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Why We Need Ethnic Studies: Building Academic Familismo Through Culturally Relevant Education to Support Students' Social Relationships and Academic Success

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Why We Need Ethnic Studies: Building Academic Familismo Through Culturally Relevant Education to Support Students' Social Relationships and Academic Success

by

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Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Ethnic Studies
University of California, Riverside, September 2021
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This study highlights the importance of Ethnic Studies education with a specific focus on how particular assignments and curriculum positively impact students' academic performance as well as peer and family relationships. I conducted an in-depth ethnographic study of an Ethnic Studies course over an academic year where I observed the classroom environment and interviewed 35 current and former students of the class. I argue that Ethnic Studies helps students develop a sense of what I call *academic familismo* through completing coursework common to this education framework. Students develop *academic familismo* through engaging with Ethnic Studies pedagogies that draw information and insights from Communities of Color and youths' families and cultures while also providing learners opportunities to share their biographical information with peers. Education that draws from marginalized groups and students' backgrounds helps learners develop consciousness of systemic oppression that Black

Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) groups historically face and encourages youth academic engagement as their background becomes a central feature of the learning materials (Au 2009). I show in my analysis how students form *academic familismo* through ethnographic analysis of three assignments students completed over an academic year. I also demonstrate how students were able to bond through working in the classroom and specific projects that helped them feel like "family." Photos of and testimonies from students in the class further show how students build important academic and familial connections in the Ethnic Studies class, which can help scholars and educators understand some of the nuance impacts of these courses.

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Dedications

I dedicate this project to my late aunt, Cindy Ann Johnson. You were the best second mom and awesome nurse who put the care of others before yourself. You left us far too soon but you've never left my side. I couldn't have made it without your love and support and you continue to motivate me to serve my community.

I also dedicate this project to elders of Ethnic Studies and the students that shaped this project. The previous, current, future generations of Ethnic Studies thinkers continue to push my thinking about this work and the importance of the pedagogy. I hope to continue exploring Ethnic Studies through teaching and research so that we can better include and advocate for marginalized communities.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study highlights the importance of Ethnic Studies education with a specific focus on how particular assignments and curriculum positively impact students' school performance as well as peer and family relationships. I argue that Ethnic Studies helps students develop a sense of academic familism or what I call *Academic familismo* through completing coursework common to this education framework. Students develop *Academic Familismo* through engaging with Ethnic Studies pedagogies that draw information and insights from communities of color and youths' families and cultures while also providing learners opportunities to share their biographical information with peers. Education that draws from marginalized groups and students' backgrounds helps learners develop consciousness of systemic oppression that Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) groups historically face and encourages youth school engagement as their background becomes a central feature of the learning materials (Au, 2009).

My work provides two important scholarly interventions in terms of how to theorize about the effects of Ethnic Studies on students' social relationships and educational outcomes through *Academic Familismo* and how to approach research endeavors with youth of color through utilizing a *Cariño* methodological framework. First, I developed *Academic Familismo* as a theoretical framework, following a constructivist process of grounded theory development (Charmaz, 2006), to understand the types of relationships students were forming in the Ethnic Studies class as well as how youth engaged with this learning environment. During my fieldwork, I saw students develop deep, meaningful friendships from conversations that they had regarding their

families and cultures while engaging Ethnic Studies assignments and learning materials. Additionally, I saw students have higher levels of school engagement and personal investment in assignments because they were able to honor their families and communities through class projects. In reviewing my various data points that included field journal notes, extensive daily written research journal logs where I chronicle the quotidian happenings in the classroom, dozens of transcripts based on 35 in-depth semi-structured interviews with current and former students of the course, and numerous photos of students participating and samples of their completed work, I developed the notion of *Academic Familismo* as a theory to understand the nuanced impacts of Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogies. In essence, students felt intrinsically motivated to complete assignments with the utmost effort because they were able to honor their families, communities, and cultures through their coursework. Likewise, students built familial relationships/friendships through discussing their similar family and cultural backgrounds that often lead students to identify with peers' families; for example: *hey your uncle reminds me of my dad, we also make tamales together on the holidays with my abuela,* or *my parents also struggled as immigrants to the U.S. and want me to get an education for a better life.* These sentiments helped students bond in profound ways that fostered a sense of belonging and community in the classroom, where youth came into class energized to learn and engage with each other. I verified these sentiments through extensive interviews with current and former students where many shared that the class felt like a family, or interviewees mentioned how specific assignments helped them connect to peers in familial ways.

I fleshed out how students built *Academic Familismo* through in-depth analyses of three assignments they completed over the course: *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altars* (DDLMSA), *World Cafe* (WC)*,* and *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project* (LLIPP). While the students completed many activities and projects over the school year, these particular assignments seemed to profoundly foster *Academic Familismo* as evinced by the ethnographic vignettes and other data points I feature in later chapters. Students completed these three assignments over the school year: DDLMSA in Fall, WC in Winter, and LLIPP in Spring. The sequence of these assignments were important in that it built different elements of *Academic Familismo*, DDLMSA focused on *familismo*, WC focused on *academic,* and LLIPP developed both *academic* and *familismo.* Students worked together on these projects in the development process and presented their completed work to the class or worked in groups to complete in-class activities. This provided learners with numerous opportunities to connect with peers through completing assignments focused on their families, communities, and cultures. All these assignments allowed students to discuss their personal, familial, community, and cultural experiences that in turn helped youths connect to one another when they saw similarities in their backgrounds. Each assignment built important skills like creativity, design and drafting, interpersonal communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and analytical writing. As students fostered *Academic Familismo* through completing this coursework, they simultaneously built meaningful family connections with their peers and a school identity tied to their cultural and community backgrounds. Thus, we can understand Ethnic Studies as an education framework that builds important family-like learning

communities and academic identities that encourage student engagement and investment in schooling.

I also provide an important intervention with regard to approaching qualitative research with schools and youth of color. For this project, I used *Cariño* as a methodological framework to structure the way I conducted my research and worked with my research site and participants. The *Cariño* framework stems from the work of Angela Valenzuela in her path-breaking book *Subtractive Schooling: U.S.-Mexican Youth and the Politics of Caring* (2010). Valenzuela's ethnographic work on Mexican-American and Mexican immigrant youth shows how our education system deprives students, particularly those from communities of color, with an authentically caring learning environment that supports both their social well-being and school success. Rather, many teachers in our K-12 education system only aesthetically care for students with regard to their measurable learning abilities determined by GPA and test scores. Valenzuela (2010) argues that Mexican-American and immigrant students need teachers to authentically care for their overall well-being, which includes being sensitive and attentive to bother their social-emotional and learning needs. When teachers authentically care for students beyond their scholastic performance, youth feel validated and honored as individuals, which in turn motivates them to do better in school. Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2006) extends this authentic caring framework into a research methodology where he discusses what it means to authentically care for research participants and communities when engaging in scholarly work. In his chapter "Utilizing Cariño in the Development of Research Methodologies," Duncan-Andrade (2006) discusses that research has rarely

been done in service of marginalized communities. Rather, scholars seek to study these populations in pursuit of professional accolades. This scholarly focus of academic inquiry for the benefit of the researchers' careers is extractive and does little to change the material realities of the marginalized communities that are studied. He argues that researchers should use their research, data, and scholarly voices to advocate for the communities they study, in line with the authentic caring model discussed by Valenzuela (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Valenzuela, 2010). This means that scholars should care about helping the communities they study and do so through their work by helping their participants directly and advocating for them with data derived from their research. When researchers take a *Cariño*-based approach to research, they seek to care about the communities they study rather than the topic they hope to understand through researching a particular group. Like with caring education and educators being concerned with students' overall well-being rather than their mere school performance measures, a *Cariño* researcher is concerned with the needs, vitality, and future of the community they study rather than solely developing new knowledge on a subject based on data derived from researching a population.

I followed a *Cariño* methodology in my research through my active participation in the Ethnic Studies classroom supporting the teacher, Mr. Garcia, and the students as an instructional aide to the course. I worked with the teacher to implement the curriculum where we would develop learning units and projects together during prep periods and after school. I also helped Mr. Garcia organize students for various presentations and facilitated many special events the class held throughout the year. Other efforts included

helping students as they worked through their assignments, in addition to providing them with college mentoring and other social-emotional support while conducting my fieldwork. I was also explicitly clear that my research aim was to generate data that would help grow Ethnic Studies courses on the campus and across the district so that the very diverse student population there would have access to culturally relevant education that honored their communities. In addition, I regularly met with school and district leadership to discuss my work and preliminary findings to show how amazing Ethnic Studies is and how it was supporting students' interpersonal relationships, sense of cultural pride, and learning outcomes. Doing this additional work beyond my data collection was meant to be in service of the students, teacher, school, and district where I conducted my research. I wanted to give to these individuals and institutions while conducting this research to show care and gratitude following the *Cariño*-based methodological framework outlined by Valenzuela (2010) and Duncan-Andrade (2006). I believe utilizing a *Cariño* methodology while in the field enabled me to become close to the Ethnic Studies course, its teacher, and students in a way where I was seen as a family member in this learning environment. This allowed me to build strong relationships with participants and gather rich data based on their experiences while also helping the Ethnic Studies' in-class community and school that hosts this program.

Why we need Ethnic Studies: Historical context and current issues with mainstream education.

I completed this study against the backdrop of historic and well-documented educational achievement gaps between youth of color and White students that stem from multiple issues in our K-12 education system like resegregation, defunding, hyperpolicing in schools, devaluation of community of color knowledge, and the narrow/utilitarian curriculum that is pervasively taught in our schools (Au, Brown, & Calderón, 2016; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Giroux, 2011; Noguera, 2009; Oakes, 2005; Rios, 2011). Traditional K-12 curriculum has not adequately included stories, histories, and general information from communities of color and other marginalized groups. Rather, mainstream education curricular focus has been on European and Anglo-American history and perspectives, dominant groups in the Western world that have perpetrated injustices against and subjugated various minoritized groups. This type of schooling also centers on merely feeding students information rather than seeing students themselves, specifically youth of color, as a source of knowledge that all can learn from. This narrow focus is problematic because it misrepresents social history leaving little substance for diverse students to connect with. students of color have historically disconnected with mainstream education and curriculum because learning materials failed to feature nor honor the knowledge and societal contribution from their BIPOC communities (Loewen, 2008).

Public education is a relatively young institution where K-12 graduation was not expected until roughly fifty years ago. American schooling was originally a system

designed to prepare individuals for the labor market, orienting students to the eight-hour Fordist work schedule (MacLeod, 2018). One's race and class determined what type of education they had access to and that school prepared them for an elevated or subordinated social, economic, and political status. Formal legal segregation has been a defining feature of the U.S. education system where public K-12 education confined Latinx/Chicanx, Native American, African American, and Asian American students across the nation (Kozol, 2012). These schools trapped racial and ethnic minorities in poorly-funded, cramped, and ramshackle classrooms. Legally, segregated schools provided students of color with poorly-trained and underpaid teachers. Education in these schools denigrated or ignored the history, culture, and various languages and dialects spoken by communities of color. These school conditions motivated parents and community leaders to file lawsuits *Gong Lum v. Rice, Mendez v. Westminster,* and *Brown v. Board of Education,* to pressure local, state, and federal governments to integrate, fully fund, and better resource and staff all public schools (Gonzalez, 2013; Casas, 2006). Nationwide, mass social movements accompanied these lawsuits where advocates called for expanded civil, social, and political rights for all race/ethnic minorities, women, and LGBTQ+ communities (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017). This widespread political and legal upheaval led by marginalized social justice-minded communities led to some major reforms. The landmark 1964 *Civil Rights Act* effectively ended legal practices of residential and school segregation as well as provided other necessary protections for communities of color. Schools eventually did begin to integrate after numerous legal challenges by White school/community officials and presidential orders for military

support and escorts of students of color trying to integrate into predominantly White schools (HoSang, 2010). Integration and the end of overt racial discrimination was not an easy process and many communities resisted full integration for many years after the passage of the 1964 *Civil Rights Act* (Gonzalez, 2013; Lipsitz, 2011; Nájera, 2015).

In the years after the Civil Rights Movement, the U.S. made minimal progress toward equalizing schools and communities. Schools and communities of color actually became more, or hyper-segregated, in the subsequent years as various White officials at various institutional levels and agencies sought to informally confine people of color within ethnic enclaves, barrios, and ghettos (De Lara, 2018; Massey & Denton, 1993; Telles & Ortiz, 2012). Schools that students of color attend today,

> tend to be urban and overcrowded, and they are often on year-round schedules that allow the schools to cram as many as four thousand students onto a single elementary school campus by cutting short the school year to 163 days and cycling both students and teachers through on multiple tracks. Many campuses have had to defer maintenance both because of lack of funds and lack of downtime to get the job done, a situation that has taken a terrible toll on school facilities. (Gándara & Contreras, 2009, p. 92-93)

The radical movement by communities of color for better rights, schools, and housing was short-lived as the spaces they inhabit now are similar, if not worse, than before.

Quality and equitable education has been one of the most persistent civil rights and social justice issues in our country's history. Much of the early education reform movement centered on ending legal segregation in public schools. Since the end of the civil rights era, political and educational leaders implemented numerous reforms aimed at providing better funding, developing and administering exams and measures that quantify

educational preparedness, and increasing access to subject-specific and college prep courses (Collins, 2009; Kozol, 2012; Oakes, 2005). These numerous reforms, some with lofty titles like No Child Left Behind (2001), Race to the Top/Common Core (2009), and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) (www.ed.gov), focused on performance in "core" areas like mathematics, reading, and writing. These educational approaches emphasize rote memorization of information from various classes and assessing students' comprehension through standardized tests (Oakes, 2005). While learning these skills are important, teaching basic skills fails to imbue students with cultural and civic knowledge they need to develop strong personal and social skills as well as their civic identity.

All of these approaches and associated assessments have been criticized for stifling critical thinking, social/cultural competency, and creative imagination and expression (Au et al 2016; Lipman, 2013). Specifically, more recent education reforms in terms of curriculum focus on literacy and math/science competencies that can be easily measured so that academic performance scores can be compared on a global scale (Lipman, 2013). These curricular and pedagogical reforms fail to foster students' intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, multicultural awareness, and interpersonal communication skills' development that are crucial personal competencies given our increasingly diversifying and interconnected world (Au, 2009). Despite the multitude of education reforms passed over the last several decades, all schools in the U.S. have significant education gaps between White students and students of color in terms of both education achievement and college readiness/matriculation (Hanushek, Peterson, Talpey, & Woessmann, 2019; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). There are persistent gaps in terms of

skills performance, test scores, secondary graduation and higher education matriculation rates, and degree completion between White students and students of color. Scholars argue that this gap is endemic of a longer trend of education disparities between Whites and various marginalized communities and can be explained by an overall divestment in the schools and schooling for youth of color (Kozol, 2006, 2012; Lipman, 2011). This divestment has left students of color in underfunded, dilapidated schools lacking safe facilities and basic resources like textbooks, computers, and other important materials akin to the segregated schools of yesteryear (Reardon & Owens, 2014).

Schools that youth of color currently attend also lack well-trained teachers, counselors, support staff, and administrators that can holistically educate youth of color in terms of their schooling needs, professional skills, and cultural nourishment. We can think of holistic education as a system, where multiple aspects of students' development are considered and opportunities are provided to all. Gilda Ochoa defines holistic education as

> inclusive, nonhierarchical, and not driven by tests. Informed by a feminist and ethnic studies ethos, it would focus on relationships—fostering self-love and students' positive sense of their classmates; an understanding of multiracial/ethnic, class, and gender histories; global awareness; critical thinking; a passion for learning; and a commitment to working together to improve our schools and communities for the greater good… (2013, p. 4)

However, the education environment and materials that youth of color are currently exposed to elide, misrepresent, or outright exclude their communities' histories and important socio-cultural contributions to society. In fact, current public education is structured in a way that focuses on competition, high stakes, and achievement measured numerically rather than preparing students to be

socially competent and civically-engaged in our society (Lipman, 2013). This leads to a particularly wide high school graduation rate gap where the national average is around 80%, but students of color graduation rates hover around 30-50% (Rodriguez, 2013). I argue that schools fail to provide these marginalized youth with safe, equitable, and culturally supportive learning environments, which in turn leads to these high drop or *push* out rates for students of color.

Regional Perspectives on the Inland Empire, California

The Inland Empire (IE) region of California has had particular issues with educating, graduating, and conferring degrees and socio-economic mobility to its majority-minority population. This regional area encompasses Riverside and San Bernardino counties, home to 54 different school districts, and is considered to be one of the most diverse areas in the state (De Lara, 2018) The nonprofit research organization *California Competes* (2012) reported that the IE lags behind with regard to educational success, student A-G readiness[1], college enrollment and degree completion, and socioeconomic status and mobility compared to state and national averages. Specifically, the Latinx and African American communities and students - who constitute the demographic majority - have poorer graduation and college matriculation rates, lower four-year degree completion rates, and overall lower socioeconomic status than their White counterparts at the regional, statewide, and national levels. Schools in the area

[1] A-G are the state's academic requirements for students to complete certain courses like Math, English/Language Arts, Science, etc… that will make them eligible to matriculate to the University of California (UC) or California State University (CSU) system after they graduate. (Venkatesan, 2020)

have significant discrepancies in terms of AP/gifted enrollment and college matriculation within the IE district between White students and students of color (ocrdata.ed.gov). Inland Empire school districts have high student of color populations with some districts being mostly minority-serving. These schools have similar issues as other public K-12 institutions with high minority student populations in terms of poor funding, outdated infrastructure, underprepared and lower-paid teachers and staff, and lack important learning materials and technology resources (Groves, Lempert, Knopman, & Berry, 2008). School districts with high student of color populations, like those in the IE, tend to be mostly segregated and spend about $1,000 less per student than districts with predominantly White student populations (Kozol, 2012; Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012). Various K-12 institutional resource gaps seem to correlate with their poor educational achievement, college-going/completion, and socio-economic status rates (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Ethnic Studies: A Possible Solution?

To deal with some of the discrepancies listed above, educators and scholars of color have proposed implementing critical multicultural and Ethnic Studies-centered courses and materials in K-12 classrooms. Critical multicultural and Ethnic Studies courses, curricular frameworks, and pedagogies emerged from civil rights struggles of the 1960s where communities of color, women, LGBT+, and students in K-12 and higher education institutions recognized that teaching at all levels did not include, engage, and honor their communities' knowledge and contributions to society (Au et al, 2016; hooks, 2003). James Loewen (2007) argues that the current education system perpetuates a false

narrative about U.S. triumphalism, heteropatriarchal normativity, racial/racist hierarchy, and the need for American global interventionism. scholars of color reinforce this argument by claiming that U.S. education masks, elides, or erases how the U.S. nation-state and political/everyday figures have worked to suppress and oppress people of color, women, LGBT+ communities, immigrants, and differently-abled folks. Public education curricula/materials/methods focus on narrow understandings of U.S. history and historical events, utilitarian application of basic skills like reading/writing/mathematics, and job-specific skills related to a race/class/gender-specific and confining labor market (Au et al., 2016; Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015; Lipman, 2011; Lipsitz, 2011).

Civil Rights Activists recognized the failings of the public education systems and fought for specific reforms to change it. This movement sought to end physical punishment for speaking languages other than English in schools and classrooms, hire more faculty of color, and increase access to bilingual and Ethnic Studies classes and curricula. Students, parents, and activists across the nation staged walk-outs from schools and universities, engaged in sit-ins at political leaders' and school officials' offices, testified at school board and city council meetings, and conducted hunger strikes to show how necessary these types of reforms were (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017). These impassioned individuals knew that critical multicultural education and Ethnic Studies specifically were important reforms that could transform the nature of public education from a system focused too narrowly on skills development to space that affirms marginalized groups, develops critical thinking, and builds awareness of social issues and tools and methods to improve society. "Ethnic studies curricula exist in part because

students of color have demanded an education that is relevant, meaningful, and affirming of their identities" (Sleeter, 2011, p. vii). Additionally, "Ethnic [S]tudies seeks to humanize the classroom for students of color, who have a history of experiencing dehumanization through silencing of their identities, perspectives, and intellectual abilities" (Sleeter & Zavala 2020, page 7). Activists of color demanded that public education change its curriculum to include Ethnic Studies so that their communities would be well-represented in classrooms[2].

Despite activists pushing for these specific additions to public school course offerings and curricula over several decades, education reform on a national level has not fully incorporated Ethnic Studies into the wider schooling mission. We can see this specifically in much of the recent legislation passed that focuses mostly on school performance and measurability of student basic skills development (Au et al., 2016; Lipman, 2011; Valencia, 2010). There have been sporadic formations of Ethnic Studies courses and programs arising and being fought over by various stakeholders at the grassroots and state legislative levels during this time. The Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) in Arizona was one of the first districts to institute Ethnic Studies programs at its high schools; this program was both extremely successful and hotly contested (Acosta, 2014; Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014). The debate around the class became so politically contentious that in 2009 the Arizona State Legislature

[2] Multicultural education is distinct from critical multicultural and Ethnic Studies education in two key ways: 1) the later explicitly discuss how forms of racism have affected communities of color, particularly denying their humanity and suppressing their ability to achieve socio-economic and political equality and 2) the later also helps students develop tools and strategies to challenge forms of oppression that affect them and their affiliated communities like racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, ableism, and ageism (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020)

passed H.R. 2281, which criminalized the teaching of Mexican American Studies courses in the state (Acosta, 2014). At the same time Arizona criminally banned the teaching of Ethnic Studies, Oregon and Indiana governors passed laws that mandated public schools offer Ethnic Studies classes. California is also moving to make Ethnic Studies a graduation requirement based on the positive data outcomes coming from various districts in the state (Dee & Penner, 2017). Thus, there is an ongoing battle over the necessity and future of Ethnic Studies in our public schools.

