will be at the top of the mountain again” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 51). Ava’s short essay responses (refer to figure 21) aligned with things she spoke and wrote about throughout the unit. Her reflections for the final project demonstrated that she was able to formulate deeper reflections towards the end of the unit. Ava also drew symbols to represent herself (refer to figure 22). Like Victoria, she was artistically inclined.



Figure 21

Final Project Written Example by Ava

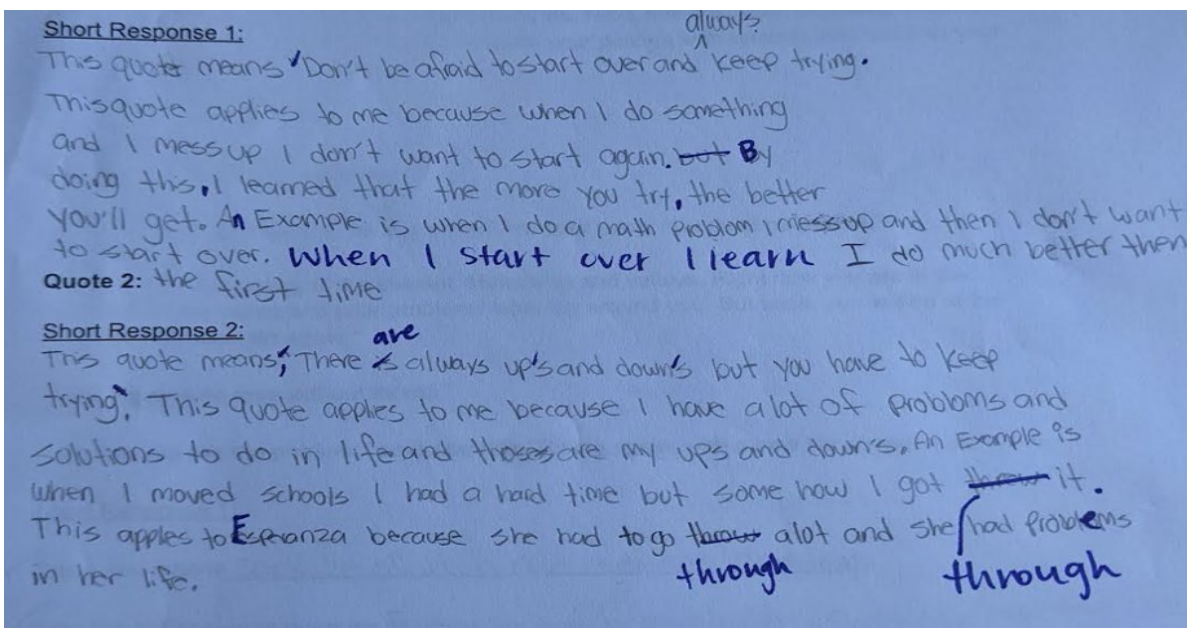
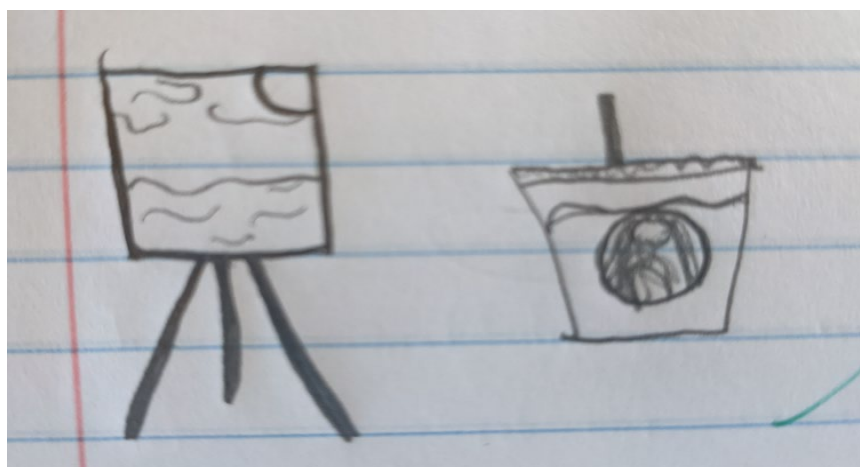


Figure 22

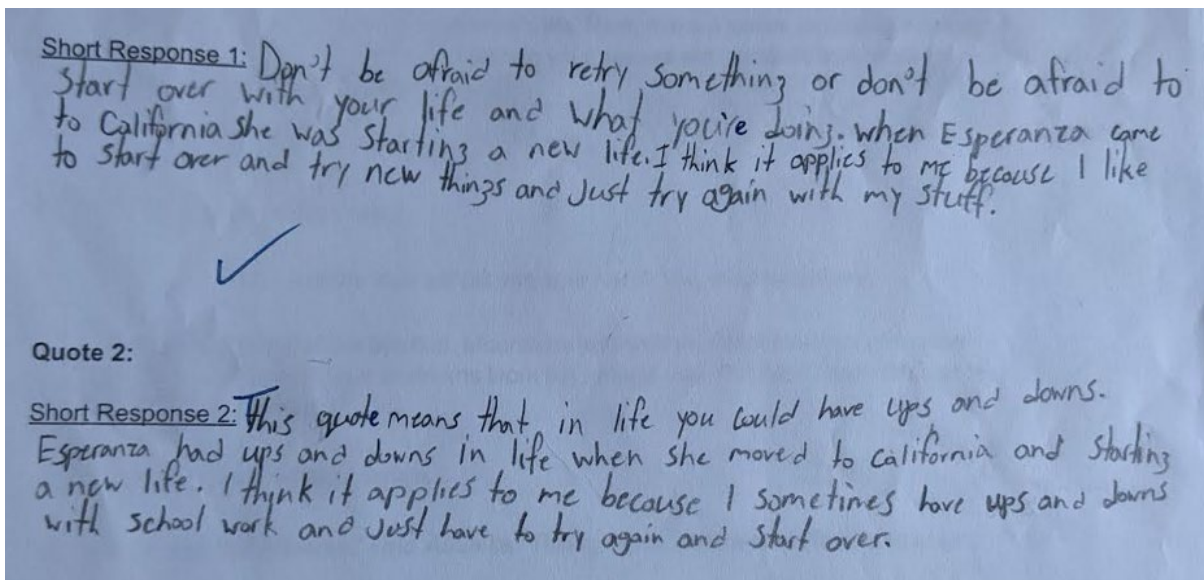
Identity Symbols Activity by Ava



Furthermore, for his final project, Luis reflected on the two quotes: “Do not be afraid to start over” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 15) and “Look at the zigzag of the blanket. Mountains and valleys. Right now, you are in the bottom of the valley and your problems loom big around you. But soon, you will be at the top of the mountain again” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 51). Luis’s short essay responses (refer to figure 23) aligned with things he spoke and wrote about throughout the unit. Like Ava, Luis struggled with formulating and sharing his thoughts throughout the study but was able to formulate a thoughtful written reflection for his end of unit project.

### Figure 23

*Final Project Written Example by Luis*

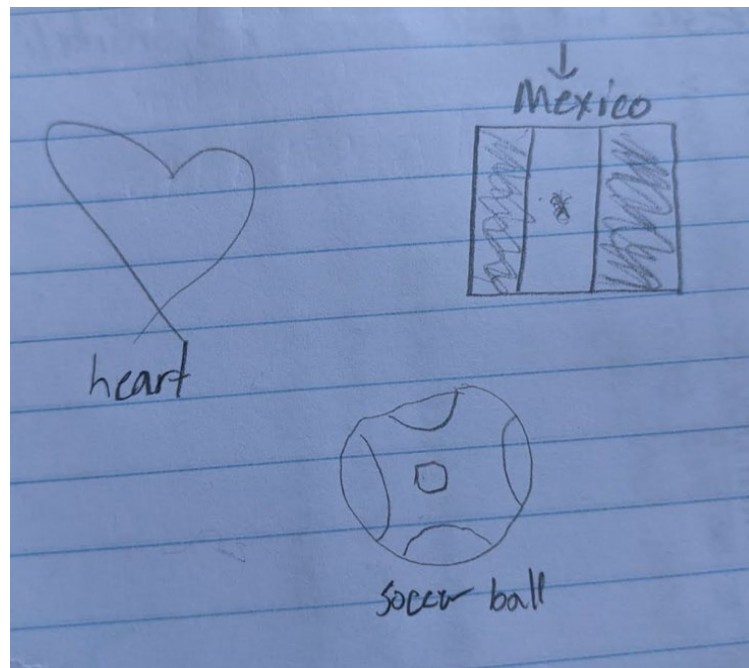


His short responses demonstrated that he continually worked towards trying to understand the book in connection to himself. Furthermore, Luis’s symbol (refer to figure 24) demonstrated that he tried to make a deeper connection to the book by identifying himself through his heritage,

soccer as something he likes to do, and by explaining how he tries to be kind to others by drawing a heart.

### Figure 24

*Identity Symbols Activity by Luis*

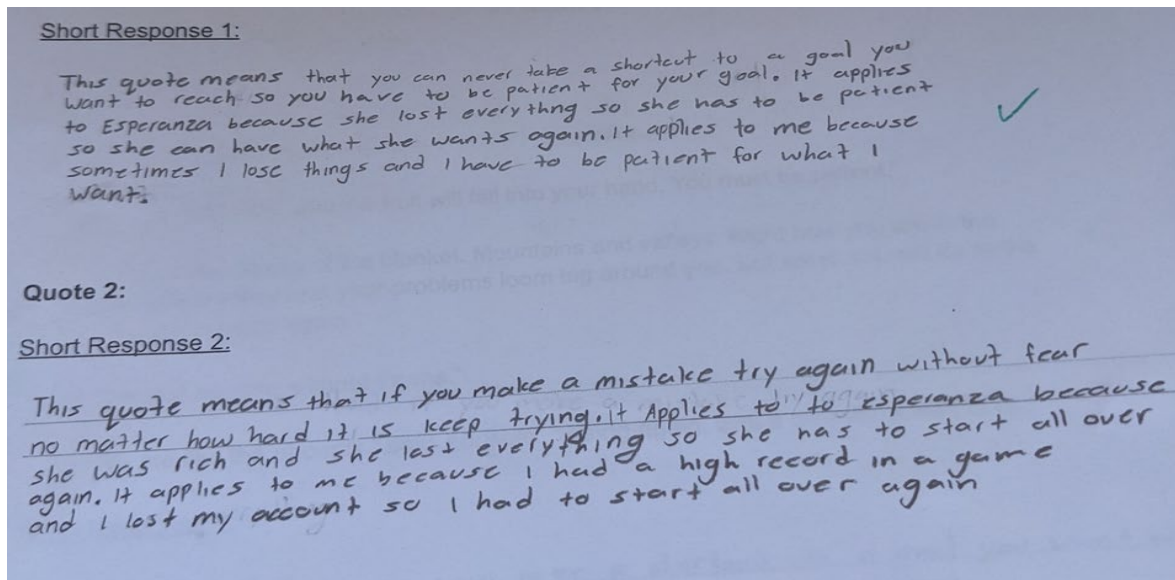


For his final project, Leo reflected on the following quotes: “Don’t be afraid to start over,” and “Wait a little while and the fruit will fall into your hand. You must be patient Esperanza” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 2). Leo’s short essay responses for his end of unit poster project (refer to figure 25) aligned with things he said and wrote throughout the study. His symbols (refer to figure 26) demonstrated that he was also an artist. He tried to connect to the book by drawing a rose next to a tree, which he explained represented Esperanza’s connection to

her father, and drew an eye with veins to express how hard and stressful things were for Esperanza and the characters in the book.

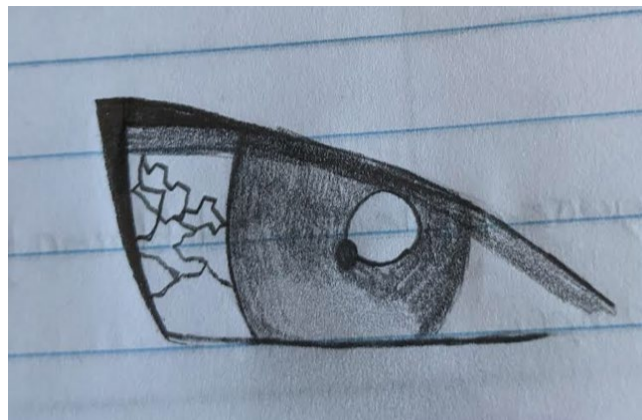
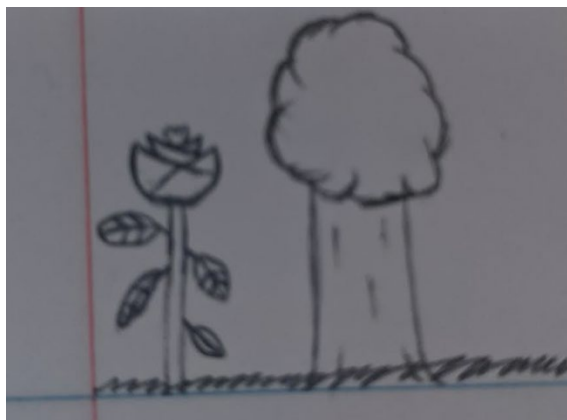
### Figure 25

*Final Project Written Example by Leo*



### Figure 26

*Identity Symbols Activity by Leo*



### Concluding Thoughts

The findings of this study demonstrated that most of the students had life experiences and stories to share in the classroom space, their interviews, and in writing in response to a unit that incorporated a culturally appropriate YA text they could relate to. Student's shared experiences became testimonies or *testimonios* in the context of power dimensions and systemic oppression inspired by Moraga's & Anzaldúa's (1981) theory in the flesh, as students began to make connections to their current life situations to reach praxis and action within their own lives outside of school (Brown, 2003), and thus became more empowered within themselves to say their own opinions, thoughts, and future life aspirations. Lastly, the observations and interviews conducted proved that Latinx students can effectively synthesize, critically analyze, and make connections to text in such a way that allows them to understand their own ways of understanding and learning. Most of the students mentioned that the short mindfulness breathing meditation practice positively contributed to their learning process, because it allowed them to remain calm and engaged in the present moment with the text and classroom work. Overall, this study points towards a curriculum that should be more holistic and engaging in the sheltered ESOL Language Arts classroom context through culturally appropriate text and a social justice mindfulness component that can help promote authentic learning. In the following chapter, I analyze these significant findings further through a Chicana feminist lens and *nepantlera* pedagogy as form of critical and culturally relevant pedagogy within the context of this study.

## CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I analyze the findings through a Chicana feminist lens and Gloria Anzaldúa's seven states of *conocimiento* (coming to knowing) to explain student's reflective and learning processes by drawing on the field notes, student's interviews, and students written reflections. I begin by highlighting overarching themes through a macro lens through some of the student's responses in their interviews in connection to the field notes and their reflective writing. The following important overarching themes became relevant in the study:

1. Students felt good and empowered after reading a longer text.
2. Students gained self-knowledge by reflecting on how they learned best.
3. Students gained a more holistic learning perspective through mindfulness.

I highlight these overarching themes to highlight how students responded in alignment to the unit implementation. Then, I highlight other important reflective moments of *testimonios* (testimonies) in which students achieved *conocimiento* (consciousness) through "aha" moments they had during their interviews. These fall within the ten themes previously discussed and explored in the findings. This is followed by the discussion, in which I summarize what I sought to explore in this study and what the findings and analysis mean. Then, I write the analysis and implications from the findings and in relation to how Latinx students learned in a sheltered ESOL classroom context and what that could mean for teachers, policy makers, and other individuals working within ESOL education. I interpret the findings by drawing inferences from the collected data to answer the following research question: How do Latinx students respond to a unit informed by Chicana feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and mindful breathing mediation in a sheltered ESOL classroom through the exploration of *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan?

Lastly, I make connections to the theory and pedagogies that drive this study and highlight empirical studies that inspired my study by sharing how it is similar and different from them, and lastly. I conclude by writing the limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future studies.

Given that this work was done with middle schoolers who share a similar background with me as Latinx, immigrant, and ESOL student, I as the researcher interpreted the data to unveil their overarching ideas reflected in their shared thoughts and experiences. The rationale to this decision stems in the fact that these students were not used to this type of pedagogy or approach. They usually do not feel comfortable in voicing their thoughts, opinions, and life experiences. They probably respond to scripted curriculums and texts that are not culturally relevant and are used to answering low-level questions and offering homogenous responses. These traditional approaches may redound in their metacognition skills not being as developed. My work precisely focused on filling this gap, but since it is groundbreaking in a sense, I feel that I still had to mediate in my best attempt to unveil students' overarching ideas, connections, and thought processes because I did not think it was going to be as evident or explicitly stated.

### **Analysis of Findings**

Chicana feminism is greatly influenced by Gloria Anzaldúa's work in that it sets an argument for a third world feminism that includes multiple subject positions (Davalos, 2008) to push back against systemic societal and cultural oppression. Chicana feminism offers individuals a lens to make sense of their evolving identities as individuals influenced by their cultures, histories, and the loss of land experienced through relocation and having to adapt to new settings. Chicana feminism draws from Indigenous spiritual knowledge that address the emotional needs of individuals who have lost much. Anzaldúa's framework speaks on the nature of the bilingual,

bicultural, and border-crossing experiences of Latinx individuals, as well on their struggles and issues through an evolving *mestiza/o* consciousness in the U.S. The process to the path of *conocimiento* is a path to healing based on an ancient Indigenous Aztec mythology in which the mother of all Gods, *Coatlicue*, holds both the nurturing and devouring aspect of death.