However, there is one major question that has not been addressed in the Ethnic Studies and education conversation. Namely, *can Ethnic Studies help deal with the historic and pervasive achievement gap issues throughout our education system?* Progressive educators, both from BIPOC and White communities, are now implementing Ethnic Studies K-12 education as a means to deal with the schooling issues I have outlined here. Emergent research on the newly-implemented Ethnic Studies programs are showing promising findings in terms of how these courses ameliorate student of color education achievement gaps, expand multicultural awareness/sensitivity/competence, and promote student activism and cross-racial solidarity (Arce & Fernández, 2014; Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee, & Penner, 2017). Even White students who have taken these courses report positive experiences with class, overall. Similarly, White students who take Ethnic Studies classes have great understandings of various forms of oppression, social justice/awareness/empathy, and political efficacy (Sleeter, 2011). These courses provide students with Culturally Relevant Pedagogies (CRP) where they can learn from contexts, materials, and teaching methodologies built from diverse communities' cultural histories

and perspectives. Culturally relevant pedagogy within Ethnic Studies courses provides students of color, in particular, opportunities to learn about their heritage, his/herstories, and epistemologies in ways that honor and celebrate their ethno-racial/cultural contributions to society (Banks, 1996, 2012; Cammarota & Romero, 2009; Sleeter, 2011; Yosso, 2002, 2005) The most recent study by Dee and Penner (2017) shows that students, particularly those considered *at risk*, who take these course increase their attendance by 21%, GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23. These findings confirm previous qualitative and quantitative research that demonstrate Ethnic Studies classes and CRP reconnect youth with schools, promote educational achievement, and encourage college going (Acosta, 2014a; Arce, & Fernández, 2014; Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009; Au et al., 2016; Cammarota, 2007; de los Ríos, López, & Morrell, 2015; Sleeter, 2011). This promising education paradigm can potentially bolster students of color educational outcomes and push them along the education pipeline and on to higher education. Ethnic Studies-centered research shows that these courses can help students of color close these gaps. Hence, we need to further study the effectiveness of these courses in various localities to better understand its potential impact on improving the educational experiences and outcomes for students of color who have been historically underserved.

My project provides new understandings about the impact of Ethnic Studies on students' social relationships, cultural identity, and school engagement and achievement. My data and analysis show how students build strong personal connections with their peers and to the course that also bolsters students' sense of academic identity. When students feel welcomed in the classroom and have their perspectives and communities

represented in the curriculum, they are more likely to develop a positive school identity and perform better in school (Au, 2009; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Ethnic Studies empowers students as both learners and important holders of knowledge in a way that helps youth develop a sense of academic identity - an identity where they feel like they are valued members of a learning community. *Academic Familismo* helps students foster this academic identity as well the familism youth feel in the classroom as derived from the connections built with peers and the classroom. I saw these strong connections emerge between students when they shared personal and family experiences through presenting assignments with their peers where they all could learn from and identify with each other. Ethnic Studies curriculum features assignments that draw information from students' backgrounds in a way that allows them to honor their families and communities, thereby validating their personal identity as academically valuable. When students share these very personal and personalized assignments with peers, youth find connections between their backgrounds in a way where they can identify with each other amidst shared familial dynamics, experiences with social struggles, and future aspirations. Youth were able to see themselves within the curriculum as their personal backgrounds were made a part of the learning materials. *Academic Familismo* promoted academic identity formation as well that students developed familial connections to their peers and the course because they were a part of an educational community where their experiences and backgrounds are central to the learning.

Ethnic Studies in the Inland Empire

Through this project, I show the power of Ethnic Studies to build *Academic Familismo* that enhances students' school engagement and interpersonal relationships through specific assignments embedded in the curriculum. This research is unique in that I have conducted the first in-depth ethnography of an Ethnic Studies class and show how the curriculum and assignments impact students' academic and social development. Additionally, this is a first-of-its-kind study focusing on schooling realities in the Inland Empire, one of the largest geographic areas with numerous school districts, thousands of students, and vast diversity in the population in the nation (De Lara, 2018). The school site where I conducted my study has a significantly large student of color population (roughly 95%) - a persistent local/community stigma as being a *bad school* - and a promising Chicanx Studies program that can show the potential impact of Ethnic Studies on students' academics. Thus, this project fills important gaps in the literature regarding the impact of this educational framework and the school conditions in a significantly large region of California that educates a significant number of students.

I focus on the IE because of the lacking scholarly focus on this vast and extremely diverse area. As a native resident of the region, a former K-12 student of schools here, and vested intellectual activist with aims of improving public education for the area, I see a need to study Ethnic Studies in the IE for the purpose of using the data to improve education, generally. Many cities and communities in the area have majority racial minority populations with mirroring student populations (Rodriguez, 2015). Because the IE has 54 school districts, is as economically and industrially diverse as its population, and has a long-seated history of race politics and civil rights movements, studying this

region will help us better understand the state of education for California and the U.S., as a whole (De Lara, 2018; Gonzalez, 2013; HoSang, 2010). This area is (mis)educating a significant number of future citizens, laborers, and the electorate that can no longer be considered scholarly insignificant. Thus, I want to pay specific attention to this region to fill a large gap in the qualitative studies in Education and Ethnic Studies to show the issues and possibilities present in my home communities.

My research project consisted of a school year-long ethnographic study of an IE high school. I have changed the name of this high school to protect the identity of individuals involved and currently attending there, following anonymity and confidentiality principles of qualitative research (Leavy, 2011). I spent four to five full days per week, for an entire school year, conducting participatory research where I interacted with students, teachers, and the campus community at-large. For documentation, I took in-depth field notes regarding my observations and informal conversations I had with various individuals about Ethnic Studies at IE High. I also logged my observational data in a typewritten digital field journal and collected numerous pictures of students interacting and engaging with Ethnic Studies curriculum, activities, and assignments as well as samples of students' completed assignments to build an archive that I supplementally-analyzed to better understand how youths engage with this educational framework. I conducted 35 (n=35) in-depth semi-structured 40-90 minute interviews with current and former students of the Ethnic Studies class to supplement this ethnographic and archival data collection and gained IRB approval from both my home university and the IE High's school district leadership. Consent forms

were gathered from all participants and parents of interviewees that were minors. All were assigned and ensured that their identity would remain confidential so that they could speak freely.

My interview questions parsed out students' feelings and connections generated through taking the course as well as looked at how they understood their identity through engaging with course materials. I recorded all interviews on a digital recorder and uploaded recording files to an encrypted cloud storage. I had all interviews transcribed by a third-party transcription service which did an initial computer-driven transcription and then re-transcribed by a paid transcriber for clarity and accuracy. I used my personal research funds to pay for these services but had no direct interaction with transcribers, thereby ensuring empirical purity of the interview transcripts. I then verified transcribed data by relistening to interviews and reviewing transcripts to ensure that transcriptions were accurate. I coded data with Dedoose digital coding software using thematic coding strategies to flesh out lower, meta, and higher themes within participant responses (Hesse-Biber, 2016). I analyzed artifactual data, photos of, and samples of students completed work, in conjunction with themes I developed from observational and interview data. From my observations, I developed *Academic Familismo* by connecting various thematic data points showing how students interacted as a family in the classroom through understanding the specific ways youth mentioned how the learning environment helped them feel familial with their peers, and identifying the meaningful ways their assignments discussed their families. In subsequent chapters, I show how students' engagement with specific Ethnic Studies assignments fostered this *Academic*

Familismo, where one can see through my analysis how students built familial connections with their peers and enhanced their scholastic abilities.

Skin in the Game: Why Ethnic Studies matters personally and my standpoint

As a Latinx student, I personally experienced this limiting and constrictive schooling system that confined me in underresourced and oversurveilled institutions that subtracted rather than added to my academic future (Rios, 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). Like many other previous and current students of color, I had no access to Ethnic Studies curriculum to affirm my community background and cultural heritage, nor well-funded schools with adequate resources or caring and culturally-competent teachers, counselors, staff, and administrators who could support my schooling success (Lipman, 2011; Valencia, 2010; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2006).

My experience with K-12 schools was one of being excluded and criminalized by teachers and school officials. Like many Black and Brown boys in U.S. public schools, I had an antagonistic relationship with many school personnel who did not like my attitude, talkativeness, and general demeanor towards education. While I performed well on tests and in honors classes, my outspokenness put me at odds with the authoritarian nature of schools that expected students to be silent, obedient, and docile (Sojoyner, 2016). This expectational mismatch between my teachers and me led to my regular removal from class and school. School-sanctioned removal of students of color due to "misbehavior" issues like talking out of turn, speaking back to teachers, and other subjective offenses is a common practice (Hietzeg, 2009). My antagonistic relationship with school led me to not care about education; I felt like school was a type of warehouse confining me until

adulthood. I was also being pulled between two very problematic tracks in education - the military and the prison industrial complex. I was finishing my K-12 schooling during the height of the *War on Drugs* and the beginning of the *War on Terror*. During this time, many youths of color of were lured to participate in foreign wars to fight "radical Islam" and the "axis of evil", as defined by the Bush administration (Tannock, 2005). I also had many friends who experimented with drugs and ended up in the juvenile justice system due to narcotic- related charges, and others were being peer-pressured to join the military because our school did little to prepare us for life after graduation (Rios, 2011). Luckily, I was recruited by a counselor to participate in a newly-offered education program called *concurrent enrollment* that allowed medium- and high-performing students to attend classes at their local community college. Concurrent enrollment is an important pathway for many low-income students to matriculate to higher education and can positively impact their secondary education outcomes (Lewis & Overman, 2008). This opportunity dramatically changed my understanding of education and what I could be in schools.

The structure and nature of higher education are often at odds with K-12 schools given the differing nature of the institutions. K-12 schools are much more structured, authoritarian, and curricularly-standardized where higher education is more self-motivated, unsupervised, and promotes academic/intellectual freedom. This disconnect and the inability of K-12 schools to adequately prepare students for the transition to higher education is a major issue and has led many students, particularly students of color, to drop or "stop" out of colleges and universities (Krist & Venezia, 2001). I, however, thrived in this environment because of my outspoken and independent nature.

The concurrent enrollment program helped me experience an educational environment that encouraged me to engage with topics and materials that I found personally relevant. Although my learning style fit well in community college and higher education, I still faced institutional challenges that made it difficult to finish a two-year degree and transition to a baccalaureate institution. Like many community college students, who are mostly working-class students of color and nontraditional students, I had to take an assessment test that *gauged* my scholastic abilities. These tests are supposed to determine students' educational level and place them in classes that will help them progress in the higher education environment. These learning assessment tools, however, are flawed in that they are culturally-biased and often place students in remedial education (Shaw & Skomsvold, 2018). Scholars argue that community college assessment tools have hindered students' ability to matriculate to bachelor degree-granting institutions and confine them in innumerable nontransferable/remedial courses (Abrica & Martinez, 2016; Dowd, 2007; Rodriguez, Mejia, & Johnson 2018; Sanchez, 2012). I took this test and was placed in remedial courses, which extended my tenure at my local community college to six years. While this remedial placement significantly extended my time in higher education, I was able to take many courses and meet an important academic/cultural mentor while completing coursework. While taking an Intro to Psychology course, I met my long-time mentor, Assistant Professor Maria Lopez, who taught me the value of education and the need to learn and teach in service of social justice. This Chicana educator served a vital role in supporting my overall academic journey by teaching me from a culturally-relatable standpoint, connecting with me interpersonally due to cultural

and community background similarities, and serving as a guide to the complicated higher education process. Her mentorship mirrors what many educators of color do for students of color throughout the higher education system, which is to provide the culturally sensitive/relatable support that help learners persist along the educational pipeline (Espinoza, 2011).

My mentor's pedagogical and curricular approach also made me realize that I had not received culturally related/relevant education in my entire public-school experience. Similarly, students of color in the public education system rarely see educators of color or curricula that well-represents and honors our communities. Rather, we see mainly White faces leading classes and schools and represented throughout our textbooks and other learning materials. In fact, the majority of educators are White and curriculum is taught from a White perspective despite the rapidly diversifying student body and society (Sleeter, 2001, 2011). The numerous issues in public schools - such as overrepresentation of White teachers and Eurocentric curriculum, authoritarian nature of school culture, and poor funding these institutions receive - creates significant educational barriers for students of color to succeed and matriculate to college (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Blankstien, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016). Through my schooling trajectory, I have wondered if teachers of color and culturally relevant curriculum can help students succeed in schools and inspire them to go to college. My curiosity about the impact of culturally relevant education stems in part from recognizing that students, educators, and scholars have led a historic movement to create Ethnic/Latinx and Chicanx/African American and Black/Asian and Asian American/Native and Indigenous Studies programs and courses at

high schools and colleges throughout the U.S. (Nicol, 2013). Given my own lack of exposure to Ethnic Studies courses, that academics of color recognize the importance of Ethnic Studies, and the positive relationship I had with a Chicana professor-mentor who taught with a culturally relevant pedagogy, I set out to research the impact of this educational framework - particularly in public high schools - to see if students of color today can benefit from these classes. It is particularly important to study the benefits of these classes because public education in the U.S. and California, specifically, has been marred with a history of legal segregation, divestment in schools that serve communities of color, and persistent achievement gaps with students of color "underperforming" compared to White peers despite attending *equal* public schools (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

Chapter Roadmap

Chapter 2: Lit Review/Theoretical Framework and Method/Methodology
This chapter outlines the uniqueness of my project in relation to previous research. This project is unique in that there have been no ethnographic examinations of Ethnic Studies classes. There are numerous studies that have chronicled and analyzed students in school settings to better understand the institutional factors that impede or promote student of color success. There is also a growing body of research, both qualitative and quantitative, that shows the importance and educational and interpersonal impacts of Ethnic Studies classes. Most qualitative research on Ethnic Studies classes has been conducted by teachers of these courses who have theorized about their work and/or analyzed their students' experiences and coursework to understand the impact of these courses. Quantitative work on this subject examines educational measures such as attendance

rates, test scores, and overall school performance to show how these courses bolster quantifiable student success. Other scholarship on this topic have meditated on Ethnic Studies as far as the curricular nature in contrast to "traditional" schooling and its purpose to improve public education to better serve students of color and foster critical and social justice consciousness. This is an important body of work but falls short of showing how specific elements of Ethnic Studies, namely assignments, shape students' understandings of self and educational futurity. My work provides an important view into the quotidian reality within Ethnic Studies classes, shows how current and former students benefit academically and interpersonally from completing these classes, and provides curricular and pedagogical recommendations to grow Ethnic Studies in other schools. My project adds to the literature in that it is the first ethnography of Ethnic Studies education with a specific focus on understanding how curriculum and assignments directly impact students. Additionally, my research provides an intimate understanding of school realities that students, specifically youth of color, face in the Inland Empire, which is both an understudied, yet important, region given its large geographical area and student population (De Lara, 2018; Rodriguez, 2015)

In this chapter, I also discuss my methodological approach for collecting data and the theoretical framework for analyzing it. My research design follows an educational ethnography where I spent a full school year, four to five days a week, observing and participating in the Ethnic Studies classroom and the everyday happenings at the school site, where I conducted the majority of my interviews. I interviewed 35 students (n=35) - 20 current (n=20) and 15 former (n=15) - and the Ethnic Studies teacher to tease out the

nature of the class, the impact of curriculum and pedagogy, and how the classroom environment fostered connectivity amongst students and bolstered their academic, cultural, and civic identity. I changed the name of the school which I renamed IE High and assigned pseudonyms to all participants following IRB and qualitative anonymity and confidentiality protocols. I used a Critical Race Theory (CRT) informed methodological approach to flesh out the lived realities of marginalized groups through observing, photographing, and interviewing youth of color. In using CRT as my methodology, I aim to directly address systemic racism and oppression in public schools, build new knowledge with and through my student of color research participants, and commit the purpose of this project to serve social justice efforts. I was specifically motivated to conduct this research to illuminate the benefits of Ethnic Studies by providing data points and curricular and pedagogic guides that can help build Ethnic Studies programs at other public schools, thereby aiding in the movement for education reform to better serve students of color. My qualitative, participatory, and interviewing research approach also follows a *Cariño* methodology that seeks to highlight narrative experiences of people most impacted by the education system and produce scholarship that can directly help those marginalized by this system. *Cariño* research approaches are those that focus on helping support communities that are being studied rather than simply engaging in scholarship for individual benefits (Duncan-Andrade, 2006). In taking this approach, I developed my analysis and findings in a way that can be used to advocate for the expansion of Ethnic Studies programs at the school site and district where I conducted my study and throughout public K-12 education. In using this approach, I give back to

the school, teacher, and students through participating in course development, helping with assignments and student needs, and contributing to campus events while also gathering their work and experiences to provide new knowledge on this subject.

Chapter 3-Día de los Muertos: Building Familismo through Constructing Altares and Honoring our Departed Loved Ones

This chapter focuses on how students formed *familismo* through completing the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* project assignment. In this chapter, I analyze how students interact with a particular assignment that I felt built familial bonds, which was a larger catalyst for youth to develop *Academic Familismo* over the school year. For the Ethnic Studies class, students are assigned every fall to construct a commemorative altar in accordance with celebrating Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) holiday and learning about Mesoamerican, Mexican, Mexican American, and Chicano Studies histories and cultures. In this chapter, I discuss elements of the assignment and give a brief history of Día de los Muertos, including how this cultural celebration has evolved and is widely celebrated by various communities today. I, then, provide an ethnographic vignette of what I observed in the students engaging with the unit's learning as well as developing and presenting their projects. I paint a picture of the students sharing about the design elements of the project, the departed loved one that was the focus of their project, and highlight student projects and interactions through photos and student statements. I, then, analyze the nature of this assignment and related curriculum through a discussion of specific student submissions and statements drawn from my in-depth interviews with research participants. My analysis shows that this project tapped into students' creativity and problem-solving skills to construct elaborate and original assignments. Additionally,

statements by students show how this assignment enhanced their peer and familial relationships. I argue that this assignment was both formative and foundational for building *Academic Familismo* in that it gave students the opportunity to develop meaningful projects focused on their family members while learning more about their peers through working on and presenting their assignments together. Students developed and presented these projects together which helped them learn about each other's backgrounds, forming deeper relationships and respect for each other as a result. Students mentioned how important it was to complete this work because they were able to learn about a BIPOC history and culture underrepresented in mainstream curriculum, showcase their families in ways that they are not able to in other classes, and enhance their interpersonal connections with peers and friends. What I argue through this project is that these types of engaging learning experiences and environments can bolster overall student achievement.

Chapter 4-Working Together with World Cafe: Building the Academic of Academic Familismo through Collaborative Ethnic Studies Activities

The next phenomenological element of Ethnic Studies I saw develop in students is the *academic* aspect of *Academic Familismo.* I came to understand how Ethnic Studies builds academic skills through observing students engage with a World Cafe activity that focused on BIPOC-centered course materials. World Cafe is a dialogic activity where participants read stories and materials, often from authors of marginalized communities, and then answer analytical questions as a part of a larger multidimensional group project. Participants read over various materials and then gather in randomized preassigned groups in a class or assembly hall to answer questions placed on paper at easel stations

scattered throughout the area. Groups respond to these questions by writing on paper around the room for a short period of time then move on to other stations. As groups write responses and move stations, they see how previous groups answered those queries. New individuals to the stations see how other groups responded and can let this knowledge inform how they will answer. Through this work, participants build off each other's insights where they learn from classmates as well as the course materials. At the end of this activity, they participate in *the harvest* or large class/group discussion where all participants reflect on the materials reviewed and groups responses to various questions.

My analysis shows that this assignment was extremely effective in building youth educational skills and familial relationships. What I observed with World Cafe was students engaging in analytical thinking by way of using ideas from course materials and their lived experiences to answer activity questions. Additionally, students built collective insights and knowledge from each other through in-group conversations and inter-group work where they used each other's responses to develop answers to various question prompts. Students developed important school skills through this activity like analytical thinking, interpersonal communication, problem-solving, and public speaking skills; all of which are important soft skills required for higher education and professional success. Students also further enhanced their *familismo* through the World Cafe activity as they discussed thoughts about culturally relevant material and shared related personal experiences in order to answer questions. This sharing of knowledge helped youth connect to one another on an intimate level where they saw similarities between their

backgrounds. Interview participants shared that these interactions and interpersonal exchanges made them feel like a family. Specifically, their shared experiences made them feel connected to their peers' families. This phenomenon of building scholastic abilities while fostering students' familial peer relationships is an important element of Ethnic Studies, ultimately bolstering students' school engagement. When students feel they can connect to the assignments and activities as well as their classmates, they are more likely to want to participate in coursework, generally, because they are personally invested in the work. Likewise, because they see their peers as family members and are concerned about classmates' educational successes as well as their own, they will invest more energy and effort into completing projects. Whether it be individual or group work, *Academic Familismo* fostered through Ethnic Studies curriculum is extremely impactful for students in that it connects them personally to their learning and motivates them to succeed to support the familial dynamics developed in the class.

Chapter 5-Lotería Identity Portrait Project: Ethnic Studies curriculum tapping into both the academic and familismo fostered in students to develop projects that honor inspirational figures

In this chapter, I focus on a particular assignment that fostered *Academic Familismo* the most with students, the *Lotería Identity Portrait Project.* This assignment, similar to the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar Project,* provides students the opportunity to engage with a creative project dedicated to an important figure in their lives. This project draws from an important culturally significant game that many Chicanx/Latinx families and communities play, Lotería. I provide a brief discussion about the nature of the game and its relevance to Brown communities and education. Next, I discuss how elements of the game have been incorporated into a culturally relevant project that taps into students'

artistic, analytical writing skills. Students complete this assignment during the middle of the spring semester where they have to develop a hand-drawn Lotería card with a unique title that honors an inspirational person from their family or community.

Students also have to write a detailed multi-paragraph analytical essay where they describe the inspirational figure represented in their portrait project and analyze that person's life with concepts covered in the course. After the students complete the assignment, they have to engage in two complementary in-class activities that allow them to showcase their work to their peers. First, students present their projects in a social justice circle where each youth describes their portrait and the person featured in their card. Next, students complete a gallery walk where they walk about the classroom viewing their peers' portrait projects and giving them anonymous feedback on cards stationed next to their classmates' work. This project was extremely effective in building academic skills and familial relationships. I show in my analysis how this assignment bolsters students' abilities to develop complex artistic projects that honor their families and embraces Latinx/Chicanx culture. Through analysis of a sample assignment where students analyzed social issues facing their inspirational figures, I also show how their critical thinking and analytical writing skills were fostered through this engagement task. The assignment and associated activities also enhanced youths' burgeoning familial relationships as they shared about their backgrounds through discussing their portrait projects and sentiments about their peers' work during the gallery walk activity. We can see how *familismo* sentiments and connectivity flourished through this activity and Ethnic Studies more broadly through photos and statements from participants I showcase

in this chapter. Like with ethnographic data I have featured in previous chapters, various data points show how students enjoyed this project and felt more connected with their classmates through engaging in this work.

The assignment embodies the essence of *Academic Familismo* fostered in Ethnic Studies courses and curriculum that honed soft skills like problem solving, critical thinking, and analytical writing while also developing students' familial relationships through presentations and anonymous commentary on peers' projects. It was observably clear that students were heavily invested in this assignment as well as the related activity, thereby demonstrating that the assignment and, by extension, Ethnic Studies encouraged educational engagement. As with all Ethnic Studies assignments and curriculum reviewed in this project, we see the heavy level of personal investment by students in this course and related coursework beyond what would be otherwise expected of students. This increased school engagement is important to recognize as it both confirms findings from previous research on Ethnic Studies and can provide evidence and rationale supporting the widespread implementation of these courses to better serve students of color. Again, Students and communities of color have been historically underserved, specifically by schools and educators not providing them with culturally relevant materials with which these youths can connect. This lack of cultural materials has caused students of color to withdraw from education because they do not find schooling relevant, thereby exacerbating the achievement gap. In the next chapter, I surmise my findings and provide guidance as to how we more adequately study the effects these courses have and implement them in other school districts.

Chapter 6/Conclusion: Why We Need Ethnic Studies Now! to Redefine/Transform Public Education

This concluding chapter will give an overview of the data gathered during my fieldwork. Here I discuss how each of the assignments and curriculum analyzed build *Academic Familismo.* I also discuss the importance of this phenomenon and its implications for understanding the benefits of Ethnic Studies courses, curriculum, and pedagogy. I will also give recommendations regarding how to better support Ethnic Studies at K-12 schools that can be utilized by education stakeholders. I will also talk about the implication for taking a *Cariño*-based research and advocacy approach when studying youth and communities of color, as well as the responsibilities the academy has for supporting marginalized groups. I provide an additional discussion on ways other scholars can build from this work, specifically highlighting that feminist, gender/queer, disability, and broader social justice education studies should also be researched and incorporated into mainstream education programs in an effort to serve students with complex multiple social identities and desires to become social justice advocates.

Chapter 2: Literature Review/Methodology/Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

This study addresses a glaring gap in the literature regarding qualitative K-12 Ethnic Studies Education research, particularly within the IE. My research provides an in-depth ethnographic and qualitative view of the positive impacts of Ethnic Studies, a first of its kind view into the quotidian realities of learning environments fostered by these courses. I am specifically conducting a qualitative analysis of students of color school experiences with Ethnic Studies curricula to better understand how this educational framework impacts students' social identity, peer relationships, and school outcomes. Previous qualitative research on Ethnic Studies, mostly conducted by instructors of these classes, show that students who take these courses have greater political efficacy, engagement with school both in academics and campus life, and community involvement (Acosta 2007, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Acosta & Mir, 2012; Cabrera et al., 2014; Cammarota, 2007; Cammarota & Romero, 2006, 2011; de los Rios, 2013, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; de los Rios et al., 2015; de los Rios & Seltzer 2017; Romero, 2008, 2010). There are some emergent quantitative studies that show the positive impacts of Ethnic Studies on students' numerical learning measures. Quantitative studies demonstrate that students who take Ethnic Studies classes report having better test scores, attendance rates, and overall GPAs (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017). My project adds to this body of work by providing an ethnographic case study of an Inland Empire Ethnic Studies classroom and the school where the class is held. This ethnography shows how students engaged with the curriculum in the classroom, how the learning materials and

environment shaped their relationships with peers and family members, and bolstered their school performance. I developed the concept of *Academic Familismo* based on these findings to show Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogies create a learning environment that encourages students to build meaningful family-like relationships with their peers and class, which ultimately leads to better learning outcomes. My approach to studying Ethnic Studies' qualitative effects provides a novel and in-depth insight into the effects of this curriculum and pedagogy by an outside researcher. Thus, this project will provide an in-depth qualitative look into an Ethnic Studies class and the education experience of High School students in the IE-an understudied area. My findings show the power this education framework has to help historically marginalized students with regard to their interpersonal relationships and learning.

In the following sections, I discuss some of the areas of relevant research that my work builds upon. I look specifically at qualitative research on Schools and students of color in Southern California to show what important lessons we can learn from scholars as well as limitations of their work. Specifically, these projects highlight the problematic school conditions that marginalized students faced and provide interventions to deal with these systemic issues. My work builds from these qualitative studies in that I show how Ethnic Studies can help ameliorate some of the social issues present in our schools. I then discuss existing research on Ethnic Studies curriculum and courses. Much of this research has either been conducted by Ethnic Studies teachers reflexively by qualitatively studying their courses and students or outside scholars looking at the impact of these classes on students' academic performance. Qualitative Ethnic Studies research provides some

observational and interview data with regard to students' sociality and identity formation; particularly, how youth develop greater senses of cultural pride and academic identity through taking these courses. Quantitative research on Ethnic Studies shows that students who take these courses report better overall GPA, improved standardized test scores, and increased attendance rates. These findings show that Ethnic Studies benefits students academically across important measures of educational engagement and success. While these quantitative studies show the positive effects of these courses, this body of research doesn't show the in-depth reality of these courses nor how particular aspects of the curriculum impact students academically. While my work doesn't provide numerical measures of academic success for students taking these courses, I show how students successfully engage with various Ethnic Studies assignments over a school year. My analysis of students' submitted work shows how well they engage the material and impressive work they did impart fostered by elements of the curriculum that tap into youths' creative, design, problem-solving, interpersonal communication, and analytical writing skills. Through my discussion of the existing research, I show in detail the wealth of information produced around education-based issues and the educational benefits of Ethnic Studies, while also demonstrating how this project adds novel and significant data to this body of work.

Qualitative Case Studies of students of color in Southern CA Public High Schools

Contemporary qualitative case study research on the experiences of students of color in the California public education system, particularly in the high school setting, is limited but addresses some important themes. There are important studies of the

California school conditions that focus on issues of gender and racial discrimination in educational achievement and policing (Bettie, 2014 Ochoa, 2013; Mendoza-Denton, 2014; Noguera, 2009; Rios 2011, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016). While there are numerous qualitative studies of White and non-White students at various levels of education throughout the U.S., Southern California—specifically the IE where I conducted my study—has not been researched enough. The IE encompasses a huge geographical region and is home to thousands of students, many of who come from marginalized backgrounds, and has a mixture of rural, suburban, and urban cities. Researching this area and its students can give scholars and policy makers clues about the school realities other relatable communities face and how Ethnic Studies can better serve marginalized students who have similar characteristics as my research participant. The glaring gap of research focused on Southern California and the IE specifically presents the impetus to better understand how students fare in schools here. This area also has numerous educational institutions, 30 colleges and universities as well as 54 K-12 public school districts (De Lara, 2018). This means that this massive area holds a significant number of the CA and U.S. student population, who are mostly youth and adults of color. Given how large the IE's territorial area is, the massive population and diversity here, numerous students going through the local K-16 education system, and how little research has been done about this region, scholars need to focus on the social happenings and phenomenon occurring in this region. We can no longer avoid studying this area because it holds much of the future labor force and electorate that will participate in one of the largest world economies.

Much of the more recent research on students of color in California public high schools generally can be described as focusing on overall school conditions, gendered policing/criminalization of youth of color in and out of school, and students navigating the education pipeline and using cultural knowledge and values to succeed. Over the past two decades, an emergent and insurgent group of scholars have looked at the ways in which schools reify class, race, gender, and ability-based school norms via various institutional policies and practices (Bettie, 2014 Ochoa, 2013; Mendoza-Denton, 2014; Noguera, 2009; Rios 2011, 2017; Sojoyner, 2018). This work has also shown how schools function as primarily controlling sites that are centered on disciplining for students of color behavioral issues rather than preparing them for academic success. Rios (2011, 2017) for example talks about how schools with predominantly youth of color populations have various staff and officials that focus on surveilling students in order to "police" or remove them from school sites. These schools essentially prepare students to transition to incarceral institutions (Sojoyner, 2016). Essentially, these schools that students of color attend undervalue or diminish their scholastic potential while also preparing these youth for the incarceral system (Rios 2011, 2017; Sojoyner, 2018). Likewise, Scholars who qualitatively look at the experiences of students in K-12 are mostly focused on identity formation and experiences navigating these institutions (Bettie, 2014 Ochoa, 2013; Mendoza-Denton, 2014; Noguera, 2009; Rios 2011, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016). Similarly, I chronicle the quotidian realities of my participants at their school to understand the environment they learn and thrive in. However, my project provides insight regarding the particular school conditions that IE youth of color

experience while showing how Ethnic Studies courses help them thrive in this environment.

The first area of qualitative research centered on students of color focuses on the school conditions that they experience. Jonathan Kozol (2012) has done extensive work on documenting the variety of often detrimental school conditions that poor students and students of color face. His work speaks to more national trends in public school circumstances that students of color endure. However, he does specifically mention the horrific institutional conditions that California's students of color face. He highlights that the majority of these youth attend racially segregated schools that are extremely underfunded.

> Racial isolation and the concentrated poverty of children in a public school go hand in hand… Only 15 percent of the intensely segregated white schools in the nation have student populations in which more than half are poor enough to be receiving free meals or reduced-price meals. 'By contrast, a staggering 86 percent of intensely segregated Black and Latino schools' have student enrollments in which more than half are poor by the same standards. A segregated inner-city school is almost 'almost six times as likely' to be a school of concentrated poverty as is a school that has an overwhelming white population. (2012, p. 20)

Louie Rodriguez (2013) has also written about the qualitative conditions in schools that Black and Brown youth attend. Rodriguez (2013) finds that students of color who overwhelmingly attend poor schools are dropping out of these institutions at alarmingly high rates, roughly 50%. This work further confirms previous work done by Rodriguez and Conchas (2009), who also find that the youth of color attend poorly funded, racially isolated schools. These institutions do not provide these students with access to courses, materials, and programs that can ensure their educational success and that they finish

school. What is important to gather from this particular body of work is that many youths of color attend hypersegregated and underfunded schools that impede their education.

The next important area of qualitative research focusing on school conditions highlights the institutional practices that reinforce understandings of race, class, gender, sexuality, and ability. While poorly funded, racially isolated schools deny students of color with healthy learning environments, this body of research shows educational achievement gap between White and non-white students can also be explained by the way school personnel interact with racialized youth (Bettie, 2014; Mendoza-Denton, 2014; Noguera, 2009; Rios, 2011; Sojoyner, 2016). Gilda Ochoa's *Academic Profiling: Latinos, Asian Americans, and the Achievement Gap* (2013) provides an ethnographic account of students of color experiences with public schools, performance measures, and social capital related to achievement within the Southern California region. This project gives us clues as to how staff and faculty give students certain labels that separate them based on their "measured" abilities. Ability segregation or academic profiling, a part of what is known as the *hidden curriculum* within schools, reinforce societal social hierarchies and influence the way teachers and staff view and treat students differently based on their race, class, and gender.

> [A]cademic profiling of students involves disparate expectations and treatment by school officials *and* other students based on race/ethnicity, class, gender, course placement, and middle school attendance. Profiling occurs individually and is rooted in historic and systemic processes, and similar to police profiling, academic profiling teaches students their place in society (Ochoa, 2013, p. 2).

Academic profiling and other forms of labeling by teachers, staff, and fellow classmates have heavily impacted the ways whole swaths of students experience school. Likewise,

those students who are labeled as *average, troublemakers,* or *at risk* are often treated differently by faculty and staff in ways that can negatively impact their sense of selves and the way they are perceived by others at the school. Specifically, "teachers' actions can strike at the core of a child and send exclusionary messages to all students in the classroom… [T]eachers' prejudicial and discriminatory treatment not only shapes students' self-conceptions but also fosters divisions and tensions among students" (Ochoa, 2013, p. 15). School officials' disparate treatment of youth of color can significantly impact the ways students see themselves and each other.

Other scholars have looked at the ways in which schools have policed and surveilled students of color to impose racialized, class, and gendered norms (Bettie, 2014; Mendoza-Denton, 2014; Miranda, 2003; Rios, 2011, 2017; Sojoyner, 2016). This body of scholarships shows how school officials and authority figures ascribe youth of color with particular labels that impact their sense of self. Victor Rios has extensively studied the ways in which school and police can influence the way young men of color identify as it pertains to criminality. His ethnographic research shows how multiple social actors ascribe deviant labels on to youth of color, how the perception of youths' criminality pervades across schools, law enforcement, local communities, and families, and how this leads these youths to internalize these labels thereby believing that they are deviant and criminal.

> I found that the boys in this study felt outcast, shamed, and unaccepted, sometimes leading them to a sense of hopelessness and a "deviant self-concept." In addition, I also found that the young men were caught in a spiral of punitive responses imposed by institutions which labeled them as deviant. Being labeled or marked for minor transgressions would place the

> boys at risk for being granted additional, more serious labels. (Rios, 2011, p.45)

This scholarship demonstrates that social actors-teachers, school staff, police, probation officers-can heavily influence the way youth of color identify and are perceived by those around them. While this work is influential in that we can discern the sociological impact of adults' perceptions and actions on the identity formation of youth of color, we should also look at the power marginalized youth have to define their own significance and cultural power.

Scholars have also looked at the power that students of color have, derived from their resilient cultural and community backgrounds, to persist in difficult education settings (Rodriguez, 2014, 2018; Yosso, 2005, 2006). Tara Yosso (2006) has written extensively on the various forms of *community cultural wealth* Chicano/a and Latino/a youth hold that can help them navigate the educational pipeline within and beyond California public education. These intrinsic sources of social capital, derived from their community and family struggles, can be tapped by students of color as a resource to help them succeed in a marginalizing education system (Yosso, 2006). Louie Rodriguez (2014) has also looked at the intrinsic power that Latino youth have to overcome difficult school conditions and act as change agents. His more recent work with the PRAXIS (Participatory Research Advocating for Excellence in Schools) project shows how students can use their own critical awareness of issues within their schools to advocate for institutional changes. Through this project, Rodriguez and his research team worked with students at a local IE High School to develop the youths' research and reporting skills. The youth participants of this research study identified several key school issues

that were negatively impacting the student population generally such as discipline policies related to tardiness and lacking support and resources that was causing a large dropout rate (Rodriguez, 2018). This scholarship shows us that students of color can draw from their cultural and community wealth and utilize their own critical awareness to remain resilient within and succeed in marginalizing schools.

While this body of scholarship covers a wide range of social phenomena occurring in our K-12 public schools, scholars have not often looked at a particular classroom environment and its impact on students' academic outcomes and peer relationship. It is important to understand the particular school conditions that students of color experience in this area given the growing student population in this area (Rodriguez, 2018). My work ethnographically examines schooling conditions that students of color face within the IE area. I also examine how an Ethnic Studies class impacts the quotidian school experience for students taking these courses. I specifically look at how students who take these courses are impacted both academically and socially to understand the nuanced and in-depth impact Ethnic Studies has on youth. Next, discuss the growing body research on Ethnic Studies in K-12 settings. This work provides clues about the social and educational benefits of these courses. However, yearlong case studies of these courses in the high school and in this area have not been done thus far. My work pays particular attention to how students engage with assignments and curriculum to flesh out how learning materials qualitatively impact students' socio-cultural identity, cultural pride, and school sensibilities.

Research Around Ethnic Studies in K-12 Settings

Research around Ethnic Studies courses and curriculum, both quantitative and qualitative, is limited but growing. As previously mentioned, scholars have written about the formation of Ethnic Studies in the higher education setting as a result of 1960s grassroots movements for social justice (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017; Blackwell, 2011). Many scholars have theorized about the various pedagogical and theoretical implications of Ethnic Studies in the broad scope of education. This work serves as an intellectual meditation on the philosophy of education and how Ethnic Studies can be used to improve teaching and learning in an effort to redress historical inequities in our public schools (Au et al., 2016; Banks, 2008). Contemporary studies focus on the experiences of students who have taken Ethnic Studies classes in different regions of the United States. More research needs to be done on this important educational paradigm to better understand its potential impact on learning experiences and outcomes for both students of color and White students.

Christine Sleeter (2011) has written the only comprehensive review of Ethnic Studies in K-12 schools. Her review specifically shows that,

> there are considerable research evidence that well-designed and well-taught ethnic studies curricula have positive academic and social outcomes for students. Curricula are designed and taught somewhat differently depending on the ethnic composition of the class or school and the subsequent experiences students bring, but both students of color and White students have been found to benefit from ethnic studies. (Sleeter, 2011, p. viii)

This assessment of the existing body Ethnic Studies research provides the most powerful evidence as to why Ethnic Studies should be taught in our public schools. The research review shows that students of color want opportunities to learn about their communities

and other relevant BIPOC cultural histories and experiences. Additionally, Sleeter (2011) argues that when these youth learn about diverse human experiences they do better in school overall. Likewise, White students who take these courses develop greater cultural sensitivity and awareness. This report ultimately shows that all students who take these courses report having greater social awareness, intercultural connectivity, critical thinking skills, academic achievement, and civic engagement.

Recent quantitative evaluations also demonstrate similar findings of the academic benefits from Ethnic Studies pedagogies in high school settings (Dee & Penner, 2017; Cabrera et al., 2014). Cabrera et al. (2014) studied the educational impact of the controversial Tucson Unified School District (TUSD) Mexican American Studies (MAS) program. The MAS program was designed by Ethnic Studies and Education Scholars and follows Ethnic Studies teaching and learning principles. These scholars were able to capture significant quantitative impact of the MAS/Ethnic Studies program, specifically several positive educational outcomes. They found that the "[t]aking MAS classes is consistently, significantly, and positively related to increased student academic achievement, and this relationship grows stronger the more classes students take. It did not matter how we operationalized academic success" (Cabrera et al., 2014, p. 1107). Dee and Penner (2017) also researched the academic outcomes for students taking Ethnic Studies classes. Their study confirmed findings from the Cabrera et al. (2014) study by showing that students who take Ethnic Studies classes consistently have better education outcomes with regard to overall GPA and test scores. This work reinforces claims made by Sleeter (2011) and adds that students that take these courses have reduced chronic

absenteeism and increased standardized test scores and GPA (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017).

We also see significant positive benefits of Ethnic Studies discussed by scholars who have studied these courses qualitatively. Several Scholars have written about the TUSD MAS program amid its controversy (Acosta 2007, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Acosta & Mir, 2012; Cabrera et al., 2014; Cammarota, 2007; Cammarota & Romero, 2006, 2011; Romero, 2008, 2010). This scholarship provides a holistic overview of the MAS program, theoretical lineages and teaching practices, and the impact these classes had on teachers and students. Acosta and Mir reflect on the experiences of those teaching and learning in the MAS Ethnic Studies literature class where,

> [a]s students became fully engaged in the curricular experiences, the dialogue in the classes centered around how the students were perceiving the literature and how they applied it to their own lives and the world around them. Thus, critical inquiry and pedagogy became the way for students to push each other toward developing social consciousness rooted firmly in themes of social justice. (2012, p. 21)

This reflection exemplifies how impactful Ethnic Studies classes were for the students taking them, specifically as it relates to building social justice consciousness. Cabrera's et al. (2014) quantitative analysis of the program that Curtis Acosta taught and in which Asiya Mir (2012) was a student shows that students had overwhelming positive experience and learning outcomes for during and after taking these classes. While the qualitative research about the TUSD MAS program shows how successful these specific courses were in Arizona, there is some research about these programs in California that also show the positive impacts of Ethnic Studies.

In terms of research based on Ethnic Studies courses in California, minimal studies exist because the state's students lack access to these vital programs (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Despite having this overwhelming diversity, there are few if any Ethnic Studies programs available. The lack of access to these programs is a persistent social justice issue as I have stated repeatedly in this project and also presents a challenge for studying the effects of these courses on this large minority student population. Cati de los Rios (2013, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) has written extensively on her experiences teaching Ethnic Studies in a Southern CA high school and how her pedagogy impacts students' academics and sense of identity. Her scholarship chronicling and theorizing about the Ethnic Studies curricula she has implemented provides us with a comprehensive view of how this educational practice can positively impact students. What is particular to note from her work, which we also see with the TUSD MAS program (Acosta, 2013), is that these classes foster student activism within and beyond the school (de los Rios et al., 2014). De los Rios and her colleagues (2014) found that students who are exposed to these classes develop a critical awareness of issues in their schools like the lack of updated learning materials, need for maintenance, and providing specific resources to students. Her students after taking her classes were motivated to conduct research on ways school officials could make necessary institutional improvements. This emergent work supports other key findings made by quantitative and qualitative scholars while also adding a layer of nuance in showing how Ethnic Studies can motivate students to engage in social justice activism (de los Rios, 2018). Given these important findings, we need to conduct more research on Ethnic Studies classes to

confirm previous scholarship and explore nuances with regard to regionally specific applications and demographic similarities and idiosyncrasies.

My project differs from the various studies mentioned above for many reasons. While I am conducting a qualitative study of students of color school experiences, I am looking specifically at the way in which an Ethnic Studies class can impact their academic performance and sense of identity. I show in the following chapters how students engage with Ethnic Studies curriculum and how learning in this environment impacts their social relationships and learning. Ethnographic vignettes, photos, and interview data featured in the following chapters demonstrate that students were positively impacted by the learning materials they engaged with and developed *Academic Familismo* while working with classmates and specific projects. Furthermore, my analysis of specific assignments indicate how Ethnic Studies enhance students' school engagement, peer relationships, and educational outcomes. My project provides important insights as to how students learn and thrive while learning and socializing in Ethnic Studies classrooms. I also provide institutional recommendations as to how we can develop and grow Ethnic Studies programs and support teachers. Thus, my project provides a holistic view of Ethnic Studies learning and how the educational framework benefits students academically and socially and gives institutional recommendations to better implement these courses and programs.

Methodology

For this project, I use qualitative methodological approach following activist, Critical Race Theory (CRT), and Cariño praxes (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Hale, 2006; Madison, 2011; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Sudbury & Okazawa-Rey, 2009). Central to these strands of research methodologies is approaching academic inquiries with the explicit aim of uncovering societal power relations that marginalize and oppress certain populations. Contemporary studies that follow these methodological traditions highlight the complexities of human experience, challenge historical and mainstream misrepresentations of certain marginalized groups, and produce knowledge and data points that can be used to politically advocate for oppressed communities. I use this braided methodological approach to study the lived experiences of Ethnic Studies K-12 students in the Inland Empire (IE). This project includes an ethnographic case study of a K-12 Ethnic Studies class, which shows how course participants are qualitatively impacted by Ethnic Studies curricula and transformative pedagogies. I supplemented my ethnography by conducting numerous semi-structured interviews with current and former Ethnic Studies students to corroborate my school and classroom-based observations. My aim with this interdisciplinary methodological approach is to analyze the sociological/educational impact of Ethnic Studies on students' sense of cultural and academic identity as well as their peer relationship. My aim with this project is to provide theoretical and methodological interventions into the qualitative study of education with regard to using a *Cariño,* or authentic caring, approach to research, develop models on

how to better teach Ethnic Studies, and provide data driven evidence of the positive impacts that come from taking Ethnic Studies classes.