In the myth, *Coatlicue* became mysteriously pregnant by falling enchanted hummingbird feathers. Her oldest daughter *Coyolxauhqui*, and four hundred of her children felt dishonored and decided to attack her, but *Coatlicue's* new child, *Huitzilopochtli*, the god of war, sprang from her womb and attacked all the children and threw them into the sky. They each became a star, and *Coyolxauhqui* was dismembered into many pieces, with her head becoming the moon, to then become revered as the moon goddess. This myth has elements of violence and calls for a deep need to heal, which Anzaldúa drew from to explain the healing process from anyone experiencing a shock when living within a dominant culture, and in essence a world that is not their own living in the borderlands experiencing the stage of *nepantla*. Anzaldúa called this healing process the path to *conocimiento*. This study considered students' path to *conocimiento*, which also includes the stage of *nepantla* that Latinx students often find themselves in. This path is not necessarily experienced in order. Sometimes an individual can remain within one stage for a long time or not experience every stage.

The seven stages to the path to *conocimiento* are as follow (Anzaldúa, 2015):

1. The *Arrebato*/deep rupture- An intense life shattering experience, like moving to a different country, that causes a rupture or fragmentation of the heart, mind, and soul.



2. *Nepantla*- The deep rupture in stage one results in a state of being torn between ways. Anzaldúa describes this as a feeling of being torn between identities.
3. The *Coatlicue* state- The stage of despair spurs a process of self-reflection and inward search for new meaning.
4. *The Call / el compromiso*- If we are brave enough to spend time in a space of self-loathing and hopelessness in *Coatlicue*, we emerge with a deeper understanding of ourselves and the world.
5. Putting Coyolxauhqui back together- Putting the pieces back together. The self is reinvented from the destruction. We can interpret and reinterpret how we see ourselves.
6. The blow-up...a clash of realities- In this stage, Anzaldúa reminds us that *la nepantlera* can teach mindfulness to the thoughts of others around us to help soothe our frustrating thoughts and feelings. We are inspired to grow and change.
7. Shifting realities- The final move through and away from pain. Healing the wounds. One gives forgiveness where needed. The individual comes out stronger after having gone through all the stages.

### **Macro Analysis of Findings Through a Chicana Feminist Lens**

Students acquired new *conocimiento* by making connections between *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) and their own lives. Their reflections led them to feeling good and empowered after reading a longer text; to gain self-knowledge by reflecting on how they learned best; and to gain a more holistic learning perspective of themselves through mindfulness. This

reflective process allowed students to push back against an identity society created for them, and in essence, debunk deficit perspectives of ESOL students in seemingly small ways through a kind of spiritual activism within themselves. Students unapologetically pushed back against a boring and at times, uninteresting curriculum by stating their thoughts and opinions in relation to their experience with the book *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). They reflected on their lived experiences, the concept of mindfulness and the breathing meditation, and on their learning experiences throughout the unit.

### **Students Felt Good and Empowered after Reading Longer Text.**

Most students reflected on how they had never read a long book in a previous class and felt good and empowered after reading a longer text. Even though some of the students did not directly state that they felt empowered or made further comments about the book, the way most students expressed themselves in their interviews aligned with how they analyzed the text in their writing and how they behaved in the classroom. Most of the students demonstrated to be invested in the reading and even stated that they wanted to read more books like *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) in the classroom. This is reflected in the findings where I highlighted these components and in figure 28 below. Most students did experience a shift in the narrative they were used to enacting as students within the classroom to one that was more open to try different things with a little push from myself and the teacher. Anzaldúa (2015) explained that we enact ourselves in the world by reflecting within our minds, through our bodies, and in connection to each other. Sometimes our spoken narrative does not fully reflect what our bodies are acting out, especially if we have never been exposed to experiences before, however, some of the students

in this study were able to express themselves a bit more towards the end of the unit. Table 2 demonstrates what some of the students said during their interviews during moments of reflections in their *testimonios*.

**Table 2**

*Section of Student's Interviews with Researcher*

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<b>Individual Interviews (Researcher and Student Dialogue)</b>	
<b>Mrs. E:</b>	How do you feel, now that you read an entire novel?
<b>Ava:</b>	Yeah, it was a good book and interesting book because she had problems and she struggled with her life. And it was really entertaining too, because you could see how she solved her problems, and how she solved her problems and progressed and just did it.
<b>Mrs. E:</b>	have you ever read an entire book like this before?
<b>Ava:</b>	I don't think I've ever had. If I did, I probably don't remember because it's been a long time since I've read a book like that. It was really interesting honestly. I really liked that book. And especially because it's like, from a girl that had to go through all that. Yeah, it was just really interesting.”
<b>Mrs. E:</b>	How do you feel now that you're done? Like with reading <i>Esperanza Rising</i> ? How do you feel about the book overall?
<b>Anna:</b>	I think it's a good book. I like it because <i>Esperanza</i> , she learned so many things from experience that...well, at first, she didn't really mean, like, once she started working, she never worked before, and she learned how to do it. And kind of this, I guess you could say, like, she was, I guess.
<b>Mrs. E:</b>	Yeah. Have you read a book like this before?
<b>Anna:</b>	I don't know. No, not really, not that I can think of. I don't think so.
<b>Mrs. E:</b>	What makes this book different from other things that you have done?
<b>Anna:</b>	I think it's different. Because it kind of shows how Mexicans were treated back when the book was read, I mean, for and how many women didn't really get to do a lot of things.
<b>Mrs. E:</b>	So how do you feel that that's something new that you talked about?
<b>Anna:</b>	Well, not the women part, but kind of a little bit, but the how Mexicans are treated? I haven't really, really talked about that. Like, I haven't learned about it that much. But I know a little
<b>Mrs. E:</b>	How do you feel about actually reading an entire book and that you're done with it? How does that make you feel?
<b>Aurora:</b>	Good! Because I've never finished a book, but like, not like the big books, like we're reading. But I have finished like little books and...
<b>Mrs. E:</b>	What does that make you think now?

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**Aurora:** I can read more bigger books and I can try to read more bigger books.

**Mrs. E:** What would you like to see Miss Archer do in her classroom next?

**Leo:** Read another book.

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### **Students Gained Self-knowledge by Reflecting how They Learned Best.**

Next, some students gained self-knowledge in relation to their learning by looking for answers within themselves (Bernal, 1998) through reflections that led to moments of consciousness after I would ask specific questions during the interviews. Through narrative, students were able to verbalize thoughts on how they felt they learned best, thus reflecting how the power of testimonios allowed them “to express their world in their own terms” (Saavedra, 2019) in a space in which they felt safe to provide their opinions on a topic they usually don’t have a say on. Table 3 demonstrates examples of how some of the student’s gained self-knowledge by reflecting on how they felt they learned best.

### **Table 3**

#### *Section of Student’s Interviews with Researcher*

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#### **Individual Interviews (Researcher and Student Dialogue)**

---

**Mrs. E:** How do you feel you learn as a student? Did this unit help or not?

**Amelia:** I mean, all the things we did, I think it's like a more fun way of learning than just taking notes and those things. I like taking notes, that just me. I mean, sometimes I just don't memorize things, and I'm just there just blindly taking notes, which is not good, because you're not learning like anything at all.

**Mrs. E:** Great!

**Amelia:** The way you guys taught, I was like, writing my own opinions. And then like, also finding what amazed us in those things, and all about a single book that gets us. I think that it will help me in the future.

**Mrs. E:** How do you feel you learn as a student? Did this unit help or not?

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**Aurora:** Yes, because it could tell me like the difference how other people learn, like, how other people maybe don't get to, like, learn or get education. I do get an education, so, it helped me, like, know that other people are struggling. And I should like, I should be grateful that I get to learn.

**Mrs. E:** And how do you learn best? Like What can teachers do to help you learn more?

**Aurora:** I'm a visual learner. So, I want them to at least put like an example so I can see it.

**Mrs. E:** What is your overall opinion of this unit...(inaudible)... What was the process like for you?

**Victoria:** It's kind of hard and kind of not, because I had a lot of homework, and I wouldn't be able to focus on that. And it was kind of easy, because of the of how we just like, were able to learn about the things and then like how we just had to glue stuff in our notebook, and we could just go back to remembering it.

**Mrs. E:** Do you feel that you learn best the way we did it or the way some of your other teachers do it?

**Victoria:** I think I'm doing it, like the way you guys did it because of that, because we could come back and revisit everything you just did.

**Mrs. E:** What are some things that Miss Archer or I, that we did in the class, that helped you with an activity?

**Victoria:** I like how you guys would explain to us if we didn't understand it and then y'all would give us some examples.

**Mrs. E:** You know, how with COVID you were on the computer a lot at home? And now you're here? What do you think makes you learn better? Which way you learn better?

**Anna:** Um, well, I think I think, oh, equal amount of both. Because last year, I did good online a little bit better than I did before in the past years in person. But this year, I'm doing pretty good in person. So, I guess you could say a little bit of both.

**Mrs. E:** That makes sense. Yeah. And how would you like to see your teachers behave in a class like this in the future. What would you like your teachers to do more off?

**Anna:** Probably...

**Mrs. E:** Or give me some advice... like maybe you should do this different or do this.

**Anna:** Probably, I think, something that teachers could do more in an environment like this. I think they should put, like, reminders on homework, because sometimes I forget. I forget to read a chapter, because of how much homework I had. But probably that's the only thing, just reminders.

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These reflections demonstrated that seven graders in a sheltered 7<sup>th</sup> ESOL classroom are more than capable of voicing how they learn best within the classroom context. For example, Amelia said things like “learn” versus “memorize,” and “writing my own opinions,” and how she was able to do all that through just one book. Analyzing these comments led me to thinking that

Amelia had never done the kind of hands-on learning the unit provided and that writing her own opinions led her to self-knowledge on how she learned best throughout the unit. Victoria also referred to a kind of learning that is not memorized, but one that is experienced through strategies that really helped her understand what was being taught. She learned about the topics throughout the unit by doing activities that she would glue in her notebook, and then go back to as she continually did work that asked her to refer to them. It seems that this led Anna to not just learning information in isolated ways, because everything was relational, and she was able to piece how all the parts came together. Lastly, Anna felt like she learned best on the computer and in person, and that she needed more reminders for the homework, because she kept forgetting. This led me to thinking that students need more time doing meaningful work in the classroom setting and less at home, because most students struggled with their homework's, and only seemed to gain stress from having to do them. Overall, students gained different kinds of self-knowledge regarding how they learned best throughout the unit.

### **Students Gained a more Holistic Learning Perspective through Mindfulness.**

Furthermore, students gained a more holistic perspectives on their learning by reading *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) in connection to the events or characters in the story and the mindfulness practice. Students' holistic perspectives are reflected in their interviews, the narratives they shared, and the writing they did, highlighted in the previous chapter. Students gained a more holistic perspective on their learning that pushed against normative ways of being within education. For example, some students attempted to make a connection between the

mindfulness breathing meditation they were experiencing in class to characters in *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). Anzaldúa explained that “nepantleras are not constrained by one culture or world but experience multiple realities” (p. 82). I believe this idea reflects how students were traveling between the world of the book, that of their mind, and the physical space of the classroom. Some students created meaning and worked in *nepantla* at the borderlands of all these spaces. Students enacted *nepantlera* thinking metaphorically and physically during instances when they were reflecting on characters and events in the book.

At the same time, students continually made sense of the breathing mindfulness practice in connection to their lived realities and by acknowledging the experiences of the fictionalized characters they were identifying with. Ava, talked about how Esperanza’s experiences throughout the story served as an example for her to see and understand what she went through herself from an emotional lens. This was an important step towards acquiring *conocimiento* in *nepantla* because Ava was able to learn, by not just reading about what Esperanza went through, but by also gaining a sense of what she was feeling by imagining herself in her place within her mind. This highlighted a creative way of learning that seemed to hint at how Ava was also tapping her spiritual side to reflect on Esperanza’s character through a lens of mindfulness. Anna also demonstrated that she began to understand the concept of mindfulness by saying that Esperanza should have paused more to process her experiences. Then she reflected further by saying that crocheting was the only way Esperanza knew how to practice mindfulness. Lastly, it seems that Gabriel also gained a more holistic perspective in his understanding of the book in

connection to his life experiences through the different layers of analysis he was able to make through Esperanza as she went from rich to poor. He intuitively knew that Esperanza was acting spoiled at the beginning of the book and made connections to how not everyone in life is the same and how some individuals experience more disrespect than others in life. This is a very holistic options because it reflected a level of maturity that not all students have at this age.

Table 4 demonstrates examples of what students said.

**Table 4**

*Section of Student's Interviews with Researcher*

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**Individual Interviews  
(Researcher and Student Dialogue)**

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**Mrs. E:** How did you feel about doing a book like Esperanza Rising with mindfulness practice? How did you feel about that?

**Ava:** Oh, it was really cool because you think about what she's going through and stuff. How she felt about it, and how she got over it and how you could like, see. She describes it a little bit in the book, and you could think about it, and you could picture it in your mind too. And it was cool to do that.

**Mrs. E:** What do you think about the mindfulness component for this unit?

**Anna:** I think it relates to probably her. Well, one way I can probably, because of how Esperanza has so many things going on, that a lot of the time she doesn't really. She doesn't really, I guess, stop and kind of process it. And probably one way she does it is by crocheting, I guess.

**Mrs. E:** Why do you think I am trying to do mindfulness with Esperanza Rising. What are some connections you see?

**Gabriel:** Some connections are that the problems that not all the people are the same. one person was rich, and poor. And sometimes the disrespect because they're poor and stuff. And like Esperanza, she called them peasants. But now she realized that she's also one, because she lost her house.

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### **A Micro Lens on the Analysis of Relevant Themes**

In this section I offer a detailed analysis of the most relevant themes from the interviews, aligning with the findings from the field observations and students written reflections highlighted in the previous chapter. After examining my findings by focusing on the interviews, I decided to highlight students' reflections through the following 10 themes and 6 sub-themes that became prevalent:

1. Matured appreciation for life and family.
2. Overcoming hard lived experiences.
3. Acceptance of starting over as part of life.
4. Reflecting and gaining consciousness through life hurtles.
5. Hard work equals success.
6. Countering notions of truth through an evolved knowledge of social justice, prejudice, patriarchy, and social class
7. Awareness through a broader perspective in connection to the book.
8. Students reflected on their positive learning experience with the unit.
  - Overall reflections on Unit.
  - Activity students found most helpful.
9. Students reflected positively on the breathing meditation.
  - Students felt happy and more relaxed.
  - Connecting to emotions through the breathing meditation
10. Students' unique definitions of mindfulness
  - Students practice mindfulness through art
  - Students practice mindfulness through hobbies they enjoy.

#### **Matured Appreciation for Life and Family.**

Amelia, Gabriel, and Anna demonstrated moments of *conocimiento* through aha moments by reflecting on their own lives more deeply. Amelia reflected on recent *arrebatos* (problems) in her life, which Anzaldúa (2015) described as moments in life when we experience “*un susto*,” a shock that causes us to struggle greatly in life, by reflecting on recent deaths of family members over the course of five months. Amelia emphasized how this experience with death in her family caused her much pain that forced her to become more conscious of life in relation to death. She

came to this realization by reflecting on a greater meaning to life during conversations in class, her interview, and her writing, reflecting how she began to value life more, even though was still so young to be thinking about life through a lens of death. She made a connection to Esperanza when talking and writing about how much she matured in the story, because she also had to mature in a short amount of time due to losing family members.

Amelia's realization could be due to how Esperanza lost her father in the story and how his death negatively affected Esperanza and her family by forcing them into poverty in California. In her verbal and written reflections, Amelia demonstrated that she was able to put *Coyolxauhqui* back together in the fifth stage of *conocimiento*, in the rewriting of her story to reconcile the trauma of losing family members by creating a new version of her reality, in which the concept of death became part of her thinking regarding her notion of the cycle of human life. Amelia in the interview explored this newly acquired concept of death by talking about biology, her favorite subject, in relation to how in the future, maybe human beings can extend their life through gene therapy. This was a very interesting and unique connection for Amelia because she was weaving her life experiences to what she was learning in one of her classes.

Gabriel also had a meaningful life realization that could have been easily triggered by what Esperanza, her mother, and some of the other characters of the book went through when they had to work in labor camps in California under poor living conditions to survive. Gabriel realized that not all people achieve a happy life or a good job to overcome their problems, because he has seen people in his own life continually struggle, like the characters in *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). Gabriel seemed to be stuck in the *Coatlícue* third stage of *conocimiento*, in which stress was still overwhelming him in his life due to a recent experience.

This was reflected through his negative behaviors midway through the study when he began to interrupt instruction and participate less. Gabriel later revealed in his interview that he had recently lost his grandparents to COVID and was having a hard time focusing.

Lastly, based on her expressions from her interview, it seems that Anna realized that maybe she was perceived a certain way by people due to her race, because she was Mexican. Here, it seems that Anna identified herself with the characters in the book and may have come to this realization because of how Esperanza and some of the other characters were treated by the Anglos within their community due to them belonging to a lower social class. However, she seemed to be residing within the *nepantla* state of *conocimiento*, because she also talked about how even though she might be viewed a certain way, she still has her family to support her. This could mean that she had reached a split in awareness by realizing that she could be perceived differently depending on the people she relates to as she moves through life. She also seemed to have acquired a deeper appreciation for her family by reflecting on how they are always going to support her through hard times.