My methodological framework follows a particular strand of critical inquiry that seeks to highlight power relationships and oppressive systems impacting certain populations, while also developing data-driven solutions to these issues. Critical academic research is used in a variety of social science-based studies to uncover how oppressive systems of power operate in a society. "The critical [researcher] looks beneath surface appearances, disrupts the status quo, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and contributes to emancipatory knowledge and discourses of social justice" (Madison, 2011, p.5). The impetus driving critical research is two-fold in that it unsettles dominant discourses while also producing new knowledge that leads to social justice. I developed this project to understand oppressive power relations in public education that also motivated generations of activists to advocate for Ethnic Studies as an alternative to mainstream curricula and pedagogies (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Historically, public education systems have failed to meet the needs of students of color and schools have not been able to propel these youth along the education pipeline (Rodriguez, 2018). Critical education scholars argue that schools as an institution further dominant power dynamics through tracking student into various class positions, pushing students of color particularly into incarceral systems, and miseducating and misrepresenting racialized groups as inferior, criminal, not significant, and absent in society (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Ochoa, 2013; Sojoyner, 2016; Sleeter, 2011). The

way in which schools miseducate students is a central tension I highlight through my work through showing that Ethnic Studies speaks back to curricula that denigrates communities of color (Banks, 1996; Lowen, 2007). I follow a criticalist tradition of unsettling the apolitical understanding of schools as just an edifice of learning to uncover how these institutions reify power and the powerful in our society.

I couch this work in Critical Race Theory (CRT) methods developed by scholars of color to highlight how racism and other forms of oppression affect racialized groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT focuses more specifically on the centrality of race and racism within the human experience and individual's identity formations—it also recognizes that there are multiple forms of oppression that intersect and interlock and limit individuals access to socio-economic prosperity and equal treatment in a society (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT methodologies are structured around five central tenets that help researchers consider how race impacts individuals. For the purposes of this study, I tie my methodological aims to three tenets of CRT that I highlighted in my theoretical framework: the Intercentricity of Race and Racism, Centrality of Experiential Knowledge, and Commitment to Social Justice (Yosso, 2006). These tenets inform the way that I conceptualize the project as a study aimed at highlighting institutional racism in education and providing intervention to this issue through my data and analysis.

I am driven to do this work because of my activist sensibilities and history as a student/community organizer. As previously, I endured many of the educational conditions that my student participants are currently facing. My experiences and realization that the injustices I experienced still impact students today motivate me to

conduct research in order to help reform these institutions. This work will be for and in service of the Ethnic Studies students that I follow through my ethnography where their experiences and testimonies are central data points that I analyze to inform my overall findings. I do this work in this manner to tie the purpose of the research to bettering the lives of my participants and future generations of students that will navigate the public education system. Far too long, scholarly endeavors have been centered on conducting research for intellectual curiosity, academic accolades, and/or monetary compensation rather than producing work for the benefit of peoples studied (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Sudbury & Okazawa-Rey. 2009).

Activist research is scholarship in pursuit of contesting social injustice in any and all of its forms. Activist researchers align the goals of their research to that of supporting communities and/or organizations they are working with. I define *activist research* as academic studies that expose oppression and social injustice in our society while also using data derived from investigations to ameliorate the negative effects of injustices. My definition follows how Julia Sudbury and Margo Okazawa-Rey define activist research and scholarship or, "the production of knowledge and pedagogical practices through active engagement with, and in the service of, progressive social movements" (2009, p. 3). Indeed, my work stems from the long tradition of social movements aimed at reforming K-12 and higher education so that these systems and institutions provide students with Ethnic Studies and critical multicultural education so that they can better learn about the diversity in our society (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017). I also work in service of the community I study by way of participating in quotidian happenings in the

school and classroom, serving as a curricular resource to the teacher whose class I am observing, co-facilitating the learning in the class along with the students and teachers, and using data from this study to advocate for more Ethnic Studies classes at the school site, at other schools within the district and IE, and throughout public education. One of the activist's aims of my research is to highlight how education systems and curriculum misrepresent communities of color and other subordinated groups as inferior to Whites in a way that maintains social perceptions of White Supremacy. My complimentary aim is to show qualitatively that students of color and other marginalized students do better in school when they learn about themselves and their cultural histories through Ethnic Studies. My findings can be used to advocate for education reform that expands Ethnic Studies courses at various levels of public education. Expanding Ethnic Studies throughout our public schools would be an important reform that would create learning opportunities that ultimately better serve the diversifying student population. I do this work not merely out of intellectual curiosity but rather I, like many other scholars and educators of color, believe that these classes change lives and help students succeed (Acosta 2007, 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Acosta & Mir, 2012; Cabrera et al., 2014 Cammarota, 2007; Cammarota & Romero, 2006, 2011; de los Rios, 2013, 2016, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; de los Rios, et al., 2015; de los Rios & Seltzer 2017; Rodriguez, 2018; Romero, 2008, 2010). Many Ethnic Studies academics, K-12 teachers, current/former/aspiring students wish they had greater access to these courses. So, my methodological aim is to show the power of these classes and why more, if not all, public K-16 institutions need to have Ethnic Studies.

My methodology and intentionality of this project is wedded to a *Cariño* framework. *Cariño* was originally conceptualized by Angela Valenzuela (2010) when she studied how authentically caring educators can help students of color succeed in education. She documented how students are exposed to schools that disparage non-white histories and cultures, which subtracts rather than adds to their overall learning. She also showed how authentically caring educators can help students survive and succeed in this damaging institution (Valenzuela, 2010). Authentic caring is extremely important in education specifically when teachers invest and care about the overall well-being of students beyond their mere academic performance. Valenzuela found that when students feel cared for as whole humans rather than a student who just performs well in class for a grade, youth feel welcomed, validated, and worthy that translates into their increased school engagement. Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2006) extends authentic caring or *Cariño* into research methodology by challenging researchers to do work in the care and service of their participants. Specifically, he argues that we should do research that empowers, "individuals as agents of meaningful, sustainable change…[and] to positively impact the material conditions of those involved with the study; it is an approach to research that gives more than it receives" (Duncan-Andrade, 2006, p. 455). Scholars conducting *Cariño* research take on a methodology of authentically caring for participants by engaging in scholarly pursuits to empower those featured in the work and improve participants' material conditions. I use the *Cariño* methodological frame for my research to honor the experience of the Ethnic Studies class participants, show how they are changing through the learning in the course, and provide the students and school with

data that can be used to support and expand Ethnic Studies at the school and district. In taking this approach, I explicitly sought to support students through my Participatory Action Research ethnographic method where I worked with them in class and helped them navigate schooling and applying to higher education; I discuss this further in the next section. Rather than being a passive observer, I actively engaged students validating their work in class and supported their learning as a teaching assistant to Mr. Garcia over the school year. I also mentioned the aims of my work to improve education through studying Ethnic Studies and using my research to help marginalized students. Taking this invested position in the classroom and sharing my research aims with students helped me develop a meaningful relationship with youth participants involved in this study. My *Cariño* research position indeed helped me develop a caring relationship with students in the classroom and with participants, which motivated students to share their experiences with me in meaningful ways.

Activist and *Cariño* methodologies are two sides of the same epistemological coin in that scholars produce knowledge in the service of the communities they care about (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Hale, 2006). I weave these methodological strands to form an Activist *Cariño* methodology, a methodological orientation that I use because I care about the students, teacher, and community I am studying. I also align this project with this interwoven methodology because I am highlighting a social injustice in our education system; I will use my data to propose education reforms that will better serve future students thereby intervening against injustices in our public schools. As mentioned earlier, I went through this same education system and had no access to Ethnic Studies

courses. In completing this research, I hope to push schools and school districts to provide Ethnic Studies classes to future students so that they can have access to learning materials and environments that I never had and activists have and continue to fight for.

Research Design/Method

This project consists of an ethnographic case study of an Ethnic Studies classroom at Southern California High School within the Inland Empire area, which I am calling IE High. I conducted this study over the 2018-2019 academic year. I gained access to this research site and classroom by visiting and assisting Mr. Garcia class over the 2017-2018 school year. I regularly visited the high school to build rapport and trust with the school community. I engaged in various activities on campus including co-teaching with the Ethnic Studies teacher Mr. Garcia, co-facilitate teacher professional developments with this teacher and the school's instructional coach, and participated in other supportive activities to gain visibility on campus. I also met with school and district administration to ask for permission to conduct my fieldwork and gained their approval. I also received approval from the district's Office to conduct this research, completing all necessary IRB documents required for qualitative research in the school setting. I changed the name of this High School to protect the identity of individuals involved and those attending the school following anonymity and confidentiality principles of qualitative research (Leavy, 2011). I selected IE High because I have a good relationship with the district, the school administration, and the current Ethnic Studies teacher. The school is in an area close to my home institution and my university has a working relationship with the district. The teacher instructing this course has been doing so for six years at two different schools in

the district. I had contacted Mr. Garcia about studying his course for my research, which he graciously allowed me to observe in his classroom over the school year. Mr. Garcia teaches at one of three high schools in the district and the only institution to offer Ethnic Studies courses. One defining feature of the school is its overwhelming Latinx/Chicanx Student population. The school is a *majority minority* school that has a mostly BIPOC student population and serves a community that is also majority minority (www.ocrdata.ed.gov). The school's demographics were an important factor in selecting it for this study because minority students often cannot take courses that center on their cultural and community heritage (Sleeter, 2011). I also chose this school to observe because it is in a largely understudied area (De Lara, 2018), one of a few schools that actually have Ethnic Studies classes, I have a good rapport with the district and school leadership as well as Mr. Garcia, the teacher is a prime candidate to observe given his teaching experience, and the student population would provide excellent data to support my methodological goals and findings from previous studies.

I conducted my research at this site during the 2018-2019 school year. My ethnography consisted of school and in-class observations to capture teacher and students' experiences within and outside of participating in an Ethnic Studies course. I spent three to four full school days per week at the site over the school year with the majority of the time spent in the Ethnic Studies classroom or participating in school related activities on campus. I followed a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method where I actively involve myself in the day-to-day classroom and school reality (Rodriguez, 2018). My PAR method involved participating in class, helping students,

interacting with other teachers, staff, and administration, working in the classroom to help with teaching and activity implementation, and engaging with everyday school life. I took this approach to fully immerse myself in institutional life and minimize social distance between me and my participants. Taking this research positionality was important to foster trust with school officials, Ethnic Studies students, and my research participants. My full immersion in quotidian school life was omnipresent in that I was regularly asked to help students and teachers, participate in a variety of activities, and even participate in the school's graduation ceremony as a faculty audience member at the end of the school year. The amount of time I spent in the field and my level of engagement was sufficient to complete meaningful field work where I captured a significant amount of ethnographic data (Carspecken, 1996). This research strategy follows the methods used in school ethnographies conducted by education, anthropology, and sociology scholars (Bettie, 2014; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Lee, 2005; Noguera, 2009; Ochoa, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). I captured my observational data through taking extensive field notes in a small journal and writing extensive field logs after each research site visit. I logged various statements made by students, faculty, and administrators regarding the Ethnic Studies course in my field journal. I used these statements, gathered from informal conversations, as supplemental data to help support my assumptions and findings. I wrote numerous pages of field notes and journal logs during my field work to detail all that I saw while in the Ethnic Studies classroom. These data points were extremely helpful for understanding how students were inhabiting the classroom space as well as engaging with each other and the course materials. I feature

ethnographic vignettes in later chapters based on this ethnographic data that specifically show how students developed *Academic Familismo* through participating in the Ethnic Studies class.

To supplement my ethnography, I conducted 35 in-depth semi-structured interviews with current and former students. I used convenience and self-selection sampling to recruit interview participants. Across the two sections of the Ethnic Studies class, I asked students if they wanted to participate and allowed them to sign up. All participants who signed up to be interviewed were given IRB approved consent forms that detailed the study, the interview process, potential risks, and aims of the study. I also gave IRB approved parental consent forms to all participants that were minors. Once potential interviewees returned their IRB informed consent forms, I scheduled meetings times that were most convenient for participants. I aimed to interview at least ten students from each section of the current Ethnic Studies course, twenty students total from two class periods. I was indeed able to interview twenty students collectively from both sections, which accounted for half of the currently enrolled students. I had more than 30 current students sign up to be interviewed but I had to cap the number of participants due to scheduling and time limitations of my study. I solicited an additional fifteen former students with help from Mr. Garcia. He provided me with an email list of all former students. I sent a standardized recruitment email to all former students on the list and received over 20 responses to my inquiry. I was able to schedule interviews with 15 former students but couldn't interview all that had responded due scheduling and time limitations. All interviewees were notified that they would be given a copy of the

dissertation once completed in an effort to be transparent about my work. I also incentivized participation through providing interviewees with a $10 amazon gift card to be used how they wished. This sample of 35 participants, 20 current and 15 former students, provided robust and nuanced data regarding the quotidian happenings of the Ethnic Studies course as well as the social and educational impact of learning in this environment.

Interviews ranged from 40 to 60 mins and I held most of these on the school site during regular class hours or lunch periods to make it easier on students. Interviews with former students were held after school but at the research site or a local coffee shop. My interview questions gauged students' feelings and insights developed while taking the course as well as looking at how participants came to better understand their identity through engaging with Ethnic Studies course materials. Ethnic Studies focuses on excluded and misrepresented communities through teaching their histories and perspectives, this is often the first-time students are given the opportunity to engage with these materials. Teaching students of color their ethno-racial and cultural backgrounds and communities' perspectives bolsters their identity and sense of educational and intellectual significance (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). I wanted to inquire as to how students felt about learning about and from their community in this meaningful way. I chose to interview both current and former students of the course to understand the immediate and lasting effects Ethnic Studies has on youths' sense of academic identity and future purpose. Interviewing former students also helped verify many of the sentiments about classroom familism that I saw during my observations. I followed a dialogic interview

method where I conducted interviews like iterative conversations between myself and participants. This research strategy was first conceptualized by Paulo Freire (2018) to build knowledge through and with participants through conversations and dialogue rather than a standardized back and forth exchange process of interviewing. Specifically, my interviews were generative conversations about school experiences which drew on participants' insights and flesh out their experiences. While I could have interviewed more participants or observed multiple cohorts of students from the Ethnic Studies course, the amount of data I was able to collect during my fieldwork and from my participants was more than sufficient to develop comprehensive analyses of phenomena emerging from this learning environment. See my appendixes for my IRB Consent Forms (Appendix 1) and interview protocols for current and former students (Appendix 2).

Given that this work is qualitative, there are specific ethical considerations that have to be addressed regarding disclosing participants identities. I am mindful of ethics about sharing my participants' narratives in the reporting for this project. Therefore, I followed strict confidentiality and anonymity protocols for concealing my participants' identity. Qualitative researchers generally assign pseudonyms to their participants to ensure that their identity that those involved in the research will not be negatively impacted because of their contribution to the project. I assign pseudonyms to all participants to ensure that identity remains confidential. All identification information, audio recordings from interviews, and other identifying materials were stored on an encrypted hard drive and under locked storage. I provided interviewees with participation consent forms that outline the various measures I took to conceal their identity. I also

informed (both verbally and through the consent form) participants that they may choose to opt out of the study and not have any information shared with me added to the wider findings/reporting at any time. While I do not expect my participants to face any particular social, political, or institutional risks due to participating in my research, I took all necessary steps to ensure that I protect them from any potential harms related to my work.

I also collected other artifacts like curricula, students' assignments, and photos of everyday classroom happenings to corroborate ethnographic and interview data points. As you will see in subsequent chapters, I focused on how students engaged with specific Ethnic Studies assignments within the curriculum to understand the social and educational impact of this educational framework. Various artifacts I collected show how students were interacting with each other in familial ways and photos of assignments demonstrate how students performed academically. This data was also important to collect and feature because it gives deeper context to many of the ethnographic vignettes I provide here that detail the quotidian realities within Ethnic Studies classrooms. Additionally, these artifactual data points corroborate my assumptions about the impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum. I analyzed this data alongside my fieldwork and interview data to develop a multilayered analysis of the Ethnic Studies course.

In the next section, I discuss the theoretical framework I used to analyze the data. I parse out how each of the assignments featured in this project helps students build aspects of *Academic Familismo.* I developed this theory using a grounded theory approach often used in qualitative and ethnographic research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy,

2010). I saw *Academic Familismo* emerge from students as they worked, learned Ethnic studies materials, completed various assignments, and engaged with activities and peers in and out of the classroom. Notably, students mentioned during informal conversations over the course of my fieldwork and in-depth interviews how the course and activities helped them feel connected to their peers like a family as well as bolstered their academic skills and confidence. From these sentiments and my observations, I developed *Academic Familismo* to capture how students enhanced scholastic abilities and developed familial relationships with peers through engaging in Ethnic Studies course assignments and activities.

Theoretical Framework: Academic Familismo

Over the course of my field-work I saw students develop a unique academic familism or *Academic Familismo* that influenced their peer relationships and school engagement. While observing the Ethnic Studies classroom, youths seemed to work together on projects and assignments and support each other socially and emotionally in ways that were unique to this course. I asked interview participants about how they felt the Ethnic Studies course was different, unique, or distinct from other courses to which almost unanimously stated that the class felt like a *family.* Both my observations of students interacting and working together as a family and sentiments shared by interviewees that the Ethnic Studies course fostered familism amongst classmates, which led me to develop this notion of *Academic Familismo* following a grounded theory framework (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Grounded theory stems from the symbolic interactionist tradition of Sociology where researchers develop new theories about social

behaviors and the social world through inductive data collection and analysis. To develop a grounded theory, researchers engage in a study with an open mind taking in data and developing theory from the data set rather than testing theories through their scholastic inquiry. To accomplish this, researchers must fully immerse themselves in their fieldwork whether that be observations, interviews, or both to collect extensive data on a subject from a study population. Then, they analyze this data in an interactive process that includes multiple reviews of data points to find various themes that emerge from the data analysis process. This Data analysis process involves the development of codes to capture thematic elements found in the data set. This can be done during the fieldwork process or at the conclusion of the study to find in-depth and generalizable themes that can be used for theory development. This process follows a constructivist approach where qualitative researchers build new theories and theoretical frameworks from their study by finding patterns in the data that may be used to make scholarly inferences about the social world (Charmaz, 2006). I followed this process of theory development by collecting extensive data on the social realities of the Ethnic Studies course I studied. I spent considerable time in the classroom working with students, took ample fields notes and wrote voluminous reflections in my field journal, conducted numerous interviews with participants who were currently enrolled in the course and those who had recently completed it, and collected dozens of sample assignments and photographs all in an effort to understand social and educational impact of Ethnic Studies.

Through this in-depth work and analysis, I found students built familial relationships in this Ethnic Studies learning environment which also benefited them

academically. So, I developed the concept *Academic Familismo* to understand the familial-like bond students forged in their Ethnic Studies classes with their peers in class and the course overall. Students that developed *Academic Familismo* through completing the Ethnic Studies course feel more connected to their peers and welcomed and included in the class, which translates into increased school engagement and bolstered performance. Through taking the course, youth became heavily invested in each other's social and emotional well-being and supporting their peers' and the course's success overall. This includes completing coursework and activities with the utmost effort and creativity, being supportive of peers' social well-being, sharing their in-class discussions topics and learning with home families, and being heavily invested in participating in on-campus and after school activities that celebrated and advocated for Ethnic Studies. This observably higher level of school engagement supports previous research findings about the nature of Ethnic Studies; specifically how these courses, curricula, and pedagogies increase educational success across qualitative and quantifiable measures (Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

My study provides data that can confirm how students who take Ethnic Studies become more academically engaged, which also leads to better learning outcomes and school performance (Au, 2009; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Many of the students in Mr. Garcia's Ethnic Studies classes only regularly interacted with each other in this specific classroom, not having other classes together or had they met prior to taking this course. Mr. Garcia created a unique learning environment, utilizing Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogies, where he and the students regularly conversed and

worked together over the school year that fostered a unique family atmosphere in the classroom. I show how students developed this sense of *Academic Familismo* through analyses of three key assignments that show the evolution of this educational phenomenon. While there were many assignments over the school year that help students build this educational familiarity, I specifically saw this interpersonal dynamic emerge and evolve with Garcia's *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar,* the *World Cafe* in-class activity*,* and the *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project.* Each of these assignments fostered a different element of *Academic Familismo*:

Figure 1: Model of *Academic Familismo*

I provide an in-depth analysis of each assignment in the subsequent chapters where I show how students were immersed in rich learning environments and developed familial-like relationships through engaging with Ethnic Studies curriculum. This classroom environment and dynamic provided students with opportunities to make connections between peers regarding educational materials and personal backgrounds all of which increased students' engagement with the course overall. Increased in-class

student engagement has been found to bolster students' overall learning outcomes (Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, and Salovey, 2012). My data will demonstrate this *Academic Familismo* and the ways in which this learning environment engenders increased school engagement.

Chapter 3: Día de los Muertos *Building Familismo through Constructing Altares and Honoring our Departed Loved Ones*

In this chapter, I discuss a key element of the Ethnic Studies curriculum that fosters *Academic Familismo* amongst students. One of the first major assignments that students complete in the Ethnic Studies course is the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar Project* completed, which Mr. Garcia assigns every Fall. For the past three years, Garcia has used this assignment to engage his students' cultures, creativity, and academic skills through having the youth create a small altar that honors a deceased loved one or significant life figure. They also present their shoebox projects to their classmates as well as the wider campus community. He is able to tap into students' cultural backgrounds by way of having an assignment focused on an important cultural event. Likewise, this assignment draws from students' creative abilities in that they have to create this small painted, stylized, and ornamented altar that honors an important person in their lives. Last, students present their work to the class and throughout the campus builds their public speaking skills. This assignments' multidimensionality is very common of Ethnic Studies projects where students' culture is featured and academic skills are developed simultaneously (Dueñas, Lopez, Tolteka Cuahtin, Zavala, Sleeter, & Au, 2019; Sleeter and Zavala 2020).

Garcia's project is derived from Culturally Relevant Pedagogies (CRP), teaching strategies that utilize students' cultural traditions and practices to create dynamic learning opportunities (Au, 2009). CRP is teaching praxis[3] that infuses culturally and community

[3] Praxis: the art, science, theory, and practice of teaching coined by Pablo Freire (2018) in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* Teaching praxes is when educators draw from creative and theoretical

relevant history and knowledge from various groups represented in the classroom into the curriculum so that students can connect personally with the learning materials. Teachers using this pedagogy adapt their instructional methods and learning materials to include knowledge, history, and insights from students' home cultures and communities so that the youth can relate and feel intrinsically connected to the information they are learning. Scholars note that when students feel personally and intrinsically connected to the learning materials, they are more vested in education generally (Au et al., 2016; Conchas & Rodriguez, 2007; Rodríguez 2008). Emergent quantitative research on Ethnic Studies shows that CRP has real school impacts in that students who engage with these courses and pedagogies have increased learning and education achievement across test scores, overall GPA, and attendance rates (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017). CRP is a powerful educational tool that teachers like Mr. Garcia and other Ethnic Studies educators use to deliver meaningful content to students that enhances their understanding of their own culture and community, their academic skills, and bolsters youths' education achievement.

Garcia uses this assignment, following the CRP framework, to teach his students about Latin American and Mesoamerican culture and history while also participating in this holiday that is widely celebrated throughout Latin America and increasingly in the United States. Many of Garcia's students have Latin American ancestry and regularly celebrate Día de los Muertos with their families and communities. The school district

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principles to develop a teaching method or practice. After implementing the *praxis,* a teacher then revisits the teaching methodology to improve it by way and incorporating new knowledge from student engagement with the pedagogy and emergent research on education.

where I conducted my fieldwork is over 90% Chicanx/Latinx self-identified. This assignment draws from the youths' time honored familial cultural traditions. Día de los Muertos is celebrated on the second of November when families and individuals honor family members that have passed away. Latinx/Chicanx families and communities across the western hemisphere construct altars or an ornamental display every November that are dedicated to individuals who have died. This holiday has Indigenous roots where many tribal communities across Latin America honor and celebrate those that have died. Unlike Western societies, Indigenous people from Latin America treat death as a common phase of life, not to be feared or mourned but rather treated as a natural life process (Sherman, 2014).

Brief Background of Día de los Muertos

Día de los Muertos is a hybrid holiday having both Indigenous and Spanish colonial roots. Indigenous Mesoamericans, preconquest, built various kinds of altars and celebrated the passing of individuals regularly throughout the year; particularly, in November in accordance with the harvest season. Mesoamerican tribes adorned masks and engaged in specific tribal dances and rituals during this event, referred to as Danza Azteca, in accordance with the traditions of the event. When Spanish colonists came to the "new world" to expand existing empires and search for gold and other raw materials, they saw that Indigenous tribes had several cultural practices like these and hoped to co-opt them. This type of colonial co-optation and repurposing was common of European colonists as they either tried to violently conquer native communities or incorporate them into existing western cultural traditions (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014; Galeano, 1997) Spanish

colonists aligned specific Catholic religious holidays with the Indigenous celebrations of the dead like Día de los Muertos in order to curry favor with natives so that they might accept colonization (Sherman, 2014). Today at most Día de los Muertos celebrations, you will see Catholic religious figures and tribal dancers leading celebrations and crosses and Aztec art on altars.

Día de los Muertos for Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, and Chicanx/Latinx identified people has had a huge cultural resurgence since the civil rights movement until now. These communities have been hosting large celebrations for the Día de los Muertos including car shows, parades, concerts, and festivals since the civil rights era. As a part of the cultural reclamation process and new imagination around this holiday Chicanx/Latinx folks have been creating new ways to celebrate and think about this hybrid Indigenous and Catholic holiday. The huge movement to honor this holiday in communities and public spaces stems from the cultural revolution that happened during the civil rights era where Black and Brown communities sought to revitalize, honor, and celebrate cultural practices. Día de los Muertos celebrations are now wide-spread through community spaces within California and in other localities across the U.S. One important group leading the charge for reinvigorating Día de los Muertos were Chicanx and Latinx college students at various universities across the country. These students pushed simultaneously for the formation of Critical Ethnic Studies, alongside other students of color, and the hosting of specific cultural celebrations like Día de los Muertos and others at various colleges and universities (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017). Now these institutions and their student organizations like MEChA (Movemiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan)

host regular and quite large Día de los Muertos celebrations with campus altars, food, and other related cultural flare and activities that students and affiliated communities can enjoy.

Altars are a central feature of this event and have significant cultural value to the Día de los Muertos. These fixtures usually have photos or pictures of the deceased, artifacts significant to their life like work tools, clothes, jewelry, toys, and the like. Pictures and artifacts are an important feature of the altar. According to folklore, those depicted on the altar will have their spirits summoned to the edifice so that they can connect with their still living kin. Artifacts of people can be an addition or a substitute to a picture of the family member. Common artifacts include personal items like those previously mentioned. All these items both honor the departed and signal to the spirit of the deceased to return to the altar during the event. Sweet foods and drinks like sweet bread (Pan de Muerto/Bread of the Dead), hot chocolate mixed with flour and cinnamon (champurrado), and stylized sugar skulls (calaveras) are also common items on Día de los Muertos altars (Sherman, 2014). Latinx/Chicanx markets will bake various kinds of *pan de muerto/*bread of the dead and champurrado in honor of the holiday. These foods along with other foodstuffs favored by the departed loved ones are placed on the altar and consumed by family members on Día de los Muertos to symbolize a family meal with the deceased.

Additionally, families decorate the altar with brightly colored *papel picado* (perforated tissue paper cutout designs) to also beautify the altar and attract the spirits of their loved ones. Additionally, families place *cempasuchil* (Mexican marigolds) flowers

and petals on altars and on graves. The marigolds are important because they attract monarch butterflies, which have huge cultural significance for this event. According to Latin American indigenous folklore, monarchs are believed to carry the spirits of deceased family members. Monarchs move south in the Fall, around the time of Día de los Muertos, as a part of their seasonal migration pattern. The flowers attract these important and beautiful insects to the altar, which symbolizes the spirit of the deceased loved one returning to visit with their living family members (Sherman, 2014). Garcia's *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar Project* invites students to develop their own mini altar for the assignment, drawing on cultural and historic traditions, to teach students about Latin American culture while tapping into students' creative skills.

Developing Shoebox Altares

For the assignment, students assemble a small *Dia de los Muertos* altar out of a shoebox or other small box that can be transformed into a diorama. Students have to utilize the small space to develop a meaningful altar dedicated to a deceased loved one or important person from their life. The assignment requires students to construct these mini altars with all of the essential elements found in traditional altars I described above. (See Appendix 3 for assignment description and direction sheet provided by Mr. Garcia.) Students are given roughly two weeks to develop their mini altars with dedicated class time to complete the assignment. Garcia provides students with creative supplies like paint and brushes, markers, colored pencils, and other related materials as well as print out pictures of family members or other images and icons that they want to include in their altars.

Mr. Garcia facilitates several in-class work sessions where students can work on their altars, which involve the students developing, crafting, and painting their shoebox altar projects together while the class also reviews a Mesoamerican cultural history unit. During these sessions, youth are working alongside one another and sharing about their projects prior to their presentation of the project for a letter grade. I observed many students sharing about their altars' central figure during these work sessions, which was often a deceased family member. These exchanges allowed students to learn more about their peers' families and personal histories. Learning about their classmates' backgrounds helped to foster nascent *familismo* bonds as students connected over their relatable experiences. Again, Garcia teaches a learning unit on precolonial Mesoamerican history while students complete this assignment where students learn about the roots of Día de los Muertos and related Indigenous cultural traditions. Thus, students develop a more in-depth understanding of Mesoamerican cultural history and how their own cultural heritage and traditions connect to this Indigenous past while also building relationships with their classmates.

While students are working together, they discuss the elements of their projects and see the diorama emerge. Mr. Garcia and I, while I was completing my field work, walked around the classroom providing students with suggestions with feedback on their altares. Featured below are some photos (Figure 2) where we can see students working on their assignments in class

Figure 2: Images of Students working on Dia de los Muertos Shoebox Altar projects

Many of the major assignments that Mr. Garcia implemented throughout the course provided students with the opportunity to create projects and had them conversing about their families, cultures, and communities. This is very distinct from traditional coursework students complete where students converse solely about scholastic content. Conversely, this assignment, like Ethnic Studies curriculum, more broadly emphasizes conversations and projects focused on students' families, communities, and cultures.

When students share about themselves to their peers, they develop a deep appreciation for one another and a bond like a family (Acosta, 2013; Au, 2009; Stovall, 2006). These working sessions for this project, facilitated by Mr. Garcia, allowed students to build familial bonds early on in the academic year given that this project occurred midway through the fall quarter. This assignment particularly helped to forge the *familismo* element of the Ethnic Studies *Academic Familismo* phenomenon that emerges in these classes.

After completing the assignment, students presented their work to the class describing who is honored in the altar, why they chose the deceased person featured, and all of the elements within the altar; specifically, how elements within it relate to the person and their overall significance. Students spend a whole class period where they stand together outside in a circle, facing one another, and describe their altar one by one until all have shared about their project. Here we can see in Figure 3 what the circle presentation looks like,

Figure 3: Students Presenting Shoebox Altars in a Social Justice Circle

After students present their work in this communal way, students celebrate the holiday by having *pan de muerto* and socializing with one another. This element of the activity allows for further *familismo* bonding in that students can look at each other's work in more detail and discuss their projects.

Discussing our Altars Through Social Justice Circles

It's Friday, and I excitedly rush off to my field site to join Garcia and the students from the two periods of Ethnic Studies. Today, students are presenting their shoe box altars in both periods. Garcia is having the students present outside in the quad where there is more open space, areas and furniture for the students to place their altars, and the weather was favorable. I had long awaited seeing the students present their work, specifically because I worked with many of them on developing their projects and giving various kinds of constructive feedback.

I arrived on campus that morning, and went straight to Garcia's class. As I walked to the classroom, many of Garcia's students were heading to the presentation area with their projects in hand. As I walked by, many greeted me and asked if I was going to be there for their presentations. *Perez, are you gonna see the presentations? Are you presenting your shoe box with us? You gotta tell us which altar is your favorite.* I decided to participate in this activity more meaningfully by way of making my own altar like the other students. It was important for me to participate in these types of activities so that I could connect students both by experiencing assignments in the ways they did as well as sharing aspects of my life. As I described in my methodology section, I approached this research project from a standpoint of working alongside students so that I could

experience the class the same way they did. I either completed similar projects as the students did, provided feedback and support for them while they were completing their altars, or commented on their final submissions. Participating in the everyday class environment in this way was extremely helpful for making important connections with students while also positioning myself meaningfully within the class dynamic where students came to understand me while I drew important insights from them.

I arrived at the classroom, many students were bustling around with some chatting together and others putting finishing touches on their altars. As I entered the classroom, there was an aura of positivity and sense of accomplishment amongst the students. I noticed that students were very excited to present their projects to their peers. I checked in with a few students helping to bring materials to the quad area where the presentations were to be held. I walked over with the remaining students from the class to the quad where Garcia and other students were waiting. Students were beginning to form the presentation circle and placed their altars on a concrete bench, which served as an artificial display stand. As students placed their altars on the bench, I was moved at the diversity in the styling of each altar. While some of the students' projects had similar colors, no two projects were alike. See a sample of projects here in Figure 3

Figure 4: Examples of Shoebox Altars

The altars featured here have very distinct characteristics. We can see that they all feature variations of the *papel picado,* paper flowers, miniature food and drink offerings, and other decorations. Most students created their altars as homages to family members, but we can also see here in the projects featured above an altar dedicated to the famous Mexican artist Frida Kahlo. The level of detail and effort displayed in these pieces above is both a testament to the students work ethic and the power of the assignment as well as the Ethnic Studies curriculum. Ethnic Studies curriculum and assignments provide students with opportunities to explore aspects of their families and cultures through learning projects. What I observed in these assignments is that students put forth a lot of effort to create elaborate altars that went well beyond the expectations of Garcia expected for the assignment. What the students created here seemed to be more about paying honor to their family members or important people featured in their altar rather than just earning a grade. Rather than seeing very similar altars that an educator could evaluate within certain letter grade ranges (i.e. A/B/C/D/F), these diverse styled and exceptionally detailed submissions show a level of personal investment by students that exceeds normal scholastic expectations.

I was able to discern this level of personal investment in this assignment also from the way in which students talked about their assignments during the circle presentation. Garcia had the students present their work to each other following the social justice circle presentation format. As we collectively convened the circle with the students placing their altars in the center, a hush fell over the gathering as Garcia began the activity. Garcia thanked the students for their work and dedication on the assignment, stating that he was thoroughly impressed with their work.

Every year I do this project, students bring their A game to this assignment. You guys are no different. I appreciate what you all created here and thank you for sharing about your families for those who dedicated an altar to a family member.

Then students one-by-one shared about their projects,

I dedicate this project to my Tio, here you can see my pan dulce for the pan de muerto and a little cup for the champurrado. He was a rancher so I put toy farm animals out. I borrowed the toy animals from my little sister who helped me build the altar.

I dedicated my project to Freddy Mercury, lead singer of the famous band Queen. I chose this artist because Queen is mine and my sister's favorite band. We listen to Queen's music all the time and me and my sister bond over music. Our favorite song is Bohemian Rhapsody, which we gained a greater appreciation for after watching the Queen movie with my sister. Freddy helped me feel comfortable being different and expressing myself through art.

I did my altar for the famous Mexican musician Antonio Aguilar. I made a little stage for him and cut out paper and placed them in a row to look like fans in the audience. I chose to do my project on Aguilar because he's from the same part of Mexico my family is from. My family always listens to his music at our parties, we love dancing to him. Listening to Aguilar's music always reminds me of family and our happy times together.

I did my project for my Papa Tonio. He was my Grandfather and died in Mexico. My mom told me lots of stories about him. I wanted to do more research on him cause he died before I was born and he was very close to my mother who I'm really close with too. It was cool doing this project cause my little cousin in Mexico saw my project on my Papa Tonio. He also wanted to do an altar on Papa Tonio too. My family doesn't do altars for Día de los Muertos, but now I think we'll make an altar every year.

Students continued to share about their projects, some getting very emotional as they reminisced about their deceased loved ones and family members. Many students emoted while others consoled and cared for their peers showing deep compassion as the sharing continued. This type of emotionality seemed to stem directly from the nature of the assignment. Students sharing stories about their family members and honoring them in this way helped to humanize the assignment. Students were able to share about their families or important people in their lives and gain a deep understanding of their peers' families and familial relationships. Likewise, the emotionality displayed by students helped connect students through showing them as more than just students but rather deep individuals with meaningful connections to their families. I saw *familismo* begin to form in this particular assignment as many students identified with their peers' families as they shared their projects; for example, *my abuelo (grandfather) was an immigrant, we also eat these foods at our family parties,* or *your tio (uncle) reminds me of my cousin.* Students being able to identify with the curriculum and their peers helped to also this familial dynamic in that youth saw themselves in their classmates' families as they all came from very relatable backgrounds.

The sharing continues for the remainder of the period until all students are finished with their presentations. After lots of laughs and tears, Garcia thanked the students for their presentations. I felt a sense of accomplishment and gratitude amongst the students, who really put forth a great effort in completing their altars as well as presenting the projects. It was at the end of the presentation where you could really feel that students were developing a sense of community with each other. Garcia closed the

presentation with a solidarity clap. This clap was traditionally performed by Filipinx and Latinx immigrant farmworkers as a method to have workers gather at the end of the work day. This was repurposed by Chicanx/Latinx movement activists during the civil rights era to rally energy for demonstrations as well as close events and gatherings (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017). Today, many Ethnic Studies classes and people of color activists still utilize this clap as a method to show solidarity and pay honor to previous generations that struggled in the fields and for social justice (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). At the end of the clap, we all shouted *¡Si se Puede!* to officially close the activity. Then students went on to socialize for a while in the remaining class time, listen to music that Mr. Garcia provided, and reviewed their peers' altars with more detail.

After we completed the sharing activity and socializing, students moved their projects to the school's library for a week-long display. Garcia had arranged with the school's new principal to display the altars in the library in accordance with the holiday. He was also able to get other teachers from traditional academic disciplines to replicate this assignment for its cultural relevance to the students and to have more altars on display for the campus community to see. Students were very excited to display their work and curate the display in the library. Many students had volunteered to work the display during passing and lunch periods to support the work done in Ethnic Studies. Their investment in this event related to the course is another dimension of *Academic Familismo* where we see the students supporting course related on-campus activities like helping their family.

Analysis

The Día de los Muertos shoebox altar is very effective in many ways. First, it is an excellent opportunity for students to learn an important cultural tradition practiced throughout Latin America. Students learn the history of the cultural practice and artistic nuance of the altars. Second, the assignment provides students the opportunity to honor their families or significant inspirational people in their life that have passed on. This aspect of the assignment has a compounding effect of building connection amongst students. Specifically, as students develop their projects and present the completed works to their peers, classmates learn about each other's families and personal histories. Likewise, classmates learn and develop appreciation for their peers' creative and artistic styles. Last, Garcia draws on students' cultural knowledge and creativity to create an interconnected learning environment where they learn about history, culture, and their classroom community through a project-based assignment that features elements of their personal identity. Students often found this project to be one of their favorites to complete for the course. This assignment was particularly important for students in multiple ways in that they were able to share an important element of their family's story with the class and honor a family member with a class project. During my interviews, many participants spoke about how impactful constructing shoebox altars were for them individually and for their families. Here Cathy, a Latinx senior, talks about how important this project was for her because she was able to honor her aunt and strengthen her relationship with her cousin,

> Cathy: I think the one that stood out to me was the one for the Día de los Muertos project. Because you really had to, you took time to actually find a person you wanted to do it on. And then you would, because some people did on artists. I specifically did it on my aunt. But you'll get to, I didn't really know a lot about my aunt so you really, because she died when I was younger. So, I didn't really, I don't remember a lot. But people who do it on artists, they get to learn more about how like what they did, or what their favorite food was. And you get to basically represent them.
>
> Frank: How did it feel doing a project about your aunt? Like, for an actual grade, you know?
>
> Cathy: Yeah. I actually felt proud of it because especially for my cousin it meant a lot to her that I was doing a project on her mom. And especially because she died of breast cancer. So, it meant a lot to her.

Similarly, Romina, a Chicanx junior, talked about how her project helped to revive cultural practices with her home families as well as strengthen her bond with her culture and an older sister.

> Romina: I also shared with my sister the project where we had to make …
>
> Frank: The shoe box altars?
>
> Romina: Yeah, the altars. She's older than me. She's like 24. And she thought it was really nice. My family isn't as religious. They are religious but they don't participate in a lot of the altars or [religious] events like that. But when I showed my sister the altar I made for my [younger deceased] sister, she got an interest of it and she was like, oh, like what is that for and stuff? I explained it to her, how it's about respect and how you put stuff that they like so that they could be able to cross things like that…. So, I told her that and she was like actually interested in making an altar now, like an actual altar now, just like a shoe box altar, you know? So, in a way the class was kind of impacting my culture, making me understand my culture and naturally like start doing altars, start celebrating specific days because I know the history now and I know what it is.

Sam, a Latinx sophomore, similarly mentioned how he was able to honor a deceased cousin through his shoebox altar and shared his project with the sibling of this departed

family member. The still living cousin, sibling to the deceased, was extremely moved by Sam's project.

> Frank: What were some of the assignments that have stood out to you so far?
>
> Sam: One that I liked was the shoe box [altars] of our family members because I had recently had lost a cousin who had died and he was very young and so I wanted something to remember him... when Mr. Garcia talked about the shoe box altar project and that you can do it on a family member, that really got me to think of ideas and how I can remember my cousin forever. Give him a good remembrance.
>
> Frank: Did you tell your family that you focused your shoebox on your cousin?
>
> Sam: I did! I had told my cousin, because my other cousin who was his brother, he was really sad he had died. They were very close and when I had finished my shoe box project, I showed him and he started crying and he told me, "Right now he's [my brother, your cousin] probably smiling and happy for what you did for him."

My conversation with Rosa (a Chicanx senior) especially demonstrates how powerful this assignment is. She shared with me that her project was dedicated to her later grandfather whom she had never met but learned about through stories from her mother. After completing the project, she shared her work with her mother and other family members both in the U.S. and Mexico. First, Rosa mentioned that the project brought her and her mother closer together. Also, Rosa's family members were very impressed with her project and shared memorable stories about her grandfather, rekindling some family bonding over memories. Additionally, Rosa's younger family members were so moved by her project that they wanted to do their own.

> Frank: What was significant about doing some of the class projects? Why did they really speak to you?

Rosa: The Día de los Muertos! I did my on my grandpa cause I never met him. But when it came to my Papa Tonyo, I grew up with my mom's stories and everything she ever told me. So, I felt like I knew him even though I wasn't even thought of. My mom was 17 when he died, and she didn't have me until she was 29. So just growing up, seeing his picture, seeing the stories, I felt like even though I didn't meet him physically, I felt like I have some connection with my grandpa...I feel like as well with the Día de los Muertos project, it got me closer to my mom because she was able to talk about her dad more and able to honor him because we never celebrated Día de los Muertos. She was more like, "I'd rather just leave it to the side and know they're dead and not really talk about it." I had told my mom, I was like, "I don't know what to do." I was like, "I'm just going to do grandpa but only if you're okay with it." When I did it, she sent it to her sisters in Mexico. She sent them a picture. My aunt posted a picture of it on her Facebook, my altar. My grandma saw it. My three uncles who rarely talked to my mom, they saw it and they're like, "Wow. That's beautiful. No one has ever done that for our dad." You know?

Frank: That's really cool. So, what were some things that your mom said just about you doing it? How did she react to just having her dad being featured in that way?

Rosa: She cried. She cried a lot. At the same time, my nephew was doing a little project as well for his school, but he's younger. He's in elementary school. He asked his mom who was my cousin. She was like, "I want to do altar on my Papa Tonyo." That's his great grandfather. My cousin, had posted about it saying like, "Wow, I can't believe. My grandpa has touched this many life even though he's not even alive himself." My mom, she posted the picture of the altar that we were together on. She posted in the comments and she was like, "I'm going through the same thing. My daughter had a project as well. It brought back so many memories and it just brought back everything and it felt like my dad was here."

Many students that I interviewed, those currently enrolled in the class and others who already completed the course, shared similar sentiments about the shoebox altar project and its overall importance for building family relationships amongst the students. Many students were emotionally invested in their assignments and felt it was a great honor to celebrate a deceased loved one in this way. This type of emotional connection to the assignment motivated many to do well so that they could pay tribute to both their family and the culture they learned more about through the assignment.