### **Overcoming Hard Life Experiences.**

Amelia, Gabriel, and Victoria had meaningful moments of *conocimiento* by reflecting on their own experiences and that of their families in direct relation to characters or events in the book. Allowing students a space in the classroom in which personal experiences or cultural practices are recognized can lead to spirituality and activism (Facio & Lara, 2014). This is reflected in how Amelia was shocked by everything she saw when she moved to the U.S. with her family after leaving everything she knew in Mexico. This reflection may have led Amelia to evolving her own sense of self when she realized the meaning behind her hard experience of

moving to the U.S. as something that forever became a part of her evolving identity moving through life in the borderlands. In Gabriel's case, his comments continually seemed to allude to how strong he felt he had to be. For example, his comment of how he went through hard times like Esperanza, but that he had to overcome them because that is just what you do revealed that he always tried to be strong without really understanding why he was feeling and acting the way he was. It was not until we talked during his interview that he realized through his own voiced reflections that he was in fact hurting and unable to focus on his work at school. His experience aligned with Anzaldúa's' (2015) concept of getting to know yourself better through spoken narrative, because he realized things about himself, he was not aware of before. Lastly, Victoria reflected through her inner knowledge of community to inspire her consciousness in relation to the way she was beginning to think. She expressed that she continually relied on the wisdom of the elders in her family to get through hard moments in her life. Further exploration on the concept of community could have led Victoria to feeling affirmed within herself with the *conocimiento* that her family is part of her identity, making her feel stronger to deal with a world in which she will have to continually enact a *nepantlera* identity.

### **Acceptance of Starting over as Part of life.**

Amelia, Gabriel, and Ava had moments of realizations that led to consciousness by reflecting on the metaphors/sayings in the book. The metaphors in the book are sayings that *Abuelita*, *Papa*, or some of the other main characters shared with Esperanza to impart wisdom. For example, *Abuelita's* saying, “‘We are like the Phoenix,’ said *Abuelita*. ‘Rising again, with a new life ahead of us’” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 50) allowed students to reflect on how starting over is part of life by explaining it in their own words through their own lived experiences. This

metaphor reflects the thoughts in Anzaldúa's fourth stage of *conocimiento*, in which students can begin to view their life and of those they love as something that can be reinvented by pushing against the internalized identities society has placed upon them (Anzaldúa, 2015). Students' responses to *Abuelita's* message revealed that they were reasoning about themselves and those they love through a lens in which change is possible.

Amelia applied this reasoning to her performance as a student at school, her creativity, and her own evolving perspective of herself. Amelia came to the realization that no one stays the same in life because we are all constantly evolving. Amelia seems to have resurrected from a dark place as she continually tried to seek a new way of viewing herself and the world through a new acquired knowledge after recently experiencing many deaths in her family, causing her to question the meaning of life and her place in the world. It seemed as if she experienced various shifts of consciousness as they played out in her daily experiences, when considering the deep inner work, she was doing by releasing her past traumas and allowing her inner soul's voice to guide her (Anzaldúa, 2015) as she continually healed through narrative, self-reflection, and in her daily routines through her own definition of mindfulness.

Gabriel related to *Abuela's* saying by talking about someone in his family who went from doing drugs to changing his/her life for the positive after becoming rehabilitated. However, the act of seeing someone else change their life for the better does not necessarily transfer to oneself. Gabriel demonstrated how he struggled to show compassion for himself by saying things like how he doesn't really care about himself as much as he cares for his friends. It is as if he was stuck in the *Coatlicue*, the third stage of *conocimiento*, in which he chose to face his problems

alone without the tools he needed to be successful. Gabriel would have needed more time to explore these thoughts further in his writing.

Ava reflected on how the characters learned to live with their new realities and made the connection to herself by reflection on the death of her uncle. She reflected on how she and her family had to continue to move on after his death while keeping him in their hearts. She demonstrated how she was beginning to grasp the concept of starting over through the characters in the book when she talked about how Esperanza, Abuelita, and Mama did start over, even though her Papa wasn't alive anymore. It seemed that Ava was reflecting on how Esperanza was able to piece her life back together (putting Coyolxauhqui together) even though her new story was very different from her previous one and she had acquired new knowledge in life (Anzaldúa, 2015) that was going to lead her in a direction of residing in and out of *nepantla*.

### **Reflecting and Gaining Consciousness through Life Hurdles.**

Gabriel, Victoria, and Amelia also had moments of *conocimiento* through other quotes/sayings in the book. For example, Victoria and Gabriel both reflected on the following saying by *Abuelita*, “there is no rose without thorns” (Muñoz Ryan, 2000, p. 14). It seemed that both Victoria and Gabriel tried to analyze this saying through a mestiza/o consciousness by trying to reconcile with the idea that no one is perfect, and that life isn't perfect. Anzaldúa (2015) explained that “from the in-between place of *nepantla* you see through the fiction of the monoculture, the myth of reality of the white races” (p. 127). It seemed that Amelia and Gabriel saw life through very realistic lenses because of their recent hard experiences. In his interview, Gabriel explained how everyone has the capacity of making another person feel bad, while

Victoria focused more on how life isn't perfect for everyone, even though at times we think we are worse off than others.

When analyzing these comments through the in-between place of *nepantla*, we see how both students were trying to see past the myth of what they think life is like for everyone. Lastly, Amelia reflected on the following quote by Esperanza's *Papa*: "Did you know that when you lie down on the land, you can feel it breathe? That you can feel its heart beating?" Amelia explained how this quote was reinforced by *Abuelita* and *Mama* throughout the story advising Esperanza so that she didn't forget where she came from and who she really was, while at the same time, teaching her to treat others right. This quote reflects the thoughts in the fourth stage of *conocimiento*, the call, because it is a call to action to do the right thing by reconnecting with the earth and the idea that you must treat every living thing with respect. Amelia was beginning to understand this type of knowledge when she said "if you treat yourself right, you will treat others right" when talking about the heartbeat of the earth and how you can set yourself free if you realize this in the sense that you must also treat yourself right.

### **Hard Work Equals Success.**

Amelia, Luis, Leo, and Anna had moments of realizations that led to consciousness about how hard work equals success in life. Facio and Lara (2014) wrote: "spirituality is a way of understanding someone's (or a community's) position in the world by trying to make sense of unfair economic conditions and gender inequality, and to do something about it" (p. 43). Amelia made a connection to Esperanza's and Miguel's work ethic in relation to how she tried to do the same in her life, as well as work harder in school to achieve her goal of getting into New York University (NYU). She reflected on how Esperanza realized that she could be anything through

hard work, even though she was still poor and there was much struggle involved. Amelia also reflected on her own patience and compared herself to Miguel, because she is determined to re-write the narrative of the ill fate of her own family by studying something related to biology. Anzaldúa (2015) wrote, “when we own our shadow, we allow the breath of healing to enter our lives” (p. 22). Amelia decided to work hard in life, motivated by her pain and understanding of the ill fate of her family and her willingness to push through so she can be successful.

Luis’s life situation seemed to reflect this thought process. Through his reflection on how hard work equals success, Luis mentioned that his dad works at a restaurant and cuts yards so that he can go to college and not have to work as hard as he does. Luis seemed to be reflecting on the sacrifices of his dad so that he can have other opportunities when he talked about following in the footsteps of his sister by going to college to become a medical assistant. He expanded on this idea during his interview when he also mentioned that he always helps his parents by babysitting his younger siblings and how he plans to help his parents economically and buy them a house when he gets older as a way of doing something about his family’s economic situation. Luis seemed to draw strength from his family to make sense of his place in the world through a lens of helping by creating goals he wants to achieve for his life and that of his family.

Furthermore, Leo reflected that his parents were Mexican, and they worked hard to reach their goals when talking about how Mexicans were negatively perceived in the book. In his interview, he proceeded to mention how he disliked that the Mexicans were called dirty greasers, just because of how they looked and because of their low socioeconomic status. Here, Leo seemed to be critically analyzing how it must feel to be the Mexicans in the book, because he can identify with their experiences while defending them against the violence, they are receiving



from a western culture that treats them as “objects” to be dealt with (Anzaldúa, 2012). Maybe Leo didn’t realize that this is what he was doing, but it is the beginning of a spark that could lead him to such a realization. Lastly, Anna reflected on how her mom is like Esperanza’s mom with pride because she is hard working like her. In her interview, Anna was making it a point to explain how women work just as hard as men when talking about how much she disliked patriarchy and its effect on women in society. With this thought process, Anna was beginning to scrape at the idea of how her identity and that of her mother’s should not be determined by men in society, because they have proven themselves to be strong. Anna’s evolving thought process aligns with the idea that “identity grows out of our interactions, and we strategically reinvent ourselves to accommodate our exchanges” (Anzaldúa, 2015, p. 75). Anna was beginning to realize what a powerful figure her own mother has been in her life. Maybe this meant that she was beginning to view herself as a strong person as well.

### **Countering Notions of Truths through an Evolved Knowledge of Social Justice, Prejudice, Patriarchy, and Social Class**

#### **Social Justice**

Amelia and Ava reflected on the topic of social justice and had moments of *conocimiento* by reflecting on Marta’s words and actions in the book. Amelia reflected on Marta’s character by saying that she was not only seeking what was right for herself and her mother, but also for the people around her when explaining her drive to strike. Amelia was trying to make sense of the reasoning behind Marta’s words and actions to understand why she was risking being sent back to Mexico when she had so much to lose. Ava was also trying to make sense of why Marta was

striking and believed it was fair for her to do so because they were barely winning money and didn't have a good home to live in. Both Amelia and Ava were trying to make sense of the *arrebato* (shocking) experience of being exposed to a young girl that looks and is the same age as them in what could have been a real-life situation for themselves if they were to have come to the U.S. during the great depression. It is important for Latinx students to be exposed to characters they can identify with, such as Marta, because her character is a symbolic representation of the journey towards *conocimiento* in that she questioned her place in the world by pushing the boundaries of the doctrines that were ruling her world (Anzaldúa, 2015). She can also be described as an empowered young person who cultivated an awareness and empathy for others due to her own struggles in life, and then decided to do something about it. Amelia and Ava saw that Marta didn't act like a victim when some of the male characters in the book just continued to work under the same terrible conditions. This exposure is important, because Marta's character began to ignite the initial stages of *conocimiento* in Amelia and Ava in that they started questioning and pondering why Marta said and did the things she did, when they themselves were too scared to strike, like Marta in the story. Students would have needed more time to understand Marta's character and why she did the things she did.

### **Prejudice**

Gabriel, Anna, and Leo reflected on the topic of prejudice by formulating their own opinions on what happened to the main characters in the book after much discussion in class. After the initial shock of coming to terms with what the characters were going through in the

book, it seems that they were trying to make sense of the prejudice the characters were experiencing when Ms. Miller and I went over the topic. Through thorough in-class conversations on the topic, critical thinking during activities, and analysis of quotes from the book, students had the opportunity to grapple with the concept *prejudice*. In their interviews and writing, which happened after this grappling, all three students expressed in their own words thoughts that point toward the idea that prejudice is bad in the world because you cannot judge a person based on their looks or their social class. Also, the students made sure to point out how Mexicans are not dirty greasers, a derogatory term used in the book, because they themselves identified with the characters and felt hurt by the comment. The students' thought processes seemed to hint that they were experiencing the third, *Coatlicue* state of *conocimiento* in which their perceptions caused their emotions to shift as they gained new understanding (Anzaldúa, 2015) of their negative feelings towards what was happening to the characters in the book in connection to themselves. These students went from not knowing what to think about the topic of prejudice to formulating these very intricate and evolving ideas on the topic.

### **Patriarchy**

Like all the topics we went over in class with the students as new vocabulary, the topic of patriarchy was no exception when it came to students expressing that they did not understand what the word meant at first. Gabriel, Ava, Victoria, Anna, and Daniel felt the strongest about the topic and achieved moments of *conocimiento* in their reflective explorations. It is interesting to note that two male students had very strong opinions on the topic of patriarchy. For example,

Gabriel was very sure about his opinions against patriarchy and why he disliked it so much due to his mom's experiences raising him as a single mother. Through the act of saying his reflections in his interview, Gabriel was able to think about the sacrifices of his own mother while pushing boundaries he might not have crossed otherwise in conversation to come to this realization. Anzaldúa (2015) explained that he is breaking from the tradition of his culture to create an alternate identity story, but in his case, in relation to how he views women within his own culture through his own mother. Daniel focused more on what he recently learned in class regarding how men usually get paid a higher salary than women in the job market and connected this newly acquired knowledge to how men control more in society because they have more money to do what they want. This was a big *arrebato* (shock) for Daniel because he didn't know this information before and talked about how his aunt is a doctor, and how he helps his mom at home with all the chores, including dishes and baby-sitting because she works too much. With the reflections, Daniel demonstrated that he understood what patriarchy was in the *nepantla* state of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2015) by thinking of his mother and realizing a clash between how the men viewed the women in the book versus the reality of how strong women are in real life.

Ava, Victoria, and Anna seemed to accept the newly acquired knowledge that men win more money than women in the workforce more readily and in less shock than the boys.

Anzaldúa (2015) explained that "awareness is not just in the mind, but also includes body knowledge" (p. 24). The girls might have reacted like this due to them being of the female gender and having already experienced a gendered ascribed identity within their own families

and culture. Victoria analyzed the negative experiences of the women in the book with patriarchy by saying that women couldn't have power over the men back then, but that now they do because they have the example of other women. She may have been referring to Marta in the story here, as well as other women in history that were mentioned in class during one of the discussions. Victoria tapped the fifth stage of *conocimiento* here, because she seemed to be trying to shift from an old way of thinking regarding how women have been viewed in her society, to one that is demanding her to employ an alternative way of knowing in which she will have to rewire her way of seeing, thinking, feeling, and expressing (Anzaldúa, 2015) women's way of being in her community. Although, I don't believe Victoria was aware of her changing thought process, she was also influencing Anna's and Ava's thinking regarding their own evolving opinions on how they didn't think it's fair that men get paid more than women, just because of their sex being viewed as weaker since she mentioned that women work just as hard as anyone else in society.

### **Social Class**

Ava, Aurora, and Anna felt the strongest about the topic of social class. They experienced moments of *conocimiento* when sharing their thoughts in their interviews and in writing regarding their evolved belief on how a person doesn't have less value if they are of a lower social class when compared to someone of a higher class. It is almost as if the students are talking from lived experience and won't change their minds, even if someone tries to convince them otherwise. Their responses made me think of how they may be thinking of social class through the third eye, with a desire to know through a reflective consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2015)

that led them to this *conocimiento* and trying to deepen awareness by affirming what they already know from lived experience. In her interview, Anna reflected deeply on the topic of social class and expanded her views by voicing her opinions in relation to Esperanza's experience going from a high status to a lower social class status. Anna was firm in her opinion by saying that we don't need social class in society because life fluctuates, and that everyone will be of lower social class at some point or another in their life. Anna may have been saying this based on how Esperanza went from a higher social class to a lower social class in the book or based on her own life experiences with her family when she talked about how hard both her parents work to achieve, what she believes is a middle-class life. Aurora alluded to her emotions and compassion in response to how Esperanza went from being rich to poor by saying that it made her feel sad, because Esperanza was treating someone with her same struggles badly without realizing the situation, she was in. It is interesting that Aurora tapped her emotions to talk about social class here, because it is almost as if she's referring to how being ignorant of things in life is a sad situation for anyone. The responses of these students point to the idea that having students reflect on a topic like social class may lead them to realizations they would not have had otherwise, and that tapping one's emotions is part of a learning process that makes learning that much more meaningful.

### **Awareness through a Broader Perspective in Connection to the Book**

Anna and Daniel made connections to characters or events in the book by talking about their lived experiences with their families and how they overcame them. Furthermore, Anna and

Daniel had meaningful moments of *conocimiento* by reflecting on their own experiences and that of their families in direct relation to characters or events in the book. For example, Anna demonstrated how she was also beginning to develop a *nepantlera* consciousness by seeing through the eyes of the other regarding how her own family would have been treated if they would have come to the U.S. during the great depression. Likewise, Daniel was also beginning to have a double awareness when reflecting on the opposite views of Miguel and Esperanza when they argued about him fighting versus not fighting to get his job back when it was unfairly given to another worker for less pay. Daniel's comment demonstrated how he was trying to make sense of the character's opposing views by grounding himself with the ability of *doble saber* (double knowing) (Anzaldúa, 2015) by considering both sides of their stories to understand what they were each going through. When asked why he liked the book during his interview, he mentioned that his biggest take-away from the book was that it helped him think about making decisions. This comment made sense when considering his thought process regarding Esperanza's and Miguel's fight when he mentioned in his interview that seeing opposing views allowed him to think more about making decisions.

### **Student's Reflected Positively on Their Learning Experience**

In the field notes and interviews, students demonstrated and expressed how well they learned by working collaboratively and creatively as they engaged with *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). This prompted moments of *conocimiento* for the students when they reflected on their own learning processes with criticality, and interactions in the classroom with

the teacher and each other. Furthermore, they reflected on how Ms. Miller and I implemented the unit and the activities they did in class.

### **Overall Reflections on Unit.**

Amelia and Victoria had meaningful overall reflections on the unit by comparing how they learned to previous learning experiences at school that led to a moment of *conocimiento* for each. Aguilar-Valdez et al. (2013) explained that “the path to *conocimiento* is a path towards a deep and transformative ‘knowing,’ one that goes beyond mere content knowledge and into deep understanding and transforming perception of reality and one’s place in it” (p. 829). Amelia demonstrated a reflective and a critical way of thinking about her own learning by talking about the way Ms. Miller and I taught throughout the unit. Through her reflection, she is contributing to her own path of *conocimiento* by trying to figure out how she learns best in a school context. Amelia was trying to make sense of her previous learning experiences to the present by reflecting on more than what she was learning through comprehension and analysis in connection to reading *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). She was seeing beyond what was presented to her in the classroom by us, her teachers, to analyze what she will need to continue to experience to have meaningful learning experiences at school.

Amelia came to realize that learning entails much more than simply taking notes to try and memorize information, because she also reflected on how she always struggled to learn this way. This realization and moment of *conocimiento* might lead Amelia to doing things a bit more differently in the way she studies and how she goes about doing her work in classroom contexts.



Victoria also reflected on her own learning process by critically reflecting on the things Ms. Miller and I did throughout the unit and focused more on specific things that helped her understand the work. She realized that there is a specific way in which teachers can explain things through examples and hands-on activities for her to learn about new topics. She also reflected on a moment when I gave her individualized attention and guided her by providing an example, definition, and by guiding her to a page number in the book. This specific analysis of her learning reflected how deeply she reflected on her learning process throughout the unit and how she came to a moment of *conocimiento* by realizing how she learns best.

#### **Activity Students Found Most Helpful (Timeline of Events).**

Students found the timeline of events activity the most helpful in their learning process reading the book *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). Ava, Victoria, Anna, and Leo reflected on how they realized the timeline of events helped them keep up with what was happening in the story the most, and how it led to them successfully completing their work throughout the unit. hooks (2010) explained that learning is most meaningful and useful when everyone in a classroom environment realizes they are all responsible for creating knowledge together as a community. When Ms. Miller and I heard the students suggest a way to keep up with the reading through an outline, we listened and created the timeline activity to help students keep up with the events in the story. This resulted in most students reflecting and having a moment of *conocimiento* about how they learn best when trying to keep up with a longer reading, which is something they didn't have a lot of experience within previous classes. Most students talked

about how they struggled with keeping up with the information from the book and how looking back at the timeline helped them keep up with the storyline while focusing on the task at hand. This realization was important, because most students reflected on how little time, they had to do all their schoolwork in their interviews. Students realized that a timeline is important for their learning development when reading a longer text is a new learning tool they learned for when they do future readings, even if their future teachers don't do a timeline with them in the classroom context.

### **Students Reflected Positively on the Breathing Mindfulness Meditation**

In the field notes, interviews, and written reflections, students demonstrated they reacted positively to the daily breathing meditation by feeling calmer and by reflecting more. This prompted moments of *conocimiento* for the students when they reflected on their experiences with the concept of mindfulness and the breathing meditation throughout the study.

### **Students Felt Happy and More Relaxed.**

Amelia, Gabriel, Ava, and Victoria reflected that the mindfulness breathing meditation made them feel more aware, calmer, and a bit more positive by the end of the study. Amelia talked about how she was able to notice more because of the breathing meditation. Anzaldúa (2015) explained, "the material body is center, and central. The body is the ground of thought. The body is a text. Writing is not about being in your head; it's about being in your body" (p. 5). Amelia was able to create her own *auto-historias* (self-stories) through moments of *testimonios* by igniting a spiritual side of herself she might have not known she had. This could have been

supported by the daily breathing meditation because it was a time during which the students were able to focus on their bodies through their breath and five senses. Amelia explained that she acquired a more conscious state of being in relation to how she became more conscious about her identity, and how she viewed herself on a personal level and as a student. She expressed during her interview that she's constantly changing because of her life experiences, and because of this, became more accepting of her reality. This newly acquired *conocimiento* led Amelia to feel that the breathing meditation was like a friend doing something nice for her because of her life-changing experience.

Next, Gabriel mentioned that the breathing meditation led him to a point where he was happy, because he was experiencing a lot of bad moments in his life. The breathing meditation practice led Gabriel to become calm enough for him to pause and reflect about his life more calmly in the present moment by activating his consciousness in relation to the emotions he was feeling. Gabriel's experience can be analyzed through Anzaldúa's (2015) writing in relation to how accepting our consciousness, instead of always acting from instinct, can lead us to *consciousness*. During the last moments of his interview, Gabriel became more conscious by reflecting on how he had to be kinder to himself. Lastly, Ava and Victoria talked about their experience with the breathing meditation as a time to relax, but also as a time to think about tough things. This reflection points to Ava's and Victoria's struggle with trying to stay in the present moment during the breathing meditation. It seems that they could not stop thinking about their worries, to the point that Victoria had to keep herself busy by doodling on a piece of paper

almost every time the practice was taking place. Both girls realized and acquired the *conocimiento* that they were experiencing a lot of stress in their lives by activating awareness of their bodies, which Anzaldúa (2015) describes as body knowledge.

Furthermore, Anna and Daniel expressed that the breathing meditation made them feel good, relaxed, and comfortable. They related these feelings in connection to when they had a test or a major assignment to complete at school. Anna viewed the breathing meditation as a tool that helped her distress when faced with school related stress and began to focus more on doing her best, rather than just worry. In relation to her evolving sense of self as a student, this was an important realization, because it added to her evolving *conocimiento* of how to be a better student in high stress situations by trying to be in harmony with the world within and around her (Anzaldúa, 2015). Next, Daniel also talked about mindfulness in relation to taking tests at school, however, he talked about it as a way of calming down afterwards. Daniel felt like the breathing meditation was important to him on a personal level because he did not want to spend an entire day worrying about the results of a test, he felt he was going to get a bad grade on.

Daniel seemed to be residing in the third, *Coatlicue* state of *conocimiento*, in which he became aware of the cracks in his performance as a student but struggled greatly to help himself. This was reflected in him tuning out sometimes when the reading was taking place, when he talked about mindfulness to escape, and by feeling lost and not clearly knowing what to do to improve his grades at school. This thought process, reflected in his interview, behavior in class,

and writing revealed that he had important things to learn regarding his own learning processes and he ultimately became more conscious that he had to put more effort towards studying.

### **Connecting to Emotions through the Breathing Meditation.**

Students also highlighted important things they were going to take away with them because of their experience with the breathing meditation. For example, Victoria and Anna had very specific reflections in their interviews of what they would always remember about the daily breathing meditation. Victoria talked about a breathing meditation that resonated with her. I read a script that asked them to think about colors and what they meant to them. Victoria reflected on the colors as if they were emotions to her and she didn't feel stressed during this practice because she felt like she could focus more by pinpointing how she was feeling about different things on that specific day. It seems that Victoria was continually working towards achieving more peace within herself and was beginning to understand her own inner spiritual awareness by advocating for her own inner well-being through the small act of being fully present during the breathing meditation. This was reflected in her body as she tried to focus more on her breathing with every new script that I read. Facio & Lara (2014) described this as a kind of process as a spiritual endeavor, in which the body and the flesh are also part of our expansion and development. Lastly, Anna reflected on how the breathing meditation was a way for her to process stress in relation to her schoolwork. It seemed like she talked about this with some of her friends in class, because she also reflected by saying that most of the students felt the breathing meditation helped them relax and reflect. Anzaldúa (2015) explained that "identity, as consciously and

unconsciously created, is always in process--self-interacting with different communities and worlds” (p 69). With this idea, I highlight how interesting it was that she also gave the opinion of her peers, because it demonstrated that the students were trying to make sense of their experience with the breathing meditation with each other collectively as a community, as if verifying their evolving thought processes and reality.

### **Students Definitions of Mindfulness**

#### **Students Practiced Mindfulness through Art and Hobbies.**

Some students mentioned they practiced mindfulness in their lives by creating art through drawing or painting, by listening to music and a podcast, and by doing a hobby. Anzaldúa (2015) explained that “the creative process is an agency of transformation. Using the creative process to heal or restructure the images/stories that shape a person’s consciousness is a more effective way of healing” (p. 35). For example, Gabriel and Anna talked about how they sought peace in their lives by reflecting on how drawing or painting made them feel. Gabriel mentioned that he drew to help him feel calm when his grandparents died because he kept crying on an almost daily basis. It seems that Gabriel was drawing to heal from the pain he was feeling from losing his grandparents and drawing was helping him put Coyolxauhqui back together. Anzaldúa (2015) explained that “art and la frontera intersect in a liminal space where border people, especially artists, live in a state of nepantla” (p. 56). In Gabriel’s case, he was dealing with the metaphorical border of his mind residing in a state of sadness, that of a new and strange school environment, and that of his home with his mother providing for him as a single mother. He was still trying to make sense of the loss of his grandparents to COVID by drawing, a coping mechanism that

allowed him to stay present during moments in his day so that he wouldn't have to think about all the sadness he was feeling.

Furthermore, Anna hinted at how art is a source of inspiration and transformation for her when she talked about how she can express herself on a blank canvas and how she reflects about her day when she's drawing. It seems that art allows Anna to have a sense of agency to create what is in her imagination, as well as inspire her to dream, since she talked about wanting to pursue a community art project and become a professional artist when she's older. Anzaldúa wrote about how border artists "depicts both the soul del artista y el alma del pueblo. It deals with who tells the stories and what stories and histories are told" (p. 62) through *autohistorias* (stories of the self). In Anna's case, she is trying to connect her art with the community by painting on some of the fences and walls within her community to demonstrate that she is there, and that in essence, the Latinx community is there and have creative beautiful things to offer.

Next, Victoria was the only student that mentioned she listened to a podcast on YouTube to practice mindfulness by herself. It is interesting to note that Victoria decided to seek out a podcast to listen to on her own, because this demonstrated how she was continually seeking ways to be mindful in her life by pushing boundaries a young person such as herself would not normally seek. She seemed to be continually enacting intimate listening (Anzaldúa, 2015) by reflecting on what others had to say, and this included the advice of elders in her family, rather than just relying on her thoughts to survive the stressful moments she talked about in her interview. Lastly, Leo and Luis mentioned they practiced mindfulness by playing a sport or a video game with their friends because this would normally allow them to disconnect from their problems. This reflected how both Leo and Luis were constantly avoiding their fragmentations in

the *Coatlicue*, third state of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2015) because they did not want to come to terms issues, they were dealing with by remaining in a state of *desconocimiento*. This was reflected in how they constantly pushed against trying to reflect more deeply in their interviews and written reflections.

### Discussion

For this study, I sought to explore how Latinx students respond to a unit informed by Chicana feminist theory, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and mindful breathing mediation in a sheltered ESOL classroom context through the exploration of the culturally appropriate Young Adolescent (YA) text *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). This question led me to exploring student's reflective reactions through their verbal, written, and physical responses in connection to the book. The themes that emerged helped answer the research question for this study, as I drew from "a holistic epistemology that incorporates self-reflection, imagination, intuition, sensory experiences, rational thought, outward-directed action, and social justice concerns" (Keating, 2006, p.10) to analyze students' responses to teaching informed by *nepantlera* pedagogy. Student's responses demonstrated how they began to resist oppression in its most invisible form by taking steps towards beginning to change their thoughts on how they viewed themselves on a personal level and as students within the school setting.

This study revealed how social justice work can begin small when students learn to reflect deeply within themselves, while doing meaningful academic work in a sheltered ESOL classroom setting. The nine Latinx students' whose interviews, written reflections, and field



observation I analyzed enacted *conocimiento* by tapping their own lived experiences, their family histories, and that of their own evolving identities in their processes of achieving (*conocimiento*) coming to knowing. Students were able to make reflective connections in such a way that their educational experiences were more meaningful because of learning that became more holistic for them. Furthermore, the findings and analysis for this study highlighted Latinx students' ability to reflect, analyze, and mindfully meditate in the English ESOL classroom context while still acquiring English as a second language. The field notes, interviews, and students' written work serve as multiple data sources that upon analysis triangulate into a comprehensive understanding of how a group of seventh grade Latinx students in a sheltered ESL classroom context responded to a unit implementation that drew on Chicana feminism (Anzaldúa, 2012 & 2015; Bernal 2001 & 1998; Elenes, 1997), culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995 & 2009; Milner, 2011), critical pedagogy (hooks, 2010), and a social justice lens to mindfulness that promotes inner awareness and reflection (Anzaldúa, 2015; Facio & Lara, 2014) in connection to learning through a culturally appropriate young adolescent text.

The unit was implemented through the application of *nepantlera* pedagogy (Aguilar-Valdez et al., 2013; Fránquiz et al., 2013; Reza-López et al., 2014) as a form of culturally relevant pedagogy that informed teaching that is open to the knowledge and lived experiences of Latinx youth in an urban setting. *Nepantlera* pedagogy was appropriate for this study because it drew from a holistic spiritual Indigenous awareness that allowed students to tap their feelings and imaginations, as well as see through the events of their daily life and how it affected their

learning with awareness (Anzaldúa, 2015). The Latinx students in this study were able to enact *conocimiento*, which translated to ways of knowing by tapping their family's lived experiences, as well as their own identity and culture within their metaphorical borderlands in relation to the Young Adolescent (YA) text *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). This led them to feeling empowered “intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20) in their interactions with me during their interviews and our informal conversations throughout the study.

This study drew from recent empirical studies that explored and analyzed their findings through Gloria Anzaldúa's seven stages of *conocimiento* with a focus on the state of *nepantla* (Auilar-Valez et al., 2013; Gutiérrez, 2012; Venegas-Weber, 2018). These studies demonstrated how teachers and students embraced *nepantla* to rethink knowledge in the science, math, and DLI classroom towards acquiring *conocimiento* (ways of knowing) with Latinx students. They highlighted teachers and teacher candidates as they became conscious of their *nepantlera* identities in their pedagogical processes with their students, and how they negotiated these evolving identities within themselves through noticing more in conversation with their students. However, Aguilar-Valdez et al. (2013) go even further in their study by describing and drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's seven stages of *conocimiento* in their analysis of students in 1st-6th grades across different school settings and programs in the U.S. The teachers not only described how they positioned themselves as *nepantleras* within themselves and the classroom setting in the writing of the findings, but also described how the students experienced Anzaldúa's (2015) seven

stages of *conocimiento* in their learning of science and math. My study drew from these qualitative empirical studies in that I drew from *nepantlera* thinking in the putting together and teaching of the unit I created, but instead of focusing on my own thought process residing in *nepantla* as an ethnic or cultural individual and teacher, I focused on the reflections of 7th grade Latinx students by analyzing their coming to knowing through Anzaldúa's (2015) seven stages of *conocimiento*. I suggested that future studies can begin to focus more on student's processes of achieving *conocimiento* (coming to know) within ESOL classroom settings.

### **Implications**

The findings and analysis of this study have real implications for teachers working with Latinx students in ESOL settings, as well as across content subject areas within diverse urban schools serving a large population of students learning English as a second language. This study demonstrated that teachers could help promote students' sense of self in connection to their learning through the concept of *educación*, which is a definition to education grounded in Mexican culture, "with its emphasis on respect, responsibility, and sociality" (Valenzuela, 1999, p.21) in their interactions in the classroom. This kind of interaction is led by caring for and accepting student's individualities and ways of being, while teachers also make themselves vulnerable in the process of creating a space in which students gain the *confianza* (trust) they need to share their own knowledges through their own unique lenses about themselves and the world around them. This lies at the core of creating meaningful relationships with Latinx students who are not only struggling within a western driven education system, but also within

themselves through constantly questioning how they fit in a world they continually feel forced to fit into. Applying *nepantlera* pedagogy towards cultivating a group of seventh grader's sense of self as individuals and as students in the ESOL classroom setting in a short amount of time was challenging, but not impossible. This study speaks to how teachers can begin helping their Latinx students cultivate a sense of empowerment within themselves through moments of *conocimiento* (coming to knowing) (Anzaldúa, 2015) by being more critical and reflective of their life experiences, education, cultures, and as well as how to be more mindful through the exploration of topics that speaks on society and their place in it. These kinds of realizations in the classroom setting were important because healing is part of learning. Humanizing teaching practices (hooks, 2010) that lifts students spirits up promotes emotional learning that is tied to intellectual learning, because students are a sum of many dynamic parts that should be made visible and respected in the classroom context (Aguilar-Valdez et. al, 2013). This study also speaks to how ELL teachers should view teaching and learning in the ESOL classroom through a holistic lens in which the mind is connected to the body in the sense that learning causes students to experience emotions, thought processes, and changes that will form them as individuals as they go out into the world to influence it.

More specifically, implications for teaching practices can be drawn from this study through students' reactions to the bell work questions, vocabulary chart, timeline, quotes foldable activities on the topics, and the final project on the major themes in *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). The bell work consisted of reflection questions that helped students reflect

through their life experiences, mindful breathing meditation practice, and their opinions on specific situations of the main characters in the book to promote analysis. Student's experience with the bell work demonstrated that they were not accustomed to being asked questions that required them to reflect often. This means that teachers should do more at promoting reflection through questions that help move students towards thinking beyond what they need to know to pass the English test, considering that students will be asked to perform these skills upon exiting ESOL. The bell work questions promoted meaningful discussion amongst the students. hooks (2010) explained that "conversations are not one-dimensional; they always confront us with different ways of seeing and knowing" (p.46). When considering that some of the students in this study shared their personal life experiences, inferences, and opinions they had on the topics and themes from the book, it is important to point out how this helped other students further their reflective and critical thinking, based on the things they shared and talked about when working with their peers. These are important implications for teachers, because it demonstrates that Latinx students learn best in community through the sharing of knowledge. This not only empowers students to speak up in front of others, but also teaches them to work together in an individualistic education context that tells them otherwise, but then are expected to know how to cooperate with others once they enter the workforce.