The assignment was so successful that many other teachers had their students participate in the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* assignment. Teachers from English/Language Arts, AVID, Visual Arts, and even Geography disciplines participated in the assignment, inspired by Mr. Garcia's curriculum and his students' submissions from previous years. Mr. Garcia coordinated with these other teachers to have all the students display their work in the school's library around the *Día de los Muertos* holiday. Other teachers who support the work Mr. Garcia is doing in his Ethnic Studies class and with the overwhelming Latinx/Chicanx/youth of color student population, also had their students participate in the showcasing of the shoebox altar submissions by way of having them come to the library, view all the mini altars, and write reflective papers about what they saw. Here in Figure 5 we can see what the library looked like, with a long snaking trail of different shoebox altars on the left and numerous students looking over the various projects for their own assignments and enjoyment on the right.

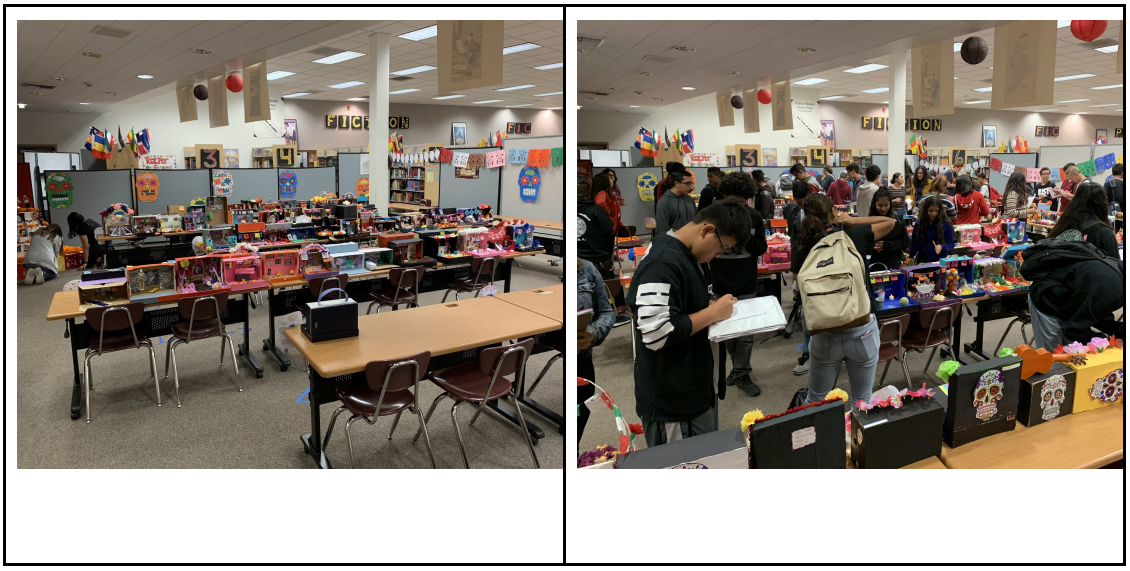

Figure 5: Library presentation of campus-wide Dia de los Muertos Shoebox Altar projects

Figure 5 showcases multiple examples of the different types of project with varying levels of detail and artistry. Also, you can see how students from the class further decorated the library to both honor the cultural elements of the holiday while also making the student submission accessible like a gallery walk. Above we see numerous students that are examining the various altars and enjoying the related festivities associated with the gallery walk. Garcia requested that the library feature the students' work for several days over in the beginning of November, giving the wider student body and other classes, faculty, and staff opportunities to see the work over several days. In having this broad display of the various projects in the library, students' culture and personal identity are celebrated and made integral to campus life and learning. By extending the project to other classes and the larger IE High community, He and the students that participated in the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* activity created a campus-wide celebration of Latinx/Chicanx, Mesoamerican, and Latin American culture. I asked many students and faculty members informally to give their thoughts about the different projects after they viewed the wider display. Many students and staff used words like *cool*, *interesting*, *powerful,* and *creative* to describe the various mini altars. It was clearly evident that youth and adults alike on campus were thoroughly impressed with the submissions.

Conclusion

My analysis of this activity shows how Ethnic Studies curriculum can foster youths' potential to form meaningful interpersonal relationships and learning. First, this assignment builds family and community amongst the students, which can be distilled by statements and photos featured above. My participant observation with assignment

related activities helped me better understand students' families and backgrounds while also seeing how a project centered on youths' backgrounds can build important interpersonal relationships between them. Indeed, students started forming their *familismo* through engaging in this work when they featured and presented their families and communities to their classmates through this project. Youth were able to understand each other more deeply through hearing about peers' family stories and witnessing their shared emotions (remembrance, condolence, and empathy). This project also strengthened participants' relationships with their home families when they shared the inspirations for the altar and the finished project. Students felt empowered and humbled to do a project centered on their lost family members and these altars brought joy to their families.

We can also see the broader impact of Ethnic Studies and its curriculum through the projects and photos of the wider campus community viewing the altars in the IE High library that I feature in this chapter. Shoebox altar projects from Garcia's class as well as other participating classes show how this education framework taps into students' creative skill sets while also honoring their families and communities. Again, Ethnic Studies, both as an education reform movement and framework, incorporates information, his/herstories, and insights from students' and/or marginalized communities. Incorporating this information into the curriculum addresses a pervasive and persistent issue in education; namely, the lack of diversity in and misrepresentation of BIPOC of the curriculum. As mentioned previously, mainstream public K-12 curriculum solely focuses on U.S. Anglo-European perspectives and histories (Loewen, 2008). Scholars

argue that narrow curricular focus causes BIPOC Students and those from other non-dominant communities to disconnect with education and is one of the major factor that has led to our current academic achievement gap (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Rodríguez, 2008; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Garcia's *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* project along with the related Mesoamerican learning unit he covers through facilitating this assignment infuses a diverse community perspectives and histories previously absent in mainstream education.

Ethnic Studies and related assignments like those I analyze through this project can be seen as a corrective to the glaring gap in the traditional public K-12 curriculum. This educational praxis can be used to meaningfully engage diverse students and bolster their educational outcomes. Students' emergent *familismo*, as a part of *Academic Familismo,* formed by engaging with Ethnic Studies is particularly noteworthy because it shows how this learning framework and environment can forge and enhance relationships with peers and family members. These relationships also impact students' academic engagement in that they feel more generally connected to school. When students feel more connected to school they perform better on all learning measures and standardized tests (Conchas & Rodriguez, 2007; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, and Salovey, 2012). We can see in my analysis that students feel more connected to their peers and learning through engaging with this Ethnic Studies project. Quantitative research on Ethnic Studies student performance confirms that students feel more connected to school and have better learning outcomes (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017). I explore this more in the subsequent chapters where we see how other Ethnic Studies assignments

fosters dimensions of *academic familismo* and bolster educational engagement, which I ultimately argue can deal with the historic achievement gap plaguing our public schools.

Chapter 4: Working Together with World Cafe *Building the Academic of Academic Familismo through Collaborative Ethnic Studies Activities*

In this chapter, I review the next link in the formation of *Academic Familismo, World Cafe*. I describe and analyze Garcia's *World Cafe* assignment, an activity that involves students reading important works by culturally relevant authors and responding to related questions regarding their readings and contemporary social issues. I show in my analysis of student responses, photos of their interactions, and statements about the activity and class how *World Cafe* builds important students' familial relationships that embody *academic familismo*. The World Cafe is a learning strategy commonly used in AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination[4]) courses to help students build interpersonal communication and critical thinking skills. I provide more details about the World Cafe in Appendix 3. The activity follows a cafe-like model where students come into the classroom, sit together in randomized groups, and work through various questions at stations that engage some concept or idea from the assigned readings. The activity is geared to be more social and dialogical where participants chat at specific areas, discussing ideas and questions regarding specific topics, as if they were at a cafe having a casual conversation. World Cafe is highly interactive and allows students to think about important questions connected to both courses assigned readings and outside society while also allowing them to hear and read insights from their peers. See Appendix

[4] AVID is a "detracking program which places students in a rigorous course of study which meets college entrance requirements and provides support in both cognitive and affective domains. Its mission statement emphasizes reducing the achievement gap by preparing students for college readiness, focusing on strategies related to writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading (WICOR), and by providing teacher advocacy and sponsorship. Its selection criteria traditionally focus on students in the "academic middle" who are members of a population historically underserved at 4-year colleges" (Pugh Jr & Tschannen-Moran, 2016, p. 142)

3 for a breakdown of the assignment including ways Mr. Garcia has adapted the activity for his Ethnic Studies course.

Mr. Garcia used this classroom learning activity regularly throughout the year to conclude a learning unit (Chicanx/Latinx history, culture, identity, social justice struggles) and prepare students for major assignments like exams and short essay papers that follow the California state education standards for G classified college prep elective courses. Garcia's class aligns with A-G requirements for UC or CSU readiness, the course fulfills the G requirement for college preparatory electives. Many Ethnic Studies courses across California and in many other localities are classified college preparatory or have been blended with other required courses such as Chicano Literature, U.S. History of Race and Class, and Statistics for Social Justice. These classes indeed prepare students for higher education in that they help to develop their critical thinking, multicultural sensitivity and awareness, interpersonal communication, group work, problem solving, analytical thinking and writing, and public speaking (Au, 2009; Cabrera et al., 2014; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Mr. Garcia's Ethnic Studies World Cafe assignment embodies pedagogical tenets of the original World Cafe activity and builds from it by having the students analyze readings by authors from their community using *culturally relevant* materials (Gay, 2018). World Cafe activities are a very effective learning method because students are connecting with their peers and the materials on multiple levels, socially, familially, and intellectually. This particular activity embodies the academic aspect of *Academic Familismo* in that students have academic/intellectual conversations in familial ways about issues facing their families and communities for the

purpose of meeting learning standards and course objectives. Essentially, students are engaging with academic concepts and materials directly tied to their cultural and familial histories/realities thereby fostering the *academic* of *Academic Familismo.*

Below, I share a detailed observation of a *World Cafe* activity from one of Mr. Garcia's Ethnic Studies class periods. In this vignette, we see how Garcia conducts the class as well as how students engage with the activity. I actively participated in this activity by helping with set-up and implementation of the *World Cafe.* Details that I provide in this next section followed by my analysis of the activity later in the chapter show how this assignment builds students' academic skills or the *academic* of *Academic Familismo.*

Working with World Café

The first time I experienced the *World Cafe Activity* was late fall between the fall and winter breaks in early December. Students had a couple months to get to know each other at this point but the general atmosphere of the class was one of "settling in" where the classroom culture was still being forged. I suspected that this learning activity would help students' bond as they would be placed in randomized groups where they would have to interact with new faces. This activity where students have to share thoughts and ideas about readings that showcase stories from their cultures and communities should give them fertile ground to connect interpersonally. Likewise, students will have to work together to respond to questions posed by Mr. Garcia to complete this assignment thereby encouraging them to share their own ideas and thoughts about the assigned readings. This sharing of thoughts and ideas about culturally relevant learning materials, stories that

reflect their own personal narratives, should foster conversations where students develop a deeper understanding of their cultural and peers' backgrounds.

I arrived at Mr. Garcia's 5th period class and was excited to see how the students engaged with this type of work. Again, I observed multiple sections of this course over the academic year to get a better sense of the impact this course has on students. Personally, I never participated in this type in a World Cafe in my early or higher education career. I was curious to see how students would respond to questions and discuss specific topics like language including speaking Spanish, English, and Spanglish or a hybrid of these two languages as well as what language means to youths' cultural identity. Students were also assigned readings on subjects like colorism and pigmentocracy, how skin coloring on a light to dark spectrum can impact the way society views Chicanx/Latinx individuals as well as how these folks see themselves. Additionally, they were required to review other writings that discussed issues with immigration and the struggles immigrant communities face and related forms of discrimination that Chicanx/Latinx groups and communities of color experience in the U.S. for this activity. Mr. Garcia assigned the *World Cafe* activity to enhance their understanding of the cultural identity unit. This unit explored Chicanx/Latinx and students' cultural and linguistic identity, specifically how authors of color discuss how they wrestle aspects of their own identity. These readings and this assignment pushed students to reflect on what they consider to be their cultural identity, who has shaped their identity, and how their culture and identity fit within the culture of U.S. society. Garcia had the students review the epic poem "Letter to the Young White Man" by Lorna Dee

Cervantes (1986), “La Güera” by Cherrie Moraga (2015), excerpts from “Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez” by Richard Rodriguez (2004), and chapters from “Borderlands: La Frontera” by Gloria Anzaldua (2012). These readings feature different socially positioned Chicanx/Latinx authors’ struggles with identifying as Chicanx/Latinx, educated, working class, students, dark or light skinned people of color, Spanish speaking bilingual and somewhat fluent people from a Latin America family, and individuals that express gender and sexuality in heteronormative and queer ways. These published works are essential readings for college level Chicano Studies courses, a vein of the Ethnic Studies main four intellectual strands (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017; Bernal, Alejandra Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Blackwell, 2016). Because Mr. Garcia shared the structure of the assignment and the format of the class with me ahead of time, I was curious to see how students would respond to these particular readings and associated critical thinking questions.

As class began and students were getting settled into their seats, I greeted many of the students that I was building relationships with. Despite the fact that I told the students they could call me Frank (because I was a researcher, not a teacher), many still referred to me as Mr. Perez. So, I was always excited to connect with a student by referring to them by their first name, seeing that spark of connection between the student and researcher, and getting “hi, Mr. Perez it's great to see you” or “hey Perez, how are you doing? How's your daughter? Getting bigger?!” when I walked into the classroom. I was very diligent in conducting field work in this way where I was a chameleon, someone that the campus community saw as both researcher and a member of IE high’s everyday life. After a few

salutations to these familiar faces, Garcia approached the front of the room signaling to me to help set up the assignment as he was about to start the activity with the students. Garcia started by calling off students' names to complete the attendance roll call while I took my field journal out ready to take notes while students engaged in the activity. Garcia asked me the prior day to help him set out large easels around the classroom that the students used for the assignment. Each easel has a large piece of butcher paper with a smaller piece of paper with both affixed to the top center of the board. As I oriented the stands around the room, Garcia began describing the assignment and gave the students directions regarding how to complete the assignment. The students have been pre-assigned to groups, three students to a group, for a total of eight groups per class-Garcia has two sections of Chicanx Studies that I observed for this project. This is what I saw during the fifth period class.

Ok guys, today we're going to do our first World Cafe. I'm excited to have you do this activity cause we get a chance to really get into the cultural identity unit. We've been covering Cervantes, Moraga, Rodriguez, and Anzaldua the past couple weeks and I asked you to review these readings again before class today. You also had access to questions for the activity and who is in your group, so we should be ready to go today. Again, we're going over a lot of questions today in this activity so you have to be focused and working if we are to complete this activity today. After I finish directions, I want you to get together with your groups so I can elect a scribe that will be the person writing for each of the groups. When the timer begins, you'll have 5 minutes to work through the question with your group members and respond. Your responses can be a follow up question, a statement/answer, and/or a visual like a drawing. You had a chance to review the questions before class, so share your responses with your groupmates and then develop a collective answer to each of the prompts. As you can see [pointing around the room], stations are already set up thanks to Mr. Perez. You will start at the station that corresponds with your group number. Once you hear the timer alert, move on to the next in an ascending order; so, if you're group 1 go to 2, 5 go to 6, and 9 go to 10. After we're done today, I'll collect the posters with your responses so that we can review them the next day for the harvest portion of the activity. Tomorrow we will have a gallery walk to review everyone's responses and reflect on the assignment in a social justice circle like we did with the Día de los Muertos and Latinx History Month Bio Project. I will discuss

what we're doing tomorrow before you leave today. Oh! 3rd period did mostly statement responses as you can see here up front [Garcia points to a poster strategically placed at the front of the room for the class to see]. I want to see some more diverse responses from you all, think about posing other questions related to the prompts or making some drawings that can serve as responses to these questions. Any questions [pointing at and making eye contact with students around the room].

Student: How much time do we have?

Garcia: five minutes per stations

Another student: what do we write with?

Garcia: There's markers here, I'll give a different color to each group so we know who is who from the responses.

We have to get started, Mr. Perez and I can answer other questions that you have as you work on the assignment. Please get with your groups so I can elect a scribe and give you markers.

[Students move towards their stations. Garcia and I split the colored markers and start passing these out to each of the groups.]

Garcia: Ok, you now have your marker. The student with the darkest shoe color is going to be the scribe. This person is responsible for writing/drawing what the group discusses. Time starts……..Now!

I return to my seat to get my field journal while students start working on the activity. As Garcia and I start to move about the classroom to observe the students as they are conversing about the questions. We chat for a second about our hopes for the assignment. He is particularly interested in how students will discuss and write about their biculturalism (Chicanx/Latinx and American) and bilingualism (Spanish/English). I share with Garcia that I'm interested in how students will produce visuals about the ways in which students will talk about how society and family influence the way they think about Spanish speaking as something that should be honored or can be viewed as un-American. The day prior to the assignment, Garcia and I conversed about potential

outcomes of this assignment. We were both curious how students would create visuals responses to questions posed at each activity station, especially given how creative students had been on other assignments. Also, we were curious if this larger activity, smaller group work and larger class reflection, would influence students' peer to peer relationships and future student engagement. Garcia had the students discussing and sharing with one another at the outset of the class, which seemed to foster some interesting bonds between the students. I was starting to see a pattern between the curriculum and learning environment where students seemed to be developing deep bonds with their peers in the lead up to this activity. Garcia and I both thought that this activity would further bolster these sprouting connections as students shared and reflected on thoughts and ideas about their cultural and linguistic identity.

I then walked about the room, taking some notes as I started seeing students talk and begin to write things down on their first activity station stop. Some groups were busy talking away, debating the reading that Mr. Garcia derived the question from while others chatted about the best way to answer the question. At first, I kept a watchful eye on students and a bit of distance so that they could engage with the activity on their own. I made note of their conversations as I could pick them up, *Anzaldua was interesting, I never knew what it meant to be an educated queer Chicana till I read her work. I feel like Ricky Rodriguez sometimes like I try to be authentically Mexican at home but my family thinks I'm a Pocho*[5]*. We should ask a question like; what ways do schools keep us from*

[5] Pocho: a Chicanx/Latinx individual that is seen by family, peers, and community members as whitewashed/Americanized in a way that is negative or unauthentic.

speaking Spanish or being prideful of our heritage? Students began writing and drawing vigorously as Garcia gave them a two-minute warning that they needed to finish and move on to the next station. One particular group caught my eye as the group's scribe drew a visual response to the question posed. Figure 6 shows a sample *World Cafe* question and some sample student responses to the activity.

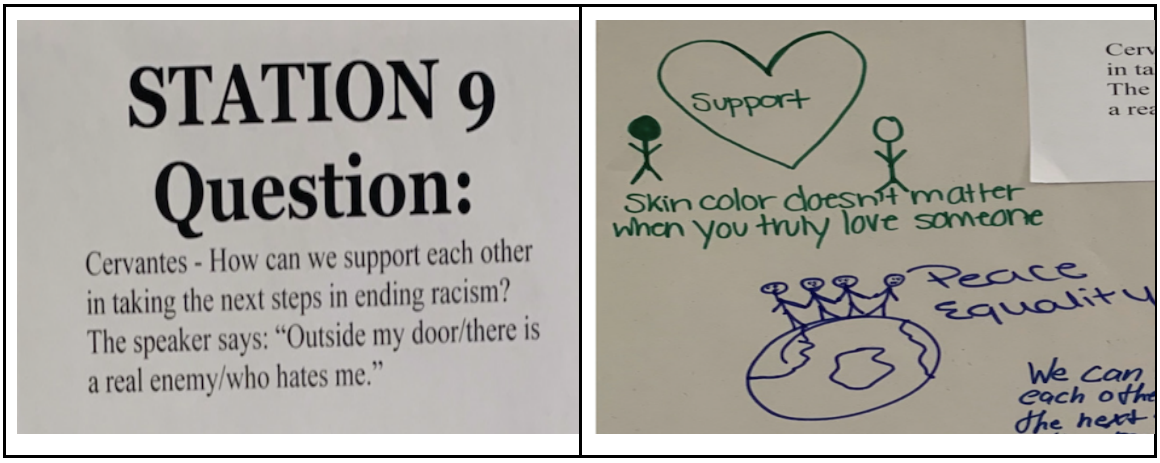

Figure 6: Examples of a *World Café* question and student responses

These quick responses show how students can respond with text and visuals that build off what peers also shared during the activity. Students easily built off each other's work, seeing the question, reviewing previous groups responses, and developing their own unique commentary that was, in this case, a picture. This is a great representation of both academic and creative growth stemming from this assignment, dimensions of *Academic Familismo,* that I regularly saw develop in the class. Here, collaborative work within a group and across groups helped students think both analytically and quickly to understand issues with racism in our society and ways to challenge this. *World Cafe* developed familism along with analytical academic skills by having students talk about their understanding of culturally relevant texts that connected directly to youths' family

and community backgrounds. As students worked through the questions embedded in this assignment, they would share with each other about their families' and personal experiences. This dialogue between students about the assignment and course materials' connection to their individual backgrounds created the fertile ground where they saw themselves in the realities and stories of their peers. They in fact saw themselves as a family as they saw the connections between their own and their peers' family's stories and histories fleshed out in this assignment. Unlike conventional group work, *World Cafe* using Ethnic Studies and CRP frameworks encourages these dialogues that connect students in familial ways while completing assignments. Thus, this assignment had students working together like a *family* helped the students achieve academically by way of completing the assignment, connecting to one another familially, and adding to the knowledge production actively happening in the class.

> Ana: We started talking because of the projects and he will also put his into groups, that is how we started knowing each other and we all became a big family.
>
> Olivia: Here you all just become a family that you guys all will know each other. Even if you don't like that person, you will end up talking to them at some point...But then it connects to your family and you're like, "Wow, my family actually did that too." They struggled, they died over that. And so, it helps you understand what their struggles were.

As I walked around the classroom, a bustling space with students chatting, I started to hear how students considered the relationship between other questions and other students' responses. I asked some of the groups what they thought regarding how their peers responded to questions. Some mention *the pictures are cool, our group should've drawn something*, *I think this group made a good point about what it means to*

live on the border, or they asked me *how do students in your university classes respond to these questions*? I banter with one group or another as the period goes on. We talk more about the questions and the readings. I share with the students that they are doing important college level work, that I assign these types of activities to my university students. The students' eyes widen as they ask me, *you think we can make it at the university Perez?* I always acknowledge them and let them know that Garcia and I constantly share how capable they are both academically and personally for higher education and how important it is for them to get their college degrees. Students then share with me and amongst themselves what they want to study/major in and what they hope their careers will be. *I think I want to be a teacher! I'd like to be an Ethnic Studies teacher like Mr. Garcia. I want to take more classes like Chicano Studies in college. I want to go to UCR so I can be Mr. Perez's student one day. Maybe I can be a Professor like Perez!* These exchanges during class are another dimension of how the class fosters and bolsters familial connectivity with the students where they discuss future plans for education and careers.