The weekly vocabulary chart activity helped students with learning about new concepts and topics in relation to the book *Esperanza Rising* (2000) and the practice of mindfulness. Teaching students' new vocabulary should not only be about teaching how a word fits within the

context of a sentence, but also about the meaning of words that shape individuals, society, and the world as a whole, because individuals speak themselves into the world influenced by identities that are assigned to them, however, these identities can be negotiated in the quest of becoming more fully human (Anzaldúa, 2015). For most Latinx students, this means that learning about new concepts and topics that have the potential to enhance learning through a more holistic view, can lead them to *conocimiento* (coming to knowing) that not only helps them academically, but also as evolving human beings who have important knowledge to offer a society that needs their wisdom to create a more peaceful and democratic world. For example, teaching the students vocabulary words in relation to mindfulness in this study opened the possibility for teaching about a different way of being within oneself at school and in the classroom, which will then translate to how to be within oneself out in the world. Once students learned about the concept of mindfulness by learning its definition through an indigenous and western lens, seeing two videos explaining both lenses, as well as visual examples for both and performing mindfulness themselves, they were able to have an embodied and experiential definition of mindfulness, because they were also experiencing a way to be mindful themselves. With this idea in mind, teachers can begin to change their views and shift from their phonics interpretation on how vocabulary is taught in the ESOL context.

The timeline activity students continually added to on a weekly basis in the classroom with the help of myself, their teacher, and their peers added to students' construction of knowledge by teaching them about an important skill and tool they will need across content

classes upon exiting ESOL. The timeline activity helped students realize that they can keep up with the reading of a longer text, even if they are still acquiring English as a second language. It means that students were able to go back in the text and learn about the chronology of events in a story, all while being exposed to the English language in a more complex format, which is the format they will continue to encounter in middle school and high school. hooks (2010) explained that “it is important to a learning community to dismantle unnecessary hierarchies” (p. 56). I incorporate this quote here to explain that what teachers choose to teach in an ESOL affects the success of students as they move through an education system that works on the premise of competition and test scores. If a teacher knows his/her students and understands the rigor they can handle depending on the level they are in, it is important for them to move beyond only teaching that which will be on the test. For example, providing students with more rigorous and interesting work through culturally relevant readings, and hands-on activities that allows for creativity, can really push student’s thinking in a culture that kills and contains students’ imaginations (hooks, 2010). Because of this, the implication of this study also pushes the limits of what it means to educate within an ESOL classroom context.

The quotes foldable activities on the topics students learned about as new vocabulary allowed students the opportunity to interact with the book in such a way that they weren’t just waiting for the answers to fall on their laps, but in a way that pushed them to actively explore and engage with a piece of text, as well as seek answers on their own with the guiding help of myself, their teacher, and their peers. Students were able to complete this activity through

constant redirection and reminders of what their task was, which was also displayed on a smart board in front of the classroom with page numbers where they could find their answers. Most students became comfortable with this activity over time through practice by reading the passages on the pages they were directed to and writing down the quotes they needed for their examples on the topics. This activity has implications for teachers in the ESOL classroom, because if teachers continue to view their students from a deficit perspective, then they will never dare to try activities that require student to do this kind of higher order thinking work. Even though students required constant guidance and help on the first couple of tries, eventually some students were able to do the work on their own and feel proud of themselves for having done so. This also included the students who struggled more. Valenzuela (1999) found in her study that students opposed schooling rather than education. I write this to explain that the students who struggled more with this kind of work, expressed that they also wanted to do more of it because they felt that they were learning to think and that it was a good thing for their lives. They also expressed that they were supported by their teachers in the process of learning, and this is important, because it was the case that these students had a negative view of themselves when it came to their abilities to do schoolwork overall. They were beginning to have confidence in their ability to do work successfully, as well as to trust a teacher to take care of them and guide them in the process towards contributing to their well-being together (hooks, 2010).

The final project on the major themes in *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) allowed students a time when they could refer to their notebooks and look over their compiled work for



the unit to gather their thoughts on two themes, they liked the most from the book to write two short essay responses. By this point, students knew that their teacher and I only expected quality work from them, because we set a high standard for their writing through their bell work reflections by grading them and letting them know when they had to expand on a thought or opinion. This kind of engaged teaching gave students the message that we cared about the work they were doing on a weekly basis (hooks, 2010). I would specifically implement culturally relevant teaching through feedback that helped students expand on their *nepantla* lenses through their writing, and Ms. Miller continually assisted students in this process by continually asking them questions to help them develop their ideas. Some of the students demonstrated how they were able to further reflect on their opinions and thoughts in their final project by referring to their work and writing their responses. This process has implications for teachers, because it demonstrated how students in an ESOL context can continually build knowledge through their writing, and critically think on the buildup of their knowledge. Students were able to summarize what they had learned throughout the unit, while also reflecting and thinking more critically to compose their two paragraphs regarding what the final project entailed.

The daily breathing meditation practice and how students responded also has meaningful implications for teachers in ESOL classroom, because emotions and how to manage those emotions are concepts that do not normally have a space in the classroom setting, even less, in connection to what students are learning in an ESOL context. Hooks (2010) explained that “if we were trained to value emotional intelligence as part of being a teacher, we might be better

equipped to make skillful use of emotions in the classroom” (p. 81). In this study, I tapped student’s emotions in connection to the mindfulness practice, which also helped them reflect through reading *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) and their writing. This process became a holistic connection of all the components of the unit that students were able to draw from to help them achieve *conocimiento* (coming to knowing) holistically through specific moments in the study. This process also allowed Ms. Miller and I to address the different needs of the students equitably (Ladson-Billings, 2009) by constantly communicating with each other on what we thought about the progress of specific student’s during her planning period to make decisions on the best approach to help them. This took time and dedication and aligned with the idea of caring teachers looking out for what is best for their students as if they were family members in need of love and care with the purpose of looking out for their overall well-being. The outcome of what students were able to achieve through the daily breathing meditation practice demonstrates that teachers can begin thinking about transforming their educational views to one that includes a type of mindful spirituality in teaching and learning that is respectful of students’ unique learning spirits, while also helping students learn to value themselves and each other as human beings (Facio & Lara, 2014) first and as workers to produce for a society, second. Taken together, the implications discussed in this section hint towards teaching and learning that could be more holistic within the ESOL classroom setting.

This study also has overall implications for language education, specifically ESOL, and mindfulness education that would require a change in educational policies regarding the way in

which the curriculum is approached and taught across school settings. For example, in this study it became relevant that teaching by focusing on students' linguistic diversity, and attending to their racialized experiences, evolving identities, and emotional and learning needs, provides an avenue to better reach them and a springboard for them to construct a more holistic understanding of the content that is being taught. At the same time, it catapults their ability to become owners and active participants of their own learning process and it catalyzes the development of agency and metacognition, which allows them to reflect about what they are learning, the learning process, and their own identities within these contexts.

In this study, students were able to engage with a culturally relevant text through a social justice-focused approach that facilitated an improvement in their ability to not only engage with the content of the book, but to also make connections between that content and their own lives and go beyond by reflecting upon the relationship between those and the impact they have in their developing identities. The students' experiences and what they bring to the table must be at the core of the teaching of any content. They all deserve and should be granted access to an equitable education that can only be supported by tapping into their linguistically, culturally, and racially diverse experiences in the process of identity negotiation within the classroom context (Wu, 2014). These kinds of student-led experiences in the classroom point towards a curriculum that is not solely focused on standardized testing, but one that is also deeply invested in teaching to the whole student by preparing them for a world in which they are required to think critically, as well as understand their place within it.

A significant piece to accomplish this revamped curriculum is the selection of appropriate culturally relevant texts to teach in ESOL classroom contexts. In this study the exposure to a culturally relevant text was enhanced by mindfulness practices that equipped students with the tools to feel empowered and confident to express their lived experiences and become owners and active participants within their own learning process. This study showed that teaching students about the concept of mindfulness and the daily breathing meditation strengthened their engagement in the learning process by providing them with the opportunity to tap into their emotions and well-being in a classroom space in which they could focus on the present moment in relation to what they were learning. This is of high importance, especially in today's educational context, when considering the COVID pandemic and its repercussions within the world of education for Latinx students who were not only dealing with the added stressor of the pandemic, but also having to learn English as a second language at home while dealing with countless of other seemingly invisible structural and systemic barriers.

The mindfulness breathing meditation conducted for this study helped students begin to address and meet their emotional needs throughout the learning process. This required an open communication between the students and the teacher that involved constantly checking in with them, having high expectations of them, and not making assumptions about their potential and willingness to work when they presented disruptive behavior. For example, the case of one student who was not showing his best behavior at one point in the study was mentioned in previous chapters. The fact that he had lost his grandparents due to COVID was triggering this

behavior. The teacher did not make any assumptions and took the time to figure out what was happening. This open communication, rapport, and *confianza* between teachers and students should be encouraged for the successful implementation of this kind of approach and promotes students feeling comfortable enough to talk about their personal issues and struggles. Achieving this takes time and requires the teachers to be caring, loving, invested, fully drawn-in, emotionally connected, to believe in the students' potential, and to put in a conscious effort that involves mind and body from a social justice humanitarian perspective to teaching and learning. It opposes to the disconnected approach that is present, especially in the upper levels, where teachers have students they see and teach daily and do not have the time to connect and get to know them, their families, and their funds of knowledge (González et al., 2005).

The present study documents the connection and *confianza* between students and teachers through students' moments of *testimonios* during which they were able to talk and write about their current struggles for survival through a continuous process of reflection. Also, *testimonios* seemed to be an effective strategy, that should be implemented in ESOL classroom contexts, for the teachers to reflect to get insights regarding students' experiences and the barriers they face, which boosts the betterment of their teaching practices. During this process, students were allowed and invited to use their language repertoires (García, Ibarra Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017) and speak in the language of their preference to make meaning of their learning. This is reassuring of their culture and backgrounds. Even though students were used to their native languages not being supported in school settings, they seemed to benefit from this initiative because they expressed that they felt like they could communicate better in Spanish. For

example, Luis mentioned that he could express himself better in Spanish because he only talks Spanish at home with his parents and siblings. This highlights the importance of the need to recruit teachers who are multilingual, speak the native languages of the students, and are familiarized with their cultures and backgrounds. Teachers' multilingualism also facilitates them effectively communicating with parents and family members to promote their significant engagement in school initiatives.

Furthermore, the mindfulness practice motivated students to feel a sense of belonging (Castro-Olivo et al., 2014), which plays a big role in students not feeling alienated and marginalized within the classroom setting. Having knowledge of the concept of mindfulness and the practice of it through breathing mediation was key in this study. This should be a desired competency and a valued asset for teachers in educational contexts. It should also be encouraged, nurtured, and promoted through professional learning, workshops, and trainings. Within this study, the mindfulness approach led students to reflect about their learning processes through a constructive lens in which they applied metacognitive skills. They were able to think about how they learned and how they think they learn best based on their experiences with the unit. This brings to the forefront that students need time to reflect and think about their own learning processes in the classroom context to be successful. In institutions where there is an emphasis in standardized testing, scripted curriculums, and accountability this is usually not possible due to time constraints and inflexibility of the teaching practices within the established expectations. These constraints also present a roadblock when it comes to the application of multiple assessment strategies which seemed to be effective and was crucial to this study. It allowed

students to demonstrate their learning through diverse opportunities and multimodalities. Students were not evaluated through tests, like usual. They took quizzes on the Kahoot game-based learning platform; had the opportunity to engage in creative writing; were invited to participate in hands-on individual and group activities; and took part in artwork related to themselves within the unit of study, which they mentioned they enjoyed.

Aligned to this multimodality in assessing students' engagement and performance in the unit activities was the transformation of the learning environment. Students' desks were placed into groups or in pairs of two when working in activities so that they could better communicate and collaborate with each other. The teacher would set up a designated table at the back or front of the classroom to provide individualized and differentiated attention to students struggling with their writing or work. The classroom door was decorated to resemble the book cover of *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000). When the breathing meditation would take place, the lights were usually turned off, we would benefit from natural light that came in through the windows, and meditation music was played in the background. Students had the freedom to walk up to grab and shake a mindfulness jar filled with water and glitter that they could then pass around to their peers. This synergy between the learning environment and the learning activities seemed to be effective and is strongly encouraged within this kind of approach.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The findings of this study were affected by the extent of how much time I had to teach *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000) and the breathing meditation through a more holistic

concept of mindfulness to the students with Ms. Miller. Students were reflecting, learning new skills, and doing creative work they were not used to, returning from a previous year spent at home doing their schoolwork through a computer screen. This unit was originally intended to last eight weeks, however, issues getting into the classroom due to COVID related factors limited the study to six weeks with one pre-week of field observations. During these six weeks, I was able to physically teach the students with the aid of Ms. Miller by getting to know her and explaining every step of the unit process. This study also had other limitations, such as having a shorter class period, which reduced the daily time I had with the students to 45 minutes, and time lost on other things that were not related to the study. For example, students still dedicated some time to their computer work during the first three weeks of the study, and a couple of the students were continually absent. This caused them to miss valuable reading time and information in relation to what we were doing in class on specific days. Furthermore, there was a time when both the teacher and I missed class due to being sick or personal family matters, as well as a day of instruction lost due to the Braves winning the World Series. Lastly, the teacher and I had to become very creative in terms of how we finished the reading with the students and felt like we could have done more if we had more time. The students could have benefited from having more time to reflect, with understanding the reading comprehension questions, and completing their symbol drawings for their end of unit project posters.

Another limitation to this study is that it applied an approach that has been seldomly explored in classroom contexts, especially ESOL and with older students. The lens of the seven



stages of *conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 2015) used to analyze the data has also been seldomly explored. The analyzed data came from a sample of nine students from a public school in an urban context within a Southeastern state of the United States. The ESOL teacher in charge of the classroom and I, who cotaught and implemented the unit had previously utilized mindfulness techniques and exercises in our daily lives. However, we were not professionally trained due to the difficulty to find appropriate mindfulness social-justice teaching trainings, and the vaguely explored nature of this approach. We did recur to the literature to inform our practice, but the identification of appropriate resources to train teachers in this approach is recommended. Future research could explore this approach in a variety of contexts with a variety of students from different backgrounds, different grade levels, and different language proficiencies. A bigger sample could be identified, as well. Finally, this data analysis lens of the seven stages of *conocimiento* could be applied more in the future.

### **Conclusion**

The introduction of this study began with an overview of the problems Latinx students often face in school and classroom settings in the U.S. I provided reasoning for this study by highlighting the oppression and marginalization that has promoted an alienating collective identity and low-quality educational experiences for Latinx students through a curriculum that excludes indigenous identities, cultures, and languages. This study was motivated by my own personal life experiences as a Cuban immigrant and Latinx student acquiring English as a second language through an education that did very little to tap my *nepantlera*, creative, and holistic ways of knowing and being. I came to this study with a question, positionality, and theoretical

lens that guided my choices, methodology, and analysis of the data. I wanted to learn how Latinx students would respond to a unit informed by Chicana feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and mindful breathing mediation in a sheltered ESOL classroom context through the exploration of a critical and culturally appropriate Young Adolescent (YA) text.

Through this question, I was led to valuable information because of the reflections made by the students on everything that took place throughout the study in relation to the book *Esperanza Rising* (Muñoz Ryan, 2000), which included a breathing meditation component, as well as reflection on their own learning processes. I used a Chicana feminist theoretical framework by mainly drawing on Gloria Anzaldúa's work on the seven stages of *conocimiento* through a qualitative ethnographic methodology that provided me with the tools I needed to arrive at my findings. The theoretical, pedagogical, and methodological lens I took up for this study were pivotal for my understanding of how students responded to the unit implementation because they complimented each other perfectly for the gathering and analysis of the findings for this study. This research was undertaken through an insider/outsider perspective and stance, considering that I am Latina and have similar life experiences as the students, but at the same time, I was an outsider through the role of researcher and teacher. This work can be extended beyond the ESOL classroom space in which it was undertaken, because it has real implications that were drawn from the reflections and experiences of the Latinx students who took part of the study. Lastly, it is my hope that this study is replicated by ESOL teachers and researchers in middle and high school classroom settings. This kind of work is important because it offers a holistic lens to ESOL education.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: GA Standards

The WIDA Language Development Strands represents the social, instructional, and academic language students need to engage with peers, educators, and the curriculum in schools following the social, instructional, and academic language for all levels (1-6) of students' English proficiency. I draw from the WIDA performance definitions to see how students use language and express information, ideas, or concepts in either written or oral communication through processes that can vary. Furthermore, instruction includes sensory, graphic, and interactive support. Sensory supports include real-life objects, pictures & photographs, illustrations, diagrams, & drawings, videos, and films. Graphic support includes graphic organizers, tables, and timelines. Interactive supports take form in pairs or partners, in triads or small groups, using cooperative group structures, with the internet (websites) or software programs, and in the home language. Scaffolding is provided for students to understand theme related language. Lastly, I draw from the **EXPANDED** strand of the WIDA standards that can be used in collaboration between language and content area educators.

(1) CONNECTIONS: *Common Core College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading (# 7) and Writing (#1-2) for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.*

(2) ELD STANDARD 2: The Language of Language Arts (Grades 9-10).

**CONNECTION:** *Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Reading: Informational Texts, Integration of Knowledge, and Ideas # 8.*

(3) ELD STANDARD 2: The Language of Language Arts (Grades 11-12).

**CONNECTION:** *Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Reading: Literature, Craft and Structure #6.*

*Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Speaking and Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration #3 (Grades 11-12).*

(4) ELD STANDARD 1: Social & Instructional Language. **CONNECTION:** *Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Speaking and Listening, Comprehension and Collaboration #1. C (Grades 9-10).*

(5) ELD STANDARD 1: Social & Instructional Language. **CONNECTION:** *Common Core Reading Standards for Informational Texts, Integration of Knowledge & ideas #7 (Grades 11-12).*

## Appendix B: Weekly Lesson Plan

### Weekly Lesson Plans

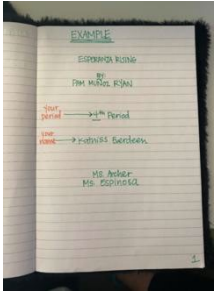
#### Week 1:

#### Objectives:

- Teacher gives students their notebooks for their new unit.
- Students are introduced to the concept of mindfulness.
- Introduction to “Esperanza Rising” by Pam Muñoz Ryan.
- Biographical information on author.
- Brief Historical information on the period the story takes place.
- Students begin reading “Esperanza Rising” following an audio recording of the book of the introduction titled: *“Aguas Calientes Mexico: 1924”*/ “Warm Waters Mexico: 1924” and chapter 1: *“Las Uvas”*/“The Grapes” in class.

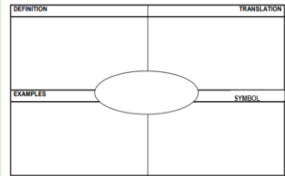
**Materials:** Markers/Unit notebook/  
 “Esperanza Rising” book and  
 audible/ Power point slides  
 (computer/smart board)/Author  
 biography worksheet/Vocabulary  
 chart worksheets/ Mindfulness

TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	
1-Bell work: Students receive their unit notebook and use a sharpie to write their names on the outside and then fill out the	1- Bell work: 10 minutes of Lexia  Power Up.  2-Teacher leads a short breathing body	1-Bell work:  Students tap their five senses by writing about them in their notebook by	1-Bell work: 10 minutes Lexia  Power Up.  2-Sitting breathing mindfulness	

<p>first page with information shown on a PP slide.</p>  <p>2-Announcements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*New unit starts today- “Esperanza Rising” by Pam Muñoz Ryan till Thanksgiving.</li> <li>*Lexia Power Up reward tracker</li> <li>*Self-introduction.</li> <li>*Permission slips.</li> </ul> <p>3- Students answer the following</p>	<p>scan meditation (2 mins).</p> <p>3-Mindfulness explained through an Indigenous lens:</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzKryaN44s">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzKryaN44s</a></p> <p>4-Students complete a compare/contrast Venn diagram on the first (Western lens) and second (Indigenous lens) video explanations of mindfulness. Students talk about their responses as a class.</p>	<p>noticing their surroundings.</p> <p>Students take out their H.W. (finishing author biography questions from Wed &amp; turn in any permission slips).</p> <p>2-Sitting breathing mindfulness meditation titled “Feeling Calm.” (2-3 min)</p> <p>3-Warm up: Students answer the following question: why is it important to understand the author of a story?</p>	<p>meditation titled “Breathing in Positivity.” (2-3 min)</p> <p>3- What is a theme? YouTube: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spxmREIZwKs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=spxmREIZwKs</a></p> <p>Example and activity: figuring out theme as a class.</p> <p>4- Students write the word theme and inference/to infer in the center</p>	<p><b>No school on Monday this week!</b></p>
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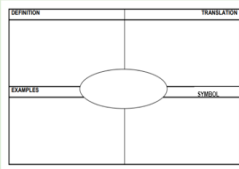
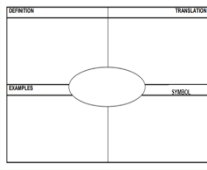
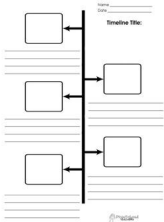
<p>question: What is mindfulness? (1-2 mins)</p> <p>4-Students are introduced to a general concept of mindfulness via (PP) slides, video, and a physical mindful jar example.</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsUEOUaWpY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTsUEOUaWpY</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHPwzNyBpAw">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHPwzNyBpAw</a></p> <p>*Students write the word mindfulness in the center of a vocabulary chart</p>	<p>5-Students are introduced to biographical information on author Pam Muñoz Ryan through audio, video, and photos.</p> <p>YouTube: <b><u>A video interview with Pam Muñoz Ryan</u></b></p> <p>6-Biographical information worksheet. Students work in pairs to complete a short reading response activity. The teacher walks around the classroom assisting</p>	<p>4- What is a metaphor? It is important for students to understand what a metaphor is to understand the themes in “Esperanza Rising.”</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPz1JiboOio">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JPz1JiboOio</a></p> <p>Students write the word metaphor in the center of a vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories:</p> <p>a-Definition b-Translation</p>	<p>of two vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories:</p> <p>a-Definition b-Translation c-Use it in a sentence d-Symbol</p> <p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p>  <p>5- Exit ticket question: Who is your favorite character in the</p>
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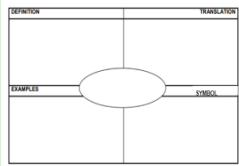
<p>worksheet with the following categories:</p> <p>a-Definition</p> <p>b-Translation</p> <p>c-Use it in a sentence</p> <p>d-Symbol</p> <p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p>  <p>5-Teacher leads a short breathing meditation titled “How are you feeling.”</p> <p>6- Students are introduced to “Esperanza Rising”</p>	<p>with vocabulary and reading responses.</p> <p>7- Exit ticket question: Why do you think is important to understand the author of a story?</p>	<p>c-Use it in a sentence</p> <p>d-Symbol</p> <p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p> <p>5-Audio recording of “Esperanza Rising” introduction “<i>Aguas Calientes México: 1924</i>” and chapter 1 “<i>Las Uvas.</i>” Students follow along in their books</p> <p>6- Exit ticket question: Free write 3-4 sentences on their initial thoughts of the first chapter.</p>	<p>story so far? Why?</p> <p>3-4 sentences.</p>	
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<p>through the following book trailer while they follow along with a script of the trailer with vocabulary words defined to check for understanding.</p> <p><i><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMB_bJRmxaM">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XMB_bJRmxaM</a></i></p> <p>7-Teacher aid students in understanding the trailer and goes over vocabulary words they might not understand.</p>		<p>Teacher walks around as students write handing out the reading comprehension questions for H.W.</p>		
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8-Exit ticket question: What are three things you learned about mindfulness today? (2-3 sentences)				
<p><b><u>Week 2</u></b></p> <p><b>Objectives:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reflecting through questions on action and characters in “Esperanza Rising.”</li> <li>● Breathing mindfulness meditation.</li> <li>● Deciphering two of <i>Abuelita’s</i> teachings.</li> <li>● Students listen to and read Chapter 2: <i>Las Papayas</i> (papayas).</li> <li>● Students listen to and read Chapter 3: <i>Los Higos</i> (Figs) for H.W.</li> <li>● Topics: Patriarchy and social class: upward mobility.</li> <li>● Students begin their chronology of events timeline.</li> <li>● Review and quiz on Kahoot: Chapters 1-3.</li> </ul> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin-top: 20px;"> <p><b>Materials:</b> Markers/Unit notebook/ “Esperanza Rising” book and audible/Computer/smart board (Pp slides)/Vocabulary and character chart worksheets/ Timeline worksheet/Mindfulness scripts.</p> </div>				
<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>

<p>1-Bell work: Abuelita introduces two life lessons in chapter 1, “there are no roses without thorns” and “never be afraid to start over.”</p> <p>Think about your parents, grandparents, or family members. Do they have any sayings or lessons they teach you?</p> <p>2-Announcements: *45 minutes of Lexia Power Up this week. *Power up minutes from last week.</p>	<p>1-Bell work: What do you know about Esperanza’s family so far? How do you think their lives will change after Papa’s death?</p> <p>2-Simple breathing meditation titled “I am Thankful.” (2-3 min)</p> <p>3-Character analysis chart for “Esperanza Rising.” Character: Esperanza</p> <p>4- Students listen to and follow along in their books: Chapter 2:</p>	<p>1- Bell work: Lexia Power Up (15 mins)</p> <p>2- Simple breathing meditation titled “When I feel Special.” (2-3 min)</p> <p>3-Students are introduced to the topic of patriarchy. *Students write the word patriarchy in the center of a vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories: a-Definition b-Translation</p>	<p>1- Bell work: Take out your H.W. to be checked and answer the following question: How does patriarchy affect Mama and Esperanza’s decisions in chapter 2?</p> <p>2-Simple breathing meditation titled “Reflecting on Joy.” (2-3 min)</p> <p>2-Students are introduced to the topic of social class.</p>	<p>1-Bell work: Lexia Power Up (15 mins) and notebook check.</p> <p>2-Simple breathing meditation titled “I Am.” (2-3 min)</p> <p>3-Students study through a Kahoot game for the quiz on chapter 1-3.</p> <p>4-Students take a reading comprehension</p>
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<p>*Kahoot quiz on Friday over the chapters covered.</p> <p>3-Simple breathing meditation titled “What I like About Me.” (2-3 min)</p> <p>4-What is symbolism? Western and Indigenous lens explanation.</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xatb9reXGZs">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xatb9reXGZs</a></p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp_QJto2bos">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rp_QJto2bos</a></p> <p>*Students write the word mindfulness in</p>	<p>“<i>Las Papayas</i>”/ “The papayas” (16 min).</p> <p>5-Exit ticket: What does family mean to you?</p> <p>6-H.W.: Read or listen to Chapter 3: <i>Los Higos</i> and answer reading comprehension questions.</p>	<p>c-Use it in a sentence</p> <p>d-Symbol</p> <p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p>  <p>4-Character analysis chart for “Esperanza Rising.”</p> <p>Character: Tio Luis</p> <p>description and evidence from the text.</p> <p>5-Exit ticket: How does patriarchy affect Mama and Esperanza’s</p>	<p>*Students write the word social class in the center of a vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories:</p> <p>a-Definition</p> <p>b-Translation</p> <p>c-Use it in a sentence</p> <p>d-Symbol</p> <p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p>  <p>3-Metaphors and symbols</p>	<p>Kahoot quiz on chapters 1-3.</p> <p>5-Students begin filling out a Chronology of events timeline on “Esperanza Rising.”</p> 
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<p>the center of a vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a-Definition</li> <li>b-Translation</li> <li>c-Use it in a sentence</li> <li>d-Symbol</li> </ul> <p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p>  <p>5-Symbols activity:</p> <p>Students draw and describe three symbols that represent them and their life experiences.</p>		<p>decisions in chapter 2?</p> <p>6-H.W. Finish reading or listening to chapter 3: <i>Los Higos</i> / The Figs and answer reading comprehension questions.</p>	<p>walkthrough activity.</p> <p>4-Exit ticket: How does Esperanza change from chapter 1 to chapter 2?</p>	
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<p>6-Exit ticket: students share their symbols with the class and why they chose them.</p> <p>7-Students show that they did their reading comprehension questions for H.W.</p>				
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### Week 3

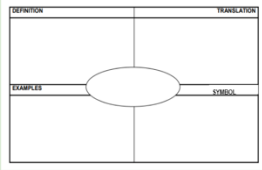
#### Objectives:

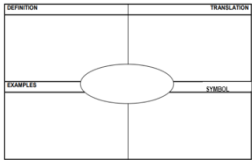
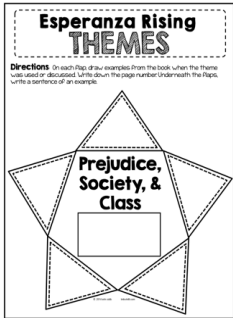
- Reflecting critically through questions on action and characters in “Esperanza Rising.”
- Chapter 4: *Las Guayabas* (Guavas): Audible listening and read along.
- Chapter 5: *Los Melones* (Cantaloupes): Audible listening and read along.
- Shape-flaps activity (quotes) on the following topics:  
Social class,  
society(patriarchy), and prejudice.
- Introduction to end of unit poster quotes project.
- Review and quiz on Kahoot: Chapters 4 and 5.

**Materials:** Markers /Unit notebook/  
“Esperanza Rising” book and  
audible/Computer/smart board (Pp  
slides)/Worksheets for activities/ Shape-  
flaps activity (quotes)/Mindfulness scripts/  
End of unit quotes project handout.



<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>
<p>1-Bell work: *30 minutes Power Up. *Power Up reward tracker.</p> <p>2- (Warm up): We have learned that whenever things are going wrong, crocheting is something Abuelita, Esperanza and her mom do. This is a way for them to practice mindfulness in tough situations and for Abuelita to offer life advice.</p>	<p>1-Bell work: Is there something special or specific you remember from the land you once called home? (If you were born somewhere other than here and go back to visit often with your parents) or is there something specific or special about the place where you live now? What does it mean to you?</p> <p>2-Breathing meditation practice</p>	<p>1-Bell work: When Miguel is talking about America, he says to Esperanza, “That even the poorest man can become rich if he works hard enough.” Do you believe this statement to be true? Why or why not?</p> <p>2-Breathing meditation practice titled “Reflecting On My Goal.”</p>	<p>1-Bell work: Is it possible to be poor and rich at the same time? How so? Refer to page 76 to help you answer.</p> <p>2-Breathing meditation practice titled “Helping Others.”</p> <p>3-Students fill out information for the following characters in their charts: Mama and Hortensia</p>	<p>1-Friday Power Up rewards.</p> <p>2-Kahoot study review on chapters 4 and 5.</p> <p>3-Students take Kahoot quiz on chapters 4 and 5.</p> <p>4-Breathing meditation practice titled: “Breathing In Light.”</p>

<p>What is something that you do that helps you deal with tough situations in your life?</p> <p>3-Breathign meditation titled “I Can Do It!”</p> <p>4-Teacher goes over the topics of social class.</p> <p>*Students write the word social class in the center of a vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories:</p> <p>a-Definition</p> <p>b-Translation</p>	<p>titled “Setting A Goal.”</p> <p>3-Students listen and follow along to the reading of “Esperanza Rising” chapter 4: “Las Guayabas” (Guavas).</p> <p>4-Exit ticket: Answer the following question:</p> <p>When Esperanza’s papa was alive, life was different for her and mama. How is Esperanza’s train ride different from the time her papa was alive</p>	<p>3-Teacher goes over the topic of prejudice.</p> <p>*Students write the word prejudice in the center of a vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories:</p> <p>a-Definition</p> <p>b-Translation</p> <p>c-Use it in a sentence</p> <p>d-Symbol</p> <p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p> 	<div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px;">Description</div> <div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px;">Evidence</div> <div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px;">Mama</div> <div style="background-color: #e91e63; color: white; padding: 2px; font-size: 8px;">Hortensia</div> <p>Students answer the following questions:</p> <p>How are Hortensia and Mama opposites?</p> <p>How do Mama and Hortensia demonstrate to be more alike than we thought in chapter 4, even though they are different?</p> <p>4-Students work on understanding the following</p>	<p>5- Students complete their shape with flaps activity from yesterday.</p> <p>6-Students organize their notebooks by cutting and gluing.</p> <p>7-Exit ticket: Students are introduced to their end of unit quotes project and rubric.</p>
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<p>c-Use it in a sentence</p> <p>d-Symbol</p> <p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p>  <p>5- Students add to their “Esperanza Rising” timeline.</p> <p>6-Exit ticket: How have you seen Esperanza’s and Mama’s social class change throughout chapters 1-3?</p>	<p>versus how it’s described in chapter 4?</p> <p>5-H.W. Students listen to or read chapter 4 and do reading comprehension questions.</p>	<p>4- Important passages in chapter 4: Examples of social class activity.</p> <p>Students receive a Ziplock bag with quotes from chapter 4 that relate information about Esperanza’s social class status of when papa was live versus when papa is gone.</p> <p>Student’s job is to read each quote to themselves and glue them where they belong on the chart labeled with two sections.</p>	<p>topics contextually through quotes from the book as example:</p> <p>Prejudice, society (patriarchy, and social class.</p> <p>Shape with flaps activity:</p>  <p>5-Exit ticket: How do you think life in California will differ from Esperanza’s previous life? How</p>
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		<p>5-Exit ticket: Based on how Esperanza has been behaving and reflecting, do you think she will change in the coming chapters?</p> <p>6-H.W. Students listen to or read chapter 5 and reading comprehension questions.</p>	<p>do you think Esperanza will react to the changes?</p> <p>6-H.W. Students listen to or read chapter 5 and reading comprehension questions.</p>	

### Week 4

#### Objectives:

- Reflecting critically through questions on events and characters in “Esperanza Rising.”
- Breathing meditation practice.
- Students listen and follow along reading to the audible of “Esperanza Rising:”

Chapter 6: “*Las Cebollas*” (The Onions). (18:54 min).

- Students read pages 132-135 from chapter 7: “*Las Almendras*”/“Almonds as a class.
- Student’s practice inferring with a partner on the topic of strikes.
- Students begin reading a summary of chapter 8: “*Las Ciruelas*”/Plums as a class.
- Review and quiz on Kahoot: Chapters 6 and 7.