I move around the room more seeing the answer sheets fill up with responses, questions, and visuals. Students continue to discuss and share their insights about the readings and continue with their socializing. The period is coming to an end both students and Mr. Garcia seemed impressed with the outcome of the activity overall. I, as well, was surprised with the way students had responded to the questions and engaged in the activity. Many students noted that they enjoy the activity and the readings. They particularly connected over the Chicana authors' work about cultural, gender, class, race,

and gender identity. Many students saw themselves in the stories of struggle these women of color share about. *I am the light skinned one in my family so I can relate to the story of La Guera. For me, I speak up to my family sometimes about women's and LGBT+ issues but I get dismissed by family members like Anzaldua. I wonder what it will take to end racism? I hear what Cervantez is saying, but how do we actually solve discrimination?* As I will show in my analysis of one of the response sheets below, this activity yields profound insights from students. I argue that it is these exchanges between students facilitated through interactive assignments where they discuss culturally relevant materials fosters the academic insight and benefits of *Academic Familismo* while also enhancing familial connections youths have been forging since participating in the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* project I discussed in the previous chapter.

Analysis

Mr. Garcia's class and the Ethnic Studies pedagogy, including the assignments described in this chapter, seemed to facilitate this type of rich connection amongst the students that embody *Academic Familismo*. Rick, a former student of the Ethnic Studies course, described the dynamic of the course best,

> Rick: Math, English courses, obviously you have friends but you don't connect as much with them. You don't know much about them. You don't know much about them outside of class where you just know who they are and what their names are and you just interact with them. Here in Chicano Studies, it's like they're your brothers, they're closer to you. They're not afraid to talk to you. They share important information with you or their personal information. Learn what they went through, their struggles, everything. And it somehow relates to you in a way, because you're from similar backgrounds and similar situations...That was very significant actually because many people...they feel like they don't belong. So, if we can actually build a family, they feel they matter, they feel they belong

somewhere and they have a reason to live and move on and achieve their goals

Students regularly shared that this type of learning environment helped them come together in ways that were unique to the course. Assignments that Mr. Garcia used, like the *World Cafe,* paired with readings from authors of color and other culturally relevant sources presented opportunities for students to discuss concepts and ideas that connected them directly with course materials and to each other interpersonally. More importantly, this assignment specifically pushes students to apply ideas, concepts, and theories presented in the readings to the real world and directly relatable social issues. While I observed students over the year completing this activity, many of them were creating thoughtful responses to questions posed by Mr. Garcia and their peers. Students were also able to build meaningful academic/interpersonal relationships with their classmates while completing culturally relevant coursework. This, again, speaks to that *Academic Familismo* in that students are developing their academic skills and identity along with familial relationships with peers.

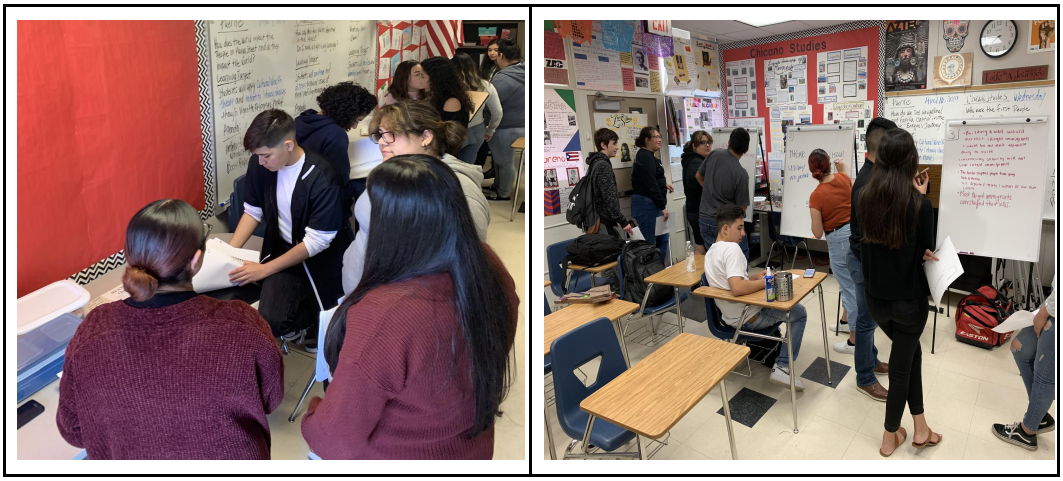

Figure 7: Students working on *World Café* activity

Figure 7 show some examples of the students working together on one of the iterations of the *World Cafe*. While this may just seem like simple group work, students I interviewed mentioned specifically that engaging in this type of assignment helped them come together as a family. Gina, a Chicana senior from the 5th period class, mentioned specifically that the *World Cafe* assignment helped her bond with her peers,

> Frank: How has it been like getting to know people? Cause I, you said you were a little bit shy before, but it seems like you're pretty social in this class, right?
>
> Gina: Hm-hmm (affirmative) I think it wasn't, there wasn't one thing I guess that really helped me bond. I think it was more like interacting. You know when we would have to do the World Cafes.
>
> Frank: Yeah.
>
> Gina: As much as I felt like it was interesting work and I always felt like it was a lot of work when I was in a group that I didn't know before. It helped me walk around and talk to different people…

As students shared their thoughts and feelings about assigned readings, they also had deep conversations about life and family while working and laughing together. Statements by Rick and Gina, students from two different cohorts of the course, demonstrate how Ethnic Studies and these assignments build family and community within the course. We can also see here with my analysis how these courses developed students' academic identities, skills, and confidence while also affirming youths' perspectives and experiences. Figure 8 show examples of a completed sheet from a World Cafe activity as well as all the completed assignments from this unit.

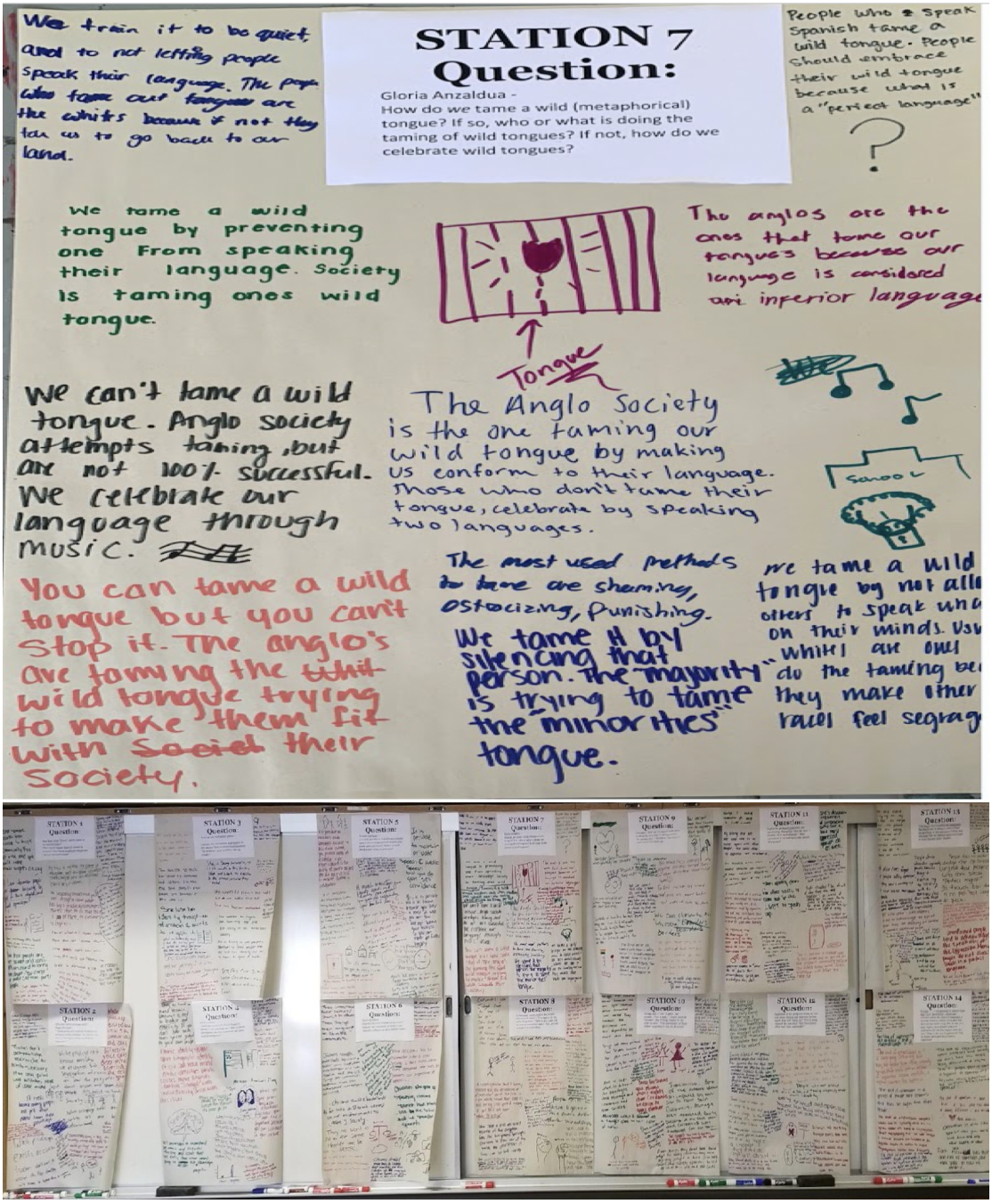

Figure 8: Examples of complete *World Café* assignment sheets

In the single assignment sheet featured above we see a small insert with a question posed by Mr. Garcia attached to a larger piece of butcher paper. Garcia presents a question from Gloria Anzaldua's famous book *Borderlands: La Frontera* (2012) that discusses culture

and the struggles of people of color and other marginalized groups, specifically Latinx/Chicanx, Working Class, Women, immigrants, and LGBT+ groups face in U.S. society. The reference within the question “how to tame a wild tongue” or how Mr. Garcia presents it, how *do we tame a wild (metaphorical) tongue? If so, who or what is doing the taming? If not, how do we celebrate wild tongues?* This reading excerpt relates to how Anzaldua (2012) describes in her parable “How to Tame a Wild Tongue" how she struggled with speaking Spanish and English, as an intellectual and working-class woman, and existing within and across various communities and cultures. Likewise, she shares how her various cultural groups and U.S. and Western society attempts to control speech by both forcing her to speak either Spanish or English and disempowering her ability to talk back to systems of power that oppress the various marginalized groups with whom she identifies. This series of compounding questions encourages students to think analytically about the author's meaning and the wider implications of what it means to control the way in which we speak in various contexts.

In the wider area of the butcher paper, you can see where students responded with different markers, each of the groups having their own distinct color. You see various kinds of responses like students posing follow-up questions, drawing visual responses, and presenting direct statements. Some of the responses discuss how the dominant group in society (named multiple times here as *Anglo* society) is attempting to control speech; specifically, the speech of the students’ communities or communities of color. This assignment draws on students’ ability to name racial/racist power relations within a society, depict themes from the readings and course materials visually, and extend ideas

from activity into real world contexts. What we can distill from this assignment example is that students are able to connect with their peers in familial like ways, and name specifically white supremacy and dominance. Additionally, we can see them working together to answer the question posed by Mr. Garcia about culturally relevant readings. Last, we can see how the responses connect together, build off one another, or pose related questions that extend the author's meaning beyond the original context of the course material. Clearly, this project is able to draw from students' academic skills and cultural knowledge while also building students' familial bonds with their classmates thereby fostering *Academic Familismo.*

Conclusion

Photos, assignment examples, quotes from students, and my vignette provided here again show how this class and Ethnic Studies more broadly foster *Academic Familismo* within students. This assignment particularly embodies the *academic* aspect of this concept where you can see students engaging with course materials, responding to questions, while also building their familial connections with their classmates. The level of effort in responses shown in the assignment's samples featured above show how this class, through *Academic Familismo*, enhances student engagement. This increased school engagement has been shown to increase students' overall academic performance and success. "Engaged students are attentive and participate in class discussions, exert effort in class activities, and exhibit interest and motivation to learn...Effective learning is therefore contingent upon the extent to which students are engaged in classroom learning activities" (Reyes et al., 2012, page 1). Previous research suggests that students will

consistently do better in classroom and in school overall when they have access to learning materials and complete assignments that connect their personal lives and culture (Au 2009; Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Gay, 2018; Pérez, 2019). This is particularly true for students of color who historically have not had access to culturally relevant materials like those I analyze for this project (Dueñas et al., 2019; Loewen, 2008; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Zavala, 2018). As we saw with the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* project, students invest heavily in these types of assignments because the curriculum draws information and insights from youths' backgrounds. *World Cafe* allowed students to connect with readings and authors that reflected their experiences as well as answer questions that considered struggles and issues youths face in their communities. The diverse, creative, and detailed responses to questions that can be seen in the samples of response sheets featured above show how *World Cafe* infused with Ethnic Studies materials foster *Academic Familismo* through developing students' critical and analytical thinking skills as well as their sense of familial community within the classroom. Photos and participant statements featured above substantiate the power of this activity to build *Academic Familismo* as we saw students work together and share how this activity helped them connect with their classmates.

Following this trend, we will see another Ethnic Studies assignment build *Academic Familismo* in the following chapter. Next, I discuss and analyze the *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait* project where students draw a Lotería card-styled portrait in honor of a family member or special person from the student's life. Students also write an analytical essay about their Lotería card portrait where they apply Ethnic Studies insights

and concepts to the life experiences of the person highlighted in their project. They also present their portraits and provide anonymous feedback to the peers during a day long in-class activity. Like with *World Cafe and Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* assignments, students heavily invest in their *Lotería Portrait Project* and further enhance familial relationships with peers through sharing their work. In discussing this project, we will see how students build *Academic Familismo* through sharing artistic creations and detailed stories about family members.

Chapter 5: Lotería Identity Portrait Project *Ethnic Studies curriculum tapping into both the academic and familismo fostered in students to develop projects that honor inspirational figures*

The *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project* fostered *Academic Familismo* in Mr. Garcia's classroom perhaps more than any other assignment. Garcia assigned this project during the middle of spring semester, roughly three quarters of the way into the academic year. This is a two-part assignment where students create a hand drawn portrait of an important person from their lives that stylistically resembles a card from Latinx/Chicanx family game *Lotería* and write an analytical essay describing the inspiration for their project. Lotería is a common game that many Latinx/Chicanx families play at special gatherings or just to bond generally. This project draws on this important Latinx/Chicanx cultural tradition and family activity to help sharpen students' creative thinking, design, and analytical writing skills. This particular project builds *Academic Familismo* through having students develop a creative and analytic project that honors their family further developing their academic skills. This project also helps build family in the classroom by providing youths another opportunity to connect and identify with each other given their relatable personal and cultural backgrounds. Furthermore, this project helps students develop their sense of academic identity in that they see their culture and families reflected in the curriculum and centered as a source of knowledge to draw from for the assignment and share with their classmates.

This project builds both the *academic* and *familismo* that I have seen students develop through learning in Ethnic Studies classrooms over the course of my field work. In terms of academics, this assignment helps with important skill development as I

mentioned before that will serve students particularly well in professional and higher education settings. Additionally, this assignment fosters familism through having the students focus an in-depth project on an important life figure that will be both submitted for a grade and shared with the class. As we saw with the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* project, students heavily invest in projects that center on their family or important people from their lives. We also see students build those *familismo* bonds with one another through engaging with these assignments and sharing their work. Garcia has students share their completed drawings through the social justice circles that he regularly uses for other assignment presentations. During this class period, students go over their work one by one sharing details about the person that inspired their project-examples of youth presenting their drawings can be found later in this chapter. This sharing activity allows students to both get to know their peers and each other's personal background, which I found consistently fosters familial bonds between students. This project is one of the final activity's youth will complete that helps to fully form their sense *Academic Familismo* prior to finishing the course.

To complete this assignment, students need to create their own Lotería card and write a descriptive and reflective essay about their creation as well as the person who inspired it. Mr. Garcia developed the assignment from a project that Dr. Luis Genaro Garcia (2017) has researched and now uses in his high school art classes. Dr. Garcia originally designed the project to allow students to do two things: 1) to critique the Lotería game for its problematic representations such as racist and sexist caricatures like *El Negrito* and *La Dama* and 2) to create an artistic rendition of an important person from

their life that also contests negative societal stereotypes about marginalized people (Garcia, 2017). Mr. Garcia expanded this assignment to make it both a creative and essay project. Students are charged with creating a personalized Lotería card and writing an analytical essay where they discuss elements of their card and the background of their inspirational figure. They analyze elements of their cards and the backgrounds of their central figure with ideas/concepts covered over the course. See Appendix 3 for the full *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project* sheet provided by Mr. Garcia. The goal of this assignment is to have youth showcase their families and cultures artistically and have them share how these important aspects of their identity motivate their educational success.

Brief Background of Lotería

The Lotería game is very similar to American Bingo where players attempt to connect lines across a card with squares that are oriented with letters and numbers making a large grid. Bingo has a caller who provides players with letter and number combinations like B 19, C 5, H 22. Those playing search their game card for squares that correspond with the letter/number combos provided by the caller and mark the sheet accordingly. The aim of the game is for players to mark squares on their game card that make lines or other patterns to win. The contrast between American Bingo and *Lotería is* that the latter has a different system for game play in the ways you gather squares to make lines/patterns to win. The Lotería game uses game sheets, a caller, and has guidelines for filling squares to make winning patterns. What makes Lotería distinct is that it uses a system of having a caller draw cards that display specific images with

corresponding names in Spanish. Many of the cards depict common images like people, animals, food, tools, and cultural and spiritual iconography from Latinx/Chicanx culture. Olga M. Ramirez and Cherie A. McCollough (2012) provide this example of a Lotería card and common winning moves

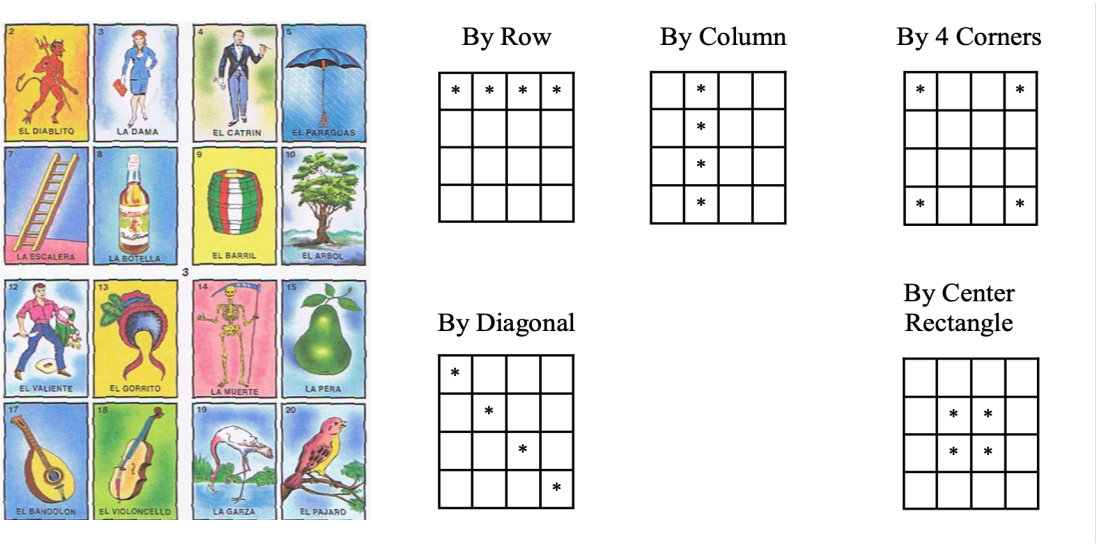

Figure 9: Loteria game card and winning game pattern

Above we see on the left a common game board and "winning move" patterns on the right. The game board has various patterned grids (4x8), with a number in the center demarcating the card's order in the set of 20 total game boards. In the game boards you can see various cards associated with animals, food, common items, cultural icons, and people that I mentioned before. There are 54 cards total in game cards stylized in this way. The caller announces the various cards as the game is played, often in very comical or flamboyant ways. As players listen and engage with the game, they place beans or colored chips over pictures of the cards on their game board with the aim of creating one of the winning patterns featured above.

The traditional cards depict icons and significant people found within Mexican culture. The game was originally developed in Italy, made its way to Spain, and was finally shipped to Mexico in 1769. The game was played mostly by Mexican colonial elites before a more common version was developed by Don Clemente, a French immigrant, who settled in Mexico during the mid 1700s. He reimagined some of the cards and made the pictures on the cards and the table relevant to all people, which made the game more accessible. The game is now played regularly at family parties and other social gatherings where young and old play alongside one another hoping to yell *Lotería!* when they are able to assemble a winning pattern from the cards announced by the caller or *El Griton.* The game does, however, depict some problematic images like *El Negrito* (the black man), *El Borracho* (the drunkard), and *La Sirena* (the mermaid) whose bare breasts and virtually naked body are displayed on the card. These cards and the messages within the images depicted on them represent common historical stereotypes about race, violent and often inebriated poor men, and the sexualization of women. Recent versions of the game like "Millennial Lotería " have incorporated new iconography that challenge old stereotypes found in the original *La Lotería* and include new images and symbols like "el avocado toast" or "la selfie" drawn from contemporary Chicanx and Latinx culture (Ramirez & McCollough, 2012)

The Assignment

For this assignment, students develop a Lotería portrait card where they feature someone who has shaped their individual and cultural identity. Students are urged to create a portrait with symbols and other iconography that will showcase their important

figures personality and/or life. Additionally, students title their card in a way that captures both how they see their important figure and what is significant about them. Students are required to style their portraits after Lotería cards from the widely played game. The essay portion of the assignment allows the student to provide a written description of their piece and connect concepts related to cultural identity, identity formation, and social justice that Mr. Garcia has covered in class. Students have to think about how their Lotería figure has helped them develop a positive sense of their culture and language, personal and academic identity, and future purpose and aspirations. Students explain their Lotería figure through a multi paragraph college level essay where they discuss elements of their portrait, the inspiration behind it, and analyze elements of the project using concepts from academic scholarship that they reviewed in the course. The essay portion of the assignment fits with the college preparatory curriculum specifics of G requirement, which help students qualify for admission to California's CSU and UC higher education systems(Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Both the visual and written elements of this assignment are aligned with the higher education standards for student assignments. Having students complete these types of activities prepares them for higher education course work that involves in-depth project development and writing assignments.