**Materials:** Markers/ Unit notebook/  
 “Esperanza Rising” book and audible/  
 Computer/smart board (Pp slides)/  
 Worksheets for activities: timeline,  
 Think/Pair/Share, and  
 Vocabulary/Mindfulness scripts/ Summary  
 of chapter 8 handout.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>1-Bell work: 10 minutes of Power Up.</p> <p>2-Warm up: Have you ever been expected to perform a skill (even a simple</p>		<p>1-Bell work: If you were moving away and never returning like Esperanza, what 10 items would you bring with you?</p>	<p>1- Bell work: 10 minutes of Power Up.</p> <p>2-Warm up: What do you know about worker’s strikes</p>	<p>1-Bell work: Ten minutes of Power Up.</p> <p>2-Warm up: Do you think that everyone in</p>

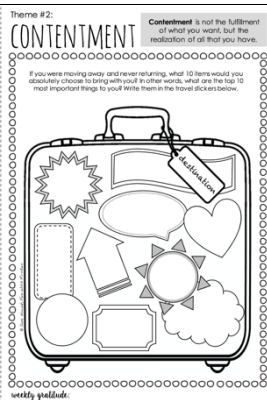
task) you had never learned before? What was it and were you able to complete the task? Was it difficult?

3-Breathing mindfulness meditation titled “My Favorite Place.” (2-3 min)

4-Teacher goes over the topic of perseverance.

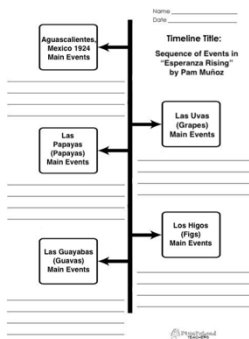
\*Students write the word perseverance in the center of a vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories:

**Teacher Planning Day!**



2-Breathing mindfulness practice titled “Cloud Meditation.”

3-Students work on their “Esperanza Rising” timeline of events.



(*huelgas*)? Have you ever heard of employees striking? Write 2-3 sentences showing your understanding of a strike (*huelga*) or guessing what it is.

3- Breathing mindfulness meditation titled “Bird Reflection.”

4- Students work on their “Esperanza Rising” timeline of events.

your society has equal opportunities to succeed? Why or why not?

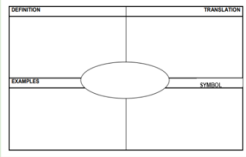
3-Breathing mindfulness meditation titled “Hot Air Balloon Reflection.”

4-Kahoot study review on chapters 6 and 7.

5-Students take Kahoot quiz on

a-Definition  
 b-Translation  
 c-Use it in a sentence  
 d-Symbol

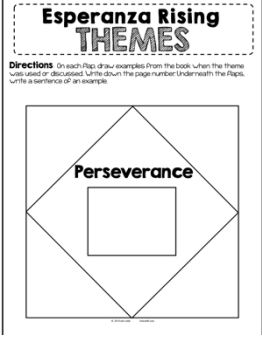
Students fill out the vocabulary chart.



5- Students listen and follow along reading to the audible of “Esperanza Rising:” Chapter 6: “Las Cebollas” (The Onions). (18:54 min).

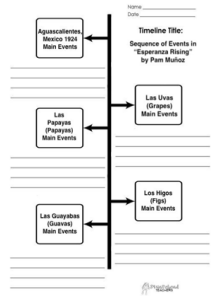
6-Exit ticket: Now that you have read chapter 6, in your opinion, how is Esperanza changing?

4- Shape with flaps activity: Students work on understanding the topic of perseverance by finding examples in the book through quotes.



5-Exit ticket: How is the influence of patriarchy still present in chapter 6?

4- Shape with flaps activity: Students work on understanding the topic of perseverance by finding examples in the book through quotes.



5-Read pages 132-135 from chapter 7 as a class on strikes to answer the question: What is a strike?

6-Students work in twos for a Think/Pair/ Share activity to infer with a partner.

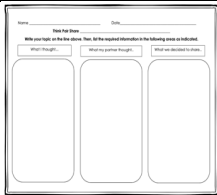
5-Read pages 132-135 from chapter 7 as a class on strikes to answer the question: What is a strike?

6-Students work in twos for a Think/Pair/ Share activity to infer with a partner.

chapters 6 and 7.

6-Read a summary of chapter 8 as a class and begin answering reading comprehension questions to be finished over the weekend for H.W.

7-Exit ticket: Remind students to do their H.W. over the weekend.

<p>6-H.W. Students do reading comprehension questions on chapter 6.</p>		<p>Refer to end of page 102 and beginning of page 104.</p> <p>6-H.W. Students listen to or read chapter 7 and do reading comprehension questions.</p>	 <p>7-Exit ticket:</p> <p>Esperanza experiences many embarrassing moments in chapter 6 and 7. It is normal to feel a bit embarrassed when learning to do new things in life. Write about one embarrassing moment when you were trying to learn something new.</p>	
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			8-H.W. Students listen to or read chapter 8 and answer the reading comprehension questions.	
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### Week 5

#### Objectives:

- Reflecting critically through questions on events and characters in “Esperanza Rising.”
- Breathing meditation practice.
- Students are introduced to the topic of social justice.
- Students listen and follow along reading to the audible of “Esperanza Rising:” Chapter 9: “*Las Papas*”/ “The Potatoes” pages 158-178.
- Students begin listening and follow along reading important passages of chapter 10 as a class: pages 186-188 and 192-195.
- Students begin listening and follow along reading important passages from chapter 11: “*Los Espárragos*”/ “The Asparagus.” Pages 199-202 and 210-213.

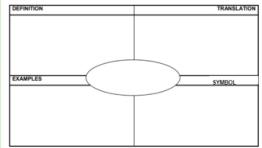
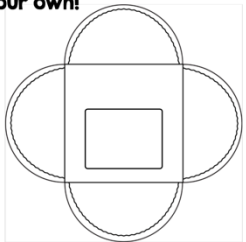
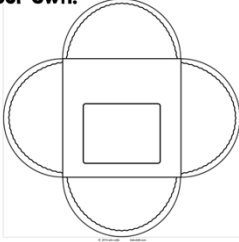
**Materials:** Markers/ Unit notebook/

“Esperanza Rising” book and audible/Computer/smart board (Pp slides)/Mindfulness scripts/Worksheets for activities: Vocabulary chart, Flap shape activity, chapter summaries.

- Flap shape quotes activity: Students look for examples of prejudice and injustice in chapter 10 through quotes.
- Think/Pair/Share: Chapter 11, “*Los Espárragos*”/“Asparagus” (important passage on the topic of striking).
- Review and Kahoot quiz on chapters 7-11 (only on the passages that were gone over in class).

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>1-Bell work: Last week we talked about what a strike is. Now that you have a better idea, what do you think about strikes? Are they good or bad for people? Refer to chapter 8, pages 146-47.</p> <p>2- Breathing mindfulness meditation titled</p>	<p>1- Bell work: How does Esperanza demonstrate growth and maturity in chapter 9 (<i>Las Papas</i>)? Why is it important for her to become more responsible? Refer to the following pages to help you answer. Pg.'s 158/172/178. Check students reading</p>	<p>1-Bell work: Do you think that everyone in your society has equal opportunities to succeed? Why or why not? (Repeated question)</p> <p>Check students' reading comprehension questions on the summaries for chapters 10 and 11.</p>	<p>1-Bell work: Do you think it is fair to deport people who strike? Why or why not? Deportation means to remove someone from a country and send them back to the country they came from. Check students' reading comprehension</p>	<p>1-Bell work: In our next chapter, “<i>Los Duraznos</i>” (“Peaches”), Esperanza becomes very disappointed with Miguel. Write about a time that you have been very disappointed. What caused your</p>

<p>“What’s Around Me.”</p> <p>3-Character analysis chart: Marta</p>	<p>comprehension</p> <p>H.W.’s.</p> <p>2- Breathing mindfulness</p>	<p>2- Breathing mindfulness meditation titled “Noticing With Your Senses.”</p>	<p>questions on the summaries for chapters 10 and 11.</p>	<p>disappointment and how did you deal with it?</p>
<p>4-Teacher goes over the topic of social justice.</p> <p>*Students write the word social justice in the center of a vocabulary chart worksheet with the following categories:</p> <p>a-Definition</p> <p>b-Translation</p> <p>c-Use it in a sentence</p> <p>d-Symbol</p>	<p>2- Breathing mindfulness meditation titled “I Can See The Rainbow.”</p> <p>3-Students are reminded of the topic of social justice through the video trailer “Precious Knowledge.”</p> <p>4-Students begin listening and follow along reading important passages of chapter 10 as a class:</p>	<p>3- (Student’s finish working on this activity) Flap shape quotes activity:</p> <p>Students look Think/Pair/Share: Chapter 11, “<i>Los Espárragos</i>”/ “Asparagus” (important passage). for examples of prejudice and injustice in chapter 10 through quotes.</p>	<p>2- Breathing mindfulness meditation titled “What I Can Feel.”</p> <p>3-Character analysis chart: Miguel</p> <p>4- Think/Pair/Share: Chapter 11, “<i>Los Espárragos</i>”/ “Asparagus”</p>	<p>2-Power up pros: Awards!</p> <p>3-Breathign mindfulness meditation titled “Mindfulness With Candy.”</p> <p>4-Kahoot study review on chapters 7-11 (only on the passages that were gone over in class).</p>

<p>Students fill out the vocabulary chart.</p>  <p>5- Students listen and follow along reading to the audible of “Esperanza Rising:” Chapter 9: “Las Papas”/ “The Potatoes” pages 158-178.</p> <p>6-Exit ticket: Students write down pages and highlight passages that will help them answer their reading comprehension</p>	<p>pages 186-188 and 192-195.</p> <p>5-Flap shape quotes activity: Students look for examples of prejudice and injustice in chapter 10 through quotes. Pages 186-188 and 192-195.</p> <p><small>Directions On each flap draw examples from the book when the theme was used or discussed. Write down the page number underneath the flaps. Write a sentence of an example.</small></p> <p><b>Create your own!</b></p>  <p>6-Exit ticket: Describe the farm where Marta and her mother live. What do you think it</p>	<p>Pages 186-188 and 192-195.</p> <p><small>Directions On each flap draw examples from the book when the theme was used or discussed. Write down the page number underneath the flaps. Write a sentence of an example.</small></p> <p><b>Create your own!</b></p>  <p>4-Reading important passages from chapter 11: “Los Espárragos”/ “The Asparagus.” Pages 199-202 and 210-213.</p> <p>5-Exit ticket: Describe the farm where Marta and her mother live. What</p>	<p>(important passage).</p> <p>Ask students: If you were one of the characters in “Esperanza Rising,” would you strike or would you continue working?</p> <p>5-Exit ticket: Esperanza helps Marta in a big way. Write about a time that you helped someone or that someone helped you.</p>	<p>5-Students take Kahoot quiz on chapters 7-11 (only on the passages that were gone over in class).</p> <p>6-When students are done with their quizzes, they will listen to chapter 12 on Google classroom silently with their headphones on.</p>
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<p>questions on chapter 9.</p>	<p>would be like to live there? Pages 192-194.</p> <p>7-H.W. Reading comprehension questions on one paragraph summaries for chapters 10 and 11.</p>	<p>do you think it would be like to live there? Refer to pages 192-194.</p>	<p>6-H.W. Catch up with your reading comprehension questions to turn in before quiz tomorrow.</p>	<p>7-H.W. Students do comprehension questions for chapter 12.</p>
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### Week 6

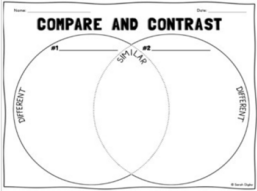
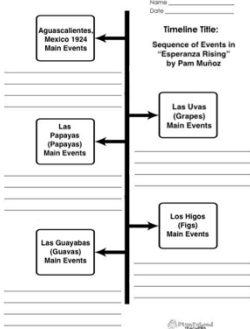
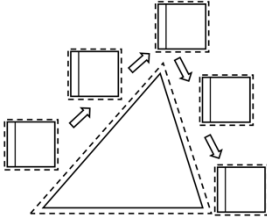
#### Objectives:

- Reflecting critically through questions on events and characters in “Esperanza Rising.”
- Breathing meditation practice: practice and video closure.
- Venn Diagram activity: Compare and contrast Miguel and Esperanza using chapter 12 (“*Los Durzanos*”/“The peaches” as reference.
- Students listen to and follow along reading to the audible of “Esperanza Rising:” Chapter 13 “*Las Uvas*”/“The Grapes.”

**Materials:** Markers/ Unit notebook/ “Esperanza Rising” book and audible/Computer/smart board (Pp slides)/Mindfulness scripts/Worksheets for activities: Venn diagram, flaps (shape)quotes activity, timeline, mindfulness in writing, my story plot triangle, end of unit project directions and rubric.

- Students complete their “Esperanza Rising” timeline of events. The plot triangle activity: Students think about the plot structure of the story and write it out in order inside the squares around the triangle.
- Students work on their end of unit quotes project.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
<p>1-Bell work: Making a prediction/infering: What do you think will happen at the end of the book?</p> <p>Check student’s H.W.’s for chapter 12.</p> <p>2-Breathing mindfulness meditation titled “Staying Focused.”</p>	<p>1-Bell work: Now that you have finished reading the book, which character do you feel like you can identify with the most? Why?</p> <p>2-Breathing mindfulness meditation titled “Feeling Calm.”</p> <p>3- Students continue listening to and follow along reading to the</p>	<p>1-Mindfulness practice through writing. Students write about things they are grateful for.</p>  <p>2-The plot triangle activity: Introduction/rising action/climax/falling action/resolution.</p>	<p>1- Closure on the breathing mindfulness practice titled “What Are You Excited For? “</p> <p>2-Mindfulness video: How mindfulness empowers us? (3 mins)</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dmg_mssP8HE">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dmg_mssP8HE</a></p>	<p>1-Students work on their end of unit quotes project (45 mins).</p> <p>Students pick 2 quotes from a list of quotes compiled for them from “Esperanza Rising” and write 2 short responses (five sentences each)</p>

<p>3-Venn Diagram activity: Compare and contrast Miguel and Esperanza using chapter 12 (“<i>Los Durzanos</i>”/“The Peaches” as reference. Refer to pages 219-223 to help you with your answer (think of the argument between Miguel and Esperanza).</p>  <p>4- Students begin listening to and follow along reading</p>	<p>audible of “Esperanza Rising:” Chapter 13 “<i>Las Uvas</i>”/“The Grapes.”</p> <p>4-Students complete their “Esperanza Rising” timeline of events.</p>  <p>5-Exit ticket: Students who haven’t completed their H.W. reading comprehension questions for chapter</p>	<p>cut and paste!</p> <p><b>My Story's Plot Triangle:</b>          Directions: Write in events from your book that match each part of the plot triangle. Use your notes on the plot triangle and parts of a story to help you.</p>  <p>Students think about the plot structure of the story and write it out in order inside the squares around the triangle.</p> <p>3-Exit ticket:          Students choose the 2 quotes they are going to analyze for their end of unit project. Students begin writing their</p>	<p>3-Students work on their end of unit quotes project (30 mins).</p> <p>Students pick 2 quotes from a list of quotes compiled for them from “Esperanza Rising” and write 2 short responses (five sentences each) about what each quote means to them and how it relates to Esperanza’s life.</p> <p>Students’ responses are printed and placed on a poster on which they will draw symbols representing the quotes and their reflections.</p> <p>Students’ responses are</p>	<p>about what each quote means to them and how it relates to Esperanza’s life.</p> <p>Students’ responses are printed and placed on a poster on which they will draw symbols representing the quotes and their reflections.</p>
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<p>to the audible of “Esperanza Rising:” Chapter 13 “<i>Las Uvas</i>”/“The Grapes.”</p> <p>5-Exit ticket: H.W. Remind students to answer reading comprehension questions for chapter 13.</p>	<p>13 should finish at this time.</p> <p><b>Students may begin working on their end of unit project today.</b></p>	<p>short responses for each quote.</p>	<p>printed and placed on a poster on which they will draw symbols representing the quotes and their reflections.</p>	
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### Appendix C: Breathing Meditation Scripts

#### Week 1

##### 1) How Are You Feeling?

Today we are going to focus on how we are feeling. As we begin, close your eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Continue breathing as you



focus on the way your body feels physically. Are you in any pain or discomfort? Is a part of your body cold or hot? What does your body feel like? When you are finished, gently shift your focus to the way your mind is feeling. Are you tired, anxious, content, etc.? How do you know? What is making you feel this way? Do you need to do something to change how you are feeling either physically or emotionally? When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

## 2) Body Scan

Today we will be doing a quick scan of how our bodies feel. As we begin, close your eyes and take one deep breath, in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you continue breathing, focus on your feet. What do your feet feel like today? Do they hurt? Can you feel your socks or shoes on your feet? Now gently shift your attention to your legs. What do your legs feel like? Can you feel them touching anything? We are now going to move slowly up to our bellies. Can you feel your breathing in your belly? Does your belly feel good or does it hurt? When you are ready, begin to focus on your arms. Do they feel heavy or light? Can you feel the desk or table they are resting on? Now, shift the focus to your face. Try to relax your face and focus on your breath coming in and out of your nose. Do you notice anything about what your head feels like? When you are finished, take a deep breath, in through you nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

## 3) Feeling Calm

Today, we are going to reflect on being calm. To begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Now, I want you to think about the word “calm.” What does it mean to you to be calm? What does it feel like when you are

calm? How would you describe the experience of being calm to someone who has never been calm before? Now, I want you to think about a place that makes you feel calm. What about this place makes you feel calm? Is it the way it feels? Smells? Sounds? Next, I want you to think of a person who makes you feel calm. It can be someone from school, from home or somewhere else. What about this person makes you feel calm? Now, I want you to think about something that you do that makes you feel calm. What about it makes you feel calm? Lastly, think about a wave of calmness coming over your body right now. Let the calmness sink into your body. When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

#### 4) Breathing in Positivity

Today we are going to do a breathing exercise and focus on bringing positivity into our lives. As we begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Continue to breathe deeply, taking time to focus on your breathing and how it feels. Now, think of your favorite color or a color that you really like. When you breathe in, focus on breathing in that color. Let this symbolize bringing positive things into your day and into your life. When you exhale, imagine that you are breathing out a color that you don't like. Let that symbolize breathing out the negative things in your day and in your life. Continue to breathe deeply, focusing on breathing the colors that you have chosen in and out. When you are finished, take one last deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

### **Week 2:**

#### 1) What I Like About Me

Today we are going to focus on what we like best about ourselves. As we begin, close your eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Think about yourself, and what you like about you. Try to choose one characteristic, not a physical trait, but something about your character. Focus on that one characteristic, and think about why you like this about yourself? Think about how this characteristic has helped you to become successful. Now, focus on how you can use this characteristic today. How can you use it to lead you and others to success? How can you work on making this characteristic even stronger? What choices can you make to help yourself get stronger at this? When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and open your eyes slowly.

## 2) I Am Thankful

Today, we are going to focus on what we have to be thankful for. To begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Now, slowly bring your focus to someone who brings you joy – someone you are thankful for. It can be a friend, a family member, or someone else that you know. Think about what you like about this person. Why are you thankful for him or her? Notice how you are feeling when you think about this person. What does it feel like to be thankful? Now, try to come up with five more things that you are thankful for. Continue to notice your feelings. How can you keep this feeling of thankfulness throughout the day? How can you remind yourself to be more thankful? When you are finished, take another deep breath and slowly open your eyes.

## 3) When I Felt Special

Today we are going to think about a time that someone made us feel special. As we begin, close your eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you continue breathing, think of a time that someone made you feel special. What did they do to make you feel special? Where were you? Visualize it in your mind. How did you feel after that? How did that affect the rest of your day? Now, I want you to think about how you can make someone else feel special today. How can you give someone else the same feeling that someone gave you? What can you do? What will it look like? Picture it in your mind. When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and open your eyes slowly.

#### 4) Reflecting on Joy

Today we are going to focus on something in our lives that has made us happy. As we begin, please close your eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Continue breathing and imagine a time in your life when you felt happy. Try to create the image in your mind. Who was there? What was happening? Try to focus on how your body and your mind were feeling at the time. Try to let your body rest as you focus on that happy time. Now, gently shift your attention to things that can bring you joy today. How will these things bring you joy and how will that feel? When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

#### 5) I Am

Today, we are going to repeat positive statements about ourselves. To begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. We are going to reflect on the positive things about us by using “I Am” statements. The first one we will

practice, is “I am strong. I am capable.” As you inhale, silently tell yourself “I am strong.” As you exhale, silently tell yourself “I am capable.” Repeat this five times. Next, we are going to do the same thing, only this time we will tell ourselves “I am important,” when we inhale and “I am special” when we exhale. Repeat that five times. When you are finished, we will do the exercise one last time. This time, you will come up with your own “I Am” statements. What truths do you need to remind yourself of? That you are beautiful? That you are enough? That you are smart? Something else? Once you have come up with your statements, repeat the exercise through five full breaths. When you are finished, slowly open your eyes.

### **Week 3**

#### 1) I Can Do It!

Today, we are going to reflect on the things that we can do. To begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Gently shift your focus to something you can do that you are proud of. It can be an athletic skill, a talent, a school subject, or something else. Think about how you learned to perfect this skill or talent. How much hard work did it require? Was it challenging? Easy? Did you ever feel like giving up when you were working on it? What kept you from giving up? Next, think about how it feels now that you have perfected it. Are you happy? Proud? Excited? Now, think about something that you would like to be able to do. Although it may be difficult, and come with challenges, remind yourself that you can do it! Begin to think about how it will feel when you master this new skill or talent. Next, think about steps that you can take to making it happen. When you are finished, take another deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

## 2) Setting A Goal

Today, we are going to focus on setting and accomplishing a goal for today. As we begin, please close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Take some time to think about something you would like to accomplish today. This can be a goal for at home, at school, or somewhere else. It can involve someone else or be a goal just for you. As your eyes are closed, visually imagine yourself accomplishing this goal. What will it look like? Who will be there? How will you be feeling? Focus especially on how you will be feeling. Really focus all of your energy on what it will be like. Now, take a few minutes to think about what you need to do in order to accomplish this goal. What steps will you need to take to get it done? When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

## 3) Reflecting On My Goal

Today we are going to focus on the goals that we set yesterday. As we begin, please close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Think about what your goal was. Did you accomplish it? If so, think about how you accomplished it. What steps did you take to meet your goal? What did it feel like to accomplish your goal? If you did not accomplish it, think about why not. Was there anything that got in the way of you meeting your goal? What can you do today to help you to meet your goal? Visualize yourself meeting this goal. When you are done, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

## 4) Helping Others

Today we are going to focus on how we can help others. As we begin, please close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Think about a way that you can help another person today. This can be something simple like holding a door open for someone or talking to someone new. It can be at school, at home or somewhere else. Visually picture what this will look like. Think about how you will feel and how you will make the other person feel. Think about what it would be like if you made helping others something you did every day. How would that make your life different? When you are done, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

#### 5) Breathing In Light

Today, we are going to breathe light into our bodies. To begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Continue to take deep breaths and imagine a ball of light in your toes. Each time you inhale, imagine that the ball of light is growing in your body. Notice as it spreads from your toes, up through your legs. From your legs, up through your stomach. From your stomach, up through your chest. From your chest, into your arms. From your arms into your hands. Now imagine the light filling your head. Now, take time to notice how you feel. Does this make you feel calm? Does it make you feel warm? Something else? Once you have noticed your feeling, take another deep breath in through you nose and out through your mouth and then slowly open your eyes.

### **Week 4**

#### 1) My Favorite Place

Today we are going to think about our favorite places. As we begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you continue breathing slowly, think of one of your favorite places to go. It can be anywhere- outside, inside, near us or far away. It can be somewhere you have been a lot, or somewhere you have only been once. I want you to really focus on picturing it in your mind. What does it look like? What can you notice about it? Does it have any certain sounds? Is it a loud place or a quiet place? Do you notice any smells there? Try to think about everything you can notice. Now, focus on how this place makes you feel. Does it make you feel calm? Happy? Excited? Something else? Really think about this feeling. Continue to breathe slowly and focus on the feeling it is giving you. When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth, and then slowly open your eyes.

## 2) Cloud Meditation

Today you are going to imagine that you are floating on a cloud. As we begin, close your eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you continue breathing, I want you to imagine a big cloud floating down to you. What does it look like? What color is it? Try to notice everything you can about how the cloud looks. As it gets nearer to you, step up on to it and let it take you away. What does the cloud feel like as it floats? Is it fluffy? Hard? Is it moving slowly? Quickly? What does the air feel like? Cool? Warm? Think about what you can see from your cloud. Do you see anything else in the sky? What can you see on the ground? Try to picture everything you can see. When you are done, continue to sit on the cloud and take a few deep breaths, focusing on what it feels like to be



sitting on your cloud. When you are finished, take another deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

### 3) Bird Reflection

Today we are going to imagine that we are birds. Before we begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you continue breathing, try to imagine yourself as a bird. What do you look like? What color are you? Do you have any special markings? Now, try to imagine that you are flying. What does it feel like? Try to notice how the air feels on your wings. What can you see from where you are flying? Can you see the ground beneath you? Try to really focus on what it looks like. What feelings do you have as you fly? Try to notice each of your emotions and focus on how they feel. When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

### 4) Hot Air Balloon Reflection

Today we are going to imagine that we are riding in a hot air balloon. As we begin, close your eyes, and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Continue to breathe as you think about what it would be like to ride in a hot air balloon. Think about what colors your balloon would be. Would there be any designs on it? As you rise through the sky, think about what it feels like. Is the air warm or cool? Is it windy or calm? Now, notice everything that you can see from your hot air balloon. Can you see houses? Can you see any bodies of water? People? What do they look like? Are they small or normal sized? Try to notice everything that you can see. Think about where you are going and how you will feel when you get there. Try to really focus on that feeling and notice how it feels. When you

are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

### **Week 5:**

#### 1) What's Around Me?

Today, we are going to practice noticing what is around us. To begin, keep your eyes open and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Now, try to notice three new things in the room that you have never noticed before. Once you have noticed three new things, choose one to really focus on. Try to notice everything you can about the thing you have chosen. What does it look like? What do you think it would feel like? Where is it located in the room? If you get distracted by other things in the room, gently move your focus back to the item you have chosen. Imagine that you are describing it to a person who can't see it. What would you tell them? When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth.

#### 2) I Can See The Rainbow

Today, we are going to practice noticing the colors that are around us. To begin, keep your eyes open and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Now, find something in the room that is red. Really look at it. How would you describe what the color looks like? What shade of red is it? When you are finished, search for something that is orange. What do you notice about the color orange? Next, find something that is yellow. Is it light yellow? Bright yellow? Dark yellow? Now, move on to finding something that is green. What shade of green is it? How would you describe it to a person who has never seen the color green before? Now, slowly shift your attention to something that is blue. What type of

blue is it? Is it a bright blue? A light blue? A dark blue? Lastly, find something that is purple. Notice everything that you can about that shade of purple. How does that shade of purple make you feel? Now, close your eyes and visualize your favorite color that you observed. Notice how you are feeling. As you are doing this, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and then slowly open your eyes.

### 3) Noticing With Your Senses

Today we are going to focus on what is going on around us. We are going to start with our eyes open this time. Take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. We are first going to focus on finding at least five things that we can see. I want you to really notice the things around you without turning your head. Just stay still where you are and look with your eyes. Look closely, do you notice anything you have looked over before? Now it is time for us to close our eyes. Take another deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and begin to focus on what you can feel. Can you feel the desk or table? What does it feel like? Is it warm or cold? Hard or soft? Can you feel the seat you are sitting in? Your clothes touching your body? Your hair on your shoulders? Focus on noticing things that you don't typically notice. Try to notice at least five things. Now we are going to focus on the things that we can hear. This may be a little difficult but keep listening and focusing on what you can hear. Can you hear anything in the hallway? Can you hear the air conditioning or the heater? Do you notice anything you have not noticed before? Try to find five things that you can hear. When you are ready, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

### 4) What I Can Feel

Today, we are going to focus on the things we can feel. To begin, close your eyes and breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth. First, bring your focus to your feet. What can you feel on your feet? Can you feel your shoes or socks? Can you feel the floor? What do these things feel like? Next, gently move your focus up to your legs. What can you feel on your legs? Your pants? The chair? Try to notice everything you can feel on your legs. Now, move your focus to your stomach. What can you feel there? Your clothes? The desk? The chair? What do they feel like? Next, move your focus to your arms. What can you feel on your arms? Try to notice as many things as you can. What do they feel like? Next, bring your focus to your head and face. What can you feel there? Is there anything else on your body that you can feel? Try to notice everything that you can. When you are finished, take another deep breath and open your eyes

#### 5) Mindfulness with Candy

Today we are going to take some time to really focus on something we do a lot, eating a piece of candy. We are going to go very slow and are going to try to notice things we don't normally notice. Everyone please pick up your Hershey's kiss. Look at it carefully, is there anything you notice about the way it looks? About the way it is wrapped? Place it in the palm of your hand. Notice its weight. Is it heavier or lighter than what you expected? Now, unwrap the candy slowly. Listen to the way it sounds as it is being unwrapped. Really focus on noticing things about the wrapper that you have never noticed before. Once you get the wrapper off, look at the candy. Is there anything you notice about how it looks? How does it feel on your skin? Is it warm or cold? Smooth? Now, slowly put it in your mouth and really

focus on how it tastes. What does the texture feel like? What does the flavor taste like? What did you notice about the Hershey kiss that you have never noticed before?

\*\*I usually use a Hershey's kiss, but this can be done with Smarties, Starbursts, any other individually wrapped candy! \*\*

## **Week 6**

### 1) Staying Focused

Today we are going to really try to focus on our breathing and to practice letting our thoughts just flow in and out. As we begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you continue breathing, I want you to focus on one thing you can hear or feel. I want you to spend the next two minutes focused only on this. If you find that your thoughts wander, just gently direct them back to what you are focused on. It is normal to have wondering thoughts, just simply acknowledge that they are there, and re-focus yourself. Continue to keep breathing and staying focused on what you chose. When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

### 2) Feeling Calm

Today, we are going to reflect on being calm. To begin, close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. Now, I want you to think about the word "calm." What does it mean to you to be calm? What does it feel like when you are calm? How would you describe the experience of being calm to someone who has never been calm before? Now, I want you to think about a place that makes you feel calm. What about this place makes you feel calm? Is it the way it feels? Smells? Sounds? Next, I want you to

think of a person who makes you feel calm. It can be someone from school, from home or somewhere else. What about this person makes you feel calm? Now, I want you to think about something that you do that makes you feel calm. What about it makes you feel calm? Lastly, think about a wave of calmness coming over your body right now. Let the calmness sink into your body. When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

### 3) What Are You Excited For?

Today, we are going to focus on something that we are looking forward to. As we begin, please close your eyes and take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth. As you continue breathing, take some time to think about something you are excited for. This can be something that will happen later today, next week or even next year! Picture whatever it is. What will it look like? Who will be there? Really try to picture the scene and notice everything about it. Now, gently shift your focus to how you will be feeling. What will your body and mind feel like when you are there? Really focus all your energy on what it will be like. When you are finished, take a deep breath in through your nose and out through your mouth and slowly open your eyes.

### 4) Positive Affirmations (Last Breathing Meditation)

I am relaxed

I am calm

I am at peace with myself and the universe

I am one with every being on the planet

I now attract soothing and calming energy into my body

I now accept the warmth and love the universe is giving out I now love myself

I am a loving giving being allowing the power of the universe

into my life

I am accepting of myself the way I am right now

I am accepting of the universe the way it is right now I now allow peaceful warm light into my body

I now allow the light inside to lift me up

I now allow the light inside to sooth me

I now allow the light inside to be me

I am calm and relaxed all is well in my world

#### **Appendix D: Interview Questions for Students**

My research question is:

How do Latinx students respond to a unit informed by Chicana feminism, *nepantlera* pedagogy, and mindful breathing mediation in a sheltered ESOL classroom through the exploration of *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan?

#### Opinion Based and Family History Questions:

1. How do you feel about the book “Esperanza Rising”?
  - Have you ever read a book like this before?
  - What makes this book similar or different to other books you have read in class?
2. Is there anything about the story or characters that caught your interest? Why?
  - Is there a character you identify with? Why?

- What are some things you like or don't like about the story? Why?
3. Can you tell me about some of your bell work reflections this semester?
    - Which one or two stick out to you the most? Why?
    - If you're unable to answer this question, why do you think you struggled with the bell work reflection this semester? Have you done bell work that require you to reflect before?
  4. Considering the themes of family and community in *Esperanza Rising*, can you tell me a bit about your family?
    - For example, what are some things you enjoy doing with your family at home or in your community?
  5. *Esperanza* traveled from Mexico to the U.S. Have you or your parents traveled?
    - Have you ever traveled to another country?
    - Where have you traveled and what are some activities you have done there with your family?

#### Student's Overall Experience with the Unit

1. What is your overall opinion of the unit we have just completed?

How was the process like for you?

How do you feel about reading the entire book overall?

Can you name some activities in class that really helped you understand “*Esperanza Rising*”?

How do you feel about the symbols and metaphors in “*Esperanza Rising*”?



How do you feel about the reflections you have done in class on the topics of patriarchy, social class, and prejudice?

2. What is your opinion about how you were able to express yourself throughout the unit?
  - Would you describe it as hard or easy for you? Why?
3. How did you feel and think about the mindfulness component of the unit?
  - Do you feel like it was helpful or not helpful to you and your learning process?
  - Would you like for teachers to implement more mindfulness in the classroom?
4. Did this unit help you think or reflect more deeply?
  - Please explain and provide examples.
  - If you feel like it didn't, please explain.
5. Did this unit help you explore ideas or opinions in relation to your learning?
  - If yes, please provide descriptions or examples.
  - If you feel like it didn't, please explain.
6. What did you think about the end of unit presentation?
  - Did you enjoy sharing what you learned with your peers?
  - Did you enjoy sharing what you learned with your community?
  - How did the experience make you feel?
7. What would you say is your biggest take-away from the unit implementation?
  - What is one thing you enjoyed doing or learning the most about? Why?

### Mindfulness

1. We have learned a lot about mindfulness this semester. What is mindfulness to you? Did you know about mindfulness before?

2. Did you practice or do you plan on practicing mindfulness at home? How are you planning on doing this?

### Looking Forward

1. Would you like to do a similar unit in class like this in the future?
2. What would you like to see your teachers teach in sheltered ESOL instruction in the future?
3. What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
  - Is there something specific you would like to accomplish in school or outside of school soon?
  - Is there something specific you would like to accomplish in life?