The overall aim of this assignment is to have students think about how people in their personal life make significant contributions to their identity and aspirations. Youth are required to consider ways their communities and families have survived and thrived despite the numerous social barriers they faced. They analyze this information using

concepts, insights, and theories drawn from the various course materials that Mr. Garcia reviews in the Identity unit. Their analysis should allow them to see how the background and/or struggles of the person or people they feature in their project has helped the students develop important elements of their identity like academic drive, work ethic, and commitment to service or activism to support marginalized communities. Mr. Garcia uses a cultural wealth and CRP framework to structure the assignment. The assignment is culturally relevant in that it uses an aspect of the students' culture, La Lotería, to have students explore their community background through completing the project. Incorporating elements of youths' culture into assignment frameworks and curricula allows students to identify with school and makes education relevant to them, they are learning important information and skills through their culture. Likewise, the elements of the project draw on students' biographical information as an important knowledge source to have them consider how their families and communities have given them intrinsic assets of drive, determination, and self-sacrifice that they use to succeed in school (Au, 2009; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). CRP reframes these intrinsic assets as sources of cultural wealth that students can use to develop navigational skills, tenacity and determination to achieve, and sensibilities of service for their communities that help them be academically successful (Yosso, 2005). In effect, the assignment centers learning through students' culture and biography allowing them to draw educational insight and aspiration from their families and communities.

After students finish the assignment, they must present their projects to their peers in a circle style presentation. The circle style presentation is akin to the circle

presentation students did for the *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* project. Students share their Lotería projects one-by-one, giving their peers a chance to see their projects and learn more about classmates' families and social struggles. After sharing their work through the presentation circle, students' final task for this assignment is to participate in a gallery walk where they move about the class and view their peers' Lotería cards up-close and give anonymous positive written feedback. This allows each student to give comments to their classmates about the ways in which either a classmate's personalized Lotería card and/or the story behind the project impacted him or her directly. Mr. Garcia provides snacks and plays music as students do their in-depth assignment viewing to make the event livelier.

Developing Academic Familismo Through Lotería

The year is ending, and the students have been working on a variety of identity projects that have forged important interpersonal bonds. The *Lotería Identity Portrait Project* is another way that students can showcase their familial backgrounds both for school credit and to connect with their classmates. I brought pan dulce (Mexican sweet bread) for the students to snack on while participating in the circle and gallery walk, and Garcia played music. Food and music were common elements of Garcia's class, which added to the family dynamic forged in the course. Classroom environments where students eat together, with food provided by the teacher, fosters a sense of belonging and community that lends itself to the sense of familism (Valenzuela, 2010). This was true of Garcia's class especially on a day like today where students talked, nibbled, and laughed together while discussing their and their peers' creations.

Garcia called the class to order and had the students move to their seats, which had been moved into a circle. He opened the circle presentation with the *In Lak'Ech* poem, an Indigenous proverb about mutual respect and love for everyone. This poem is regularly recited in Ethnic Studies classes and activist circles to develop a sense of trust and community with participants sharing that everyone is loved and respected (Ayers et al., 2009). Students repeat stanzas of the poem after Garcia recites each line.

Garcia: ok guys, settle down. We're going to start the presentation circle with In Lak'Ech, like we have in the past.

[students hush, and turn to focus on Garcia]

Garcia: Tu eres mi otro yo
Students: Tu eres mi otro yo
Garcia: You are my other me
Students: You are my other me
Garcia: si te hago daño a ti
Students: si te hago daño a ti
Garcia: if I do harm to you
Students: if I do harm to you
Garcia: me hago daño a mi mismo
Students: me hago daño a mi mismo
Garcia: I do harm to myself
Students: I do harm to myself
Garcia: si te amo y respeto
Students: si te amo y respeto
Garcia: if I love you and respect you
Students: if I love you and respect you
Garcia: me amo y respeto yo
Students: me amo y respeto yo
Garcia: I love and respect myself
Students: I love and respect myself

I sat there alongside the students in the circle, chanting with them, feeling their echoing expressions of love and care for another. I think students chanting this poem throughout the academic year and particularly during these activities helped to sow seeds of deep

respect and admiration for each other and themselves. This practice of reciting the poem has happened many times over the course of the academic year. By having the students recite the words regularly, it develops those sentiments of love and family within the students.

After students finish the chant, Garcia asks the students to share about their portrait projects. One by one students discuss their projects describing the central figure, design elements, and what they wrote in their essays. More than half of the students across both sections of the Ethnic Studies classes that I observed dedicated their portraits to their mothers. I observed that students who dedicated their projects to their mothers did so because they felt these female figures were inspirational given their work ethic, unrelenting commitment to supporting their families, and steadfast support of the youth. Students' cards that honored their mothers featured titles like *La Superhero, Mi Motivacion* (my motivation), *La Luz* (the light), *La Fuerza* (the force/strength), and *La Mujer Trabajadora* (the working woman). I showcase several of these cards below in the analysis section. These cards are well developed with beautiful colors and artwork that show both how grateful students are for their mothers love and support and the level of personal investment students have in making an exemplary project that honors their families. This pattern of honoring other family members like dads, grandparents, and siblings as well as families generally through Lotería portraits was also consistent with students from the previous cohorts of the Ethnic Studies class. Students' sentiments about their inspirational figures, regardless of who was depicted, were quite moving.

I dedicated my piece to my little sister, which I titled La Super Valiente. So, my lil sis has leukemia that she's been fighting for two years. She's four years old now. She's had to do

chemo and take a bunch of other meds to fight off the cancer and stay healthy. It was scary for a while cause we (my family) thought we might lose her. But, she kept on fighting and we stayed with her through the treatments and in the hospital. Her cancer has been in remission for a year now. Her strength and being valiant or valiente in the face of her cancer gives me strength to keep going in school and in life.

I dedicated my project to my Mom, which I titled La Luz. It was important for me to do this project for my mom cause she always shines a light on me to help me feel better or guide me. Even when I'm feeling down, she has a great way of helping get back on the right path. Showing me with her light that I matter and that I'm doing a good job in school.

My portrait is titled La Abuelita for my grandmother. I drew a picture of her needle point work here cause she loves to sew. She was a seamstress and taught me and my mom how to sew. I love my grandmother very much, she's the family member that I'm closest to. We talk a lot about her life in Mexico and she's taught me very valuable lessons about my culture and the importance of family. I mentioned in my essay that she really embodies community cultural wealth because she has so much knowledge about Mexican culture that she's shared with me. This has helped me feel more connected with my Mexican cultural heritage and given me a sense of pride as Chicana. She also pushes me to get an education and be something. She wasn't able to get her education in Mexico cause of how poor our family was back then. So, I want to get a higher education to make her and the rest of my family proud.

The process of sharing both about the inspirational figure behind the portrait and sharing familial history continued on for half of the class period. Students shared very heartfelt stories about their family members and other important figures that inspired their projects. During the presentations, there was a palpable sense of respect and empathy forming between students. I saw this similarly when students shared their *Día de los Muertos Shoebox Altars* where students were able to identify with one another as they could connect with peers' descriptions of family members and familial backgrounds. This sharing process further developed the sense of *Academic Familismo* amongst students in that they learned more about peers' families and communities during and class activity. As I have argued previously, students sharing their personal stories and experiences

allows their classmates to connect with them as they find similarities in their shared experiences. Students develop familial sentiments and relationships with their peers as they identify their commonalities through discussing their family members and biographies.

I sat in awe as youth shared their portraits and discussed the inspiration behind their work. Students created a variety of portrait representations that included hand drawn portraits of family members, detailed symbols that represent elements of their inspirational figures, or mixed media with pictures, symbols, printouts, and paintings that made for diverse and amazing projects. I could really see their artistic and creative talents through this assignment where they created detailed and profound portraits and cards that, like with other assignments, went well beyond the course expectations. Again, *Academic Familismo* fostered through Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogy encourages students to produce a higher level of work. Ethnic Studies' focus on featuring students' and marginalized communities, often one in the same, through assignments connects youth to education in meaningful ways that encourages higher levels of s school engagement and personal investment in completing course work. When students see themselves in the learning materials, they want to learn more and engage with assignments so that they can showcase their backgrounds.

When the presentation order naturally fell to me, Garcia asked if I had something to present. Unfortunately, I hadn't created a Lotería card like the students given my own work/life constraints as a single father, graduate student of color. Students looked to me to see what my response was to the request to present. At this point, I had built close

relationships with many students where they expected me to participate in the course activities alongside them. While I was not formally prepared to participate, I did the best I could through improvising and presenting on my visible tattoos, many that I had dedicated to my deceased family members who were particularly impactful in my life.

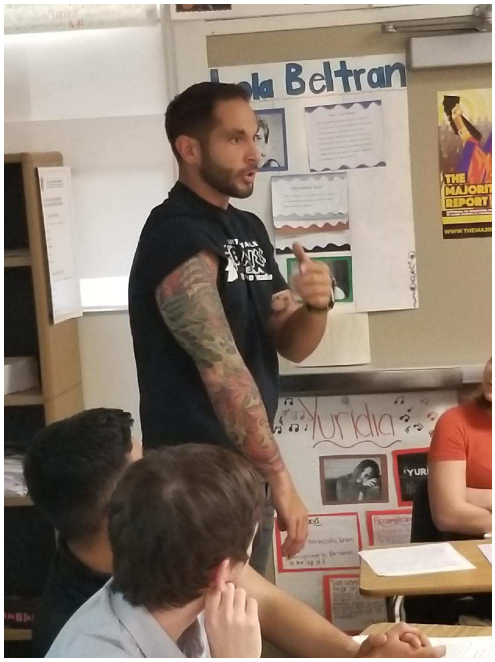

Figure 10: Describing my tattoos to students during Loteria presentation

I had mentioned to the students that the upper portion of my sleeve tattoo was dedicated to my late maternal grandfather, Malcolm *Rusty* Henry Johnson. He was a great influence on my life and taught me steadfastness in the face of life's difficulties as well as the importance of commitment to family. I mentioned that the banner that sits atop the tattoo which reads "hold fast in perilous seas" was a lesson he imbued with his family. Rusty always told us that we had to stick together as a family through the tough times and focus on fixing problems rather than dwelling on what has happened. He was a sailor and served in the U.S. Navy during WWII, which is why I chose the nautical theme for my

body art. These types of personal exchanges between the students and I made for a more rich and meaningful research experience. They came to know aspects of my educational journey where I struggled and succeeded in school, my family, and my professional pursuits and aspirations. Participating with these types of assignments helped me also understand *Academic Familismo* because I felt connected to my participants like a family member. When students mentioned family during casual in-class conversations and in-depth interviews, I could fully understand how they were experiencing this phenomenon because I was also developing this sensibility alongside them.

After completing presentations, we moved on to the gallery walk activity in the remaining time of the class period. Students had to walk around the class and give anonymous feedback to their peers regarding their portraits. This part for me was the most interesting because I wanted to walk about the classroom and ask students what they thought of their peers' work. I walked about the class with my field journal in hand and watched the students start moving to each of the stations where Garcia placed students' work. Students continued with snacking on their pan dulce as they made their way to each station that featured a student's work. I walked up to several youths and observed their quiet dedication when writing responses to their peers' projects. In between stations, I asked students how they felt about the activity.

It was really cool to make the portrait, I had to really think about how I wanted to make my card.

I had never done a project like this, I like that so many of our activities involve our families.

Some students had really cool cards like the superhero and others that used like paints and stuff.

I heard numerous positive sentiments about the cards and gathered from the students that they really enjoyed the assignment.

Garcia gave students a final notice that they were to finish commenting on their classmates' work. I looked around at all the fully filled out response sheets with thoughtful comments from students, the mostly eaten pan dulce, and the smiling faces of students that were still chatting about the assignment and school. Garcia and I looked and nodded at each other signaling that this project seemed to be a great success. He had only implemented this assignment the previous year and was still nervous about how students would engage with the project. Students from both cohorts resoundingly said that this was one of their favorite assignments. Many felt both obliged and honored to feature an important family member that helped them learn about their Chicanx/Latinx cultural identity and strive to do well in school. I was hopeful that the effort I saw in the class with the portraits and presentations would also be present in the response's students shared with each other during the gallery walk and with their essay they had to write about the portraits. I could tell that this particular project would resonate most with the students beyond the class and they had a great sense of accomplishment after completing it.

Analysis

The *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project* was the most significant project for promoting *Academic Familismo* that I observed over the course of my field work. This project drew from and developed students' creative and analytical skills through

creating portraits that honored family members, challenged societal stereotypes about youths' communities with artistic representations, and applied course concepts to their lived experiences within their essays. Students' ability to complete a multidimensional project like this speaks to how Ethnic Studies develops students' academic skills from the creative to the analytic. Likewise, we see how this project along with the Ethnic Studies curriculum develops *familismo* through the way students' bond around the project. These Figure 11 give a sense of what I experienced in class during the class session where students presented their work and participated in the gallery walk activity.

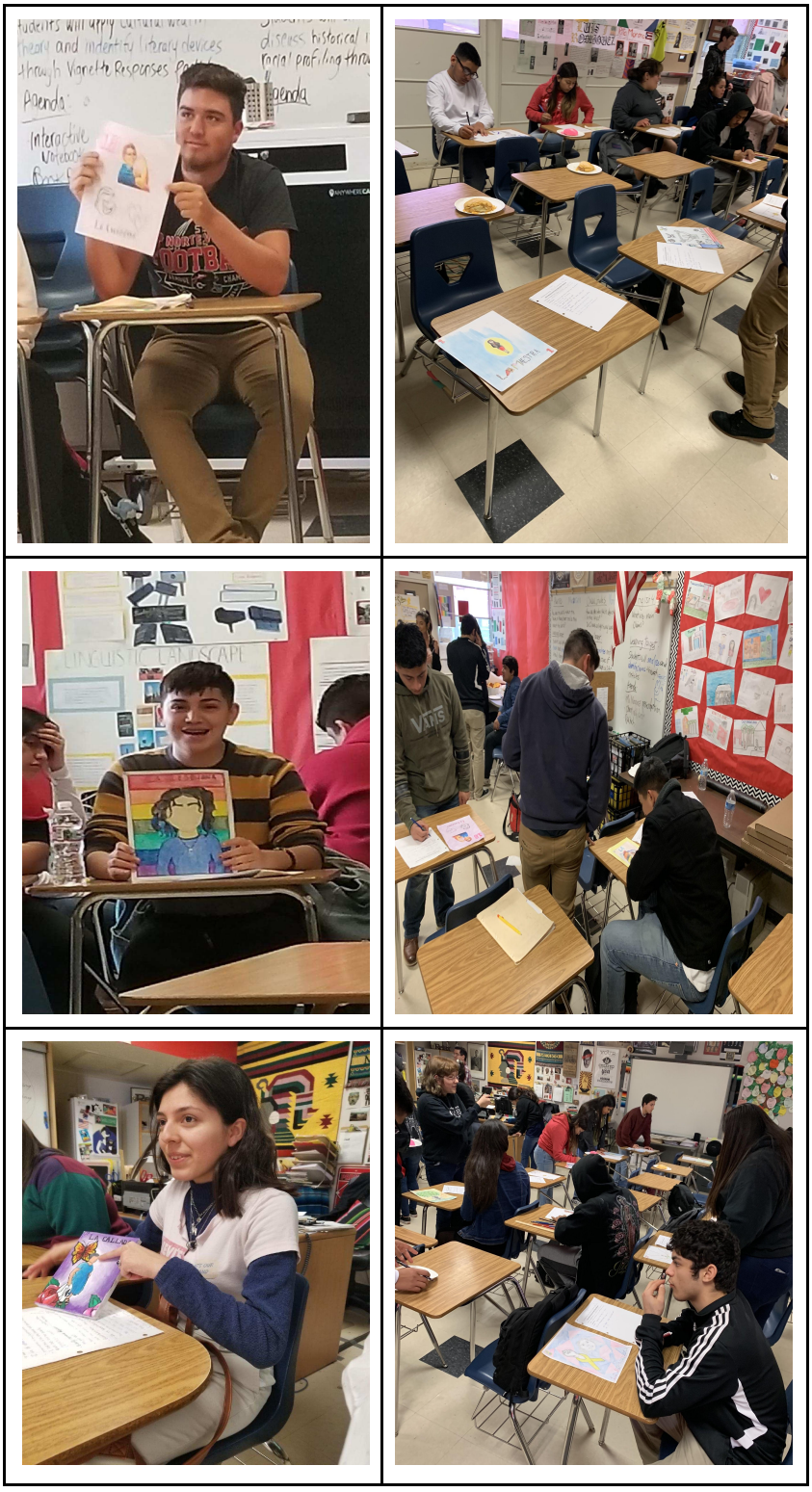

Figure 11: Examples of students presenting their Loteria

What we can see above is some images of the students sharing their portraits on the left during the *social justice circle* presentation period and students giving their peers written feedback on the right. The images capture how students interact with one another and build a family line community. This statement by Gina, a senior from the class, shared how students fostered family through the Lotería project,

> When we drew the Lotería cards...one of the things that I remember in this classroom that I loved so much and made me just feel a stronger bond to everyone was the comments that were written on the side of our drawings. That made me feel so happy to see that people know you in this class and they accept you and everything that you bring to the table.

Likewise, students mentioned that this assignment gave them a chance to honor their family and enhanced their relationships with specific family members.

> Monica: I like Lotería.
>
> Frank: Can you tell me a little bit about your Lotería project? What was who you chose to do it on?
>
> Monica: I chose to do it on my grandpa. He passed away back in 2016, and I would have done it on my mom's parents, but I'm not close to them as much as I would've liked. So, he raised me because I didn't have my dad growing up. So, he pushed me outside of the social norms, and... made me embrace my heritage, and push the traditions that I had.
>
> Frank: What about some of the projects? Is there been something interesting in terms of the work that you've done that you feel stand out or spoken to you specifically?
>
> Nicole: Yes. Well, so far the one that's my favorite was the Lotería project. Mainly because it gave me the opportunity to write about my own experience and the people that I admire, which would be my parents. So, I really liked that because I never... I don't usually talk about that stuff. It was even hard for me to put in my essay what I went through. And so, when I saw the opportunity to write this essay, I just wrote it. And it was hard, but I'm actually glad I did it because I start... It's like I was able to release that. I don't know how to explain it. Because you're holding it in

for so long, everything you went through, and it affects you. And so, when I was able to write it down, it was like a stress free...

Frank: So, kind of therapeutic in a way.

Nicole: Yes.

Frank: What do you feel was most challenging about writing the paper?

Nicole: Talking about my parents and what they went through and how that affected me. It's hard. Having to start from so low and seeing how much your parents do and yet they're being treated like... I don't want to say bad words, but it's like... Yeah. They're being treated bad. So, it hurts because you're over here trying to do your best and knowing that your parents gave up everything that they have to come here into a country that they don't know anybody at all just so you could get a better education. That's sad and it's also admirable.

Frank: After completing the project, how did you feel afterwards? What was the kind of feeling that you got from that?

Nicole: I felt proud. Yeah. I felt proud because... It was two things. I felt proud of what I went through because since I went through all of that, I am in the place that I am right now, and I'm also proud because it was, if anything, probably the best essay that I've written.

Frank: Oh wow. Do you feel that having the opportunity to write about your family pushed you to do better or was it easier for you to excel in the assignment because it was tied to your family?

Nicole: Definitely. I feel like a lot of... I know some people don't really use their parents as their main success...but I do. I base my success mainly on my parents and everything for my parents. Like I don't care how mad maybe sometimes we get, like in a fight or something or because they simply don't understand or... you know? I really appreciate everything that they do for me and that's something that helped me write the essay really easily.

My conversation with Nicole, a Latinx undocumented senior, encapsulates some of the major benefits of Ethnic Studies curriculum and *Academic Familismo.* First, she mentions how important it was for her to write a commemorative essay for her parents

who are working class immigrants. She felt empowered to honor them through her project because of their numerous social and economic struggles as undocumented immigrants. *They're being treated bad. So, it hurts because you're over here trying to do your best and knowing that your parents gave up everything that they have to come here into a country that they don't know anybody at all just so you could get a better education. That's sad and it's also admirable.* This exercise was cathartic for Nicole who was able to express her frustrations with the way her parents were treated and commend their sacrifices for her educational success. She felt a sense of relief after completing the project. What is also important to note from this conversation is Nicole felt she wanted to complete this project with utmost effort because she was featuring her parents through this assignment. What I found in my research was students felt more motivated to complete their work and do well in Ethnic Studies classes because they could highlight their personal backgrounds, families and communities through their projects. This validates findings from previous research where scholars show that students heavily invest in Ethnic Studies coursework because the material connects to their personal and cultural backgrounds. This body of work shows that students will strive to complete assignments in ways that garner a sense of personal, familial, and cultural pride (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Sleeter 2011). Indeed, assignment samples featured here in this chapter and in previous ones show that students invest heavily in these projects thereby producing works that exceed teacher expectations.

These feelings of connection were also shared by the previous cohort of students. Rick, a Chicanx student that completed the class the previous year, mentioned that the

Lotería project was very meaningful for him as a way to honor his mother and get to know his peers through both their respective projects and presentations.

> Frank: Can you give me an example of what was a really fun bonding activity or something that you did where you felt really connected to other students?
>
> Rick: Well, we did our Lotería project and just seeing other people's Lotería projects and like how you had to pick one person. You had to pick one person that impacted your life and who has shaped you into who you are today. And obviously I picked my mom. She's huge, she was a big part of my life, very religious, very amazing person. And that shaped me to be the person I am today. Seeing other people's projects, they were very similar to mine and actually, a lot of people picked their mom. A lot of people they're very similar. A lot of people just, they understand what you've been through and their stories are very similar to yours.

Ana and Marie, former students of the Ethnic Studies class, also shared similar sentiments about how important it was to dedicate their projects to family members.

> Frank: Did you do your Lotería project on someone in your family?
>
> Ana: Yeah, I did. My dad.
>
> Frank: Did you share your project with him?
>
> Ana: He works so I told my mom about it, and I told her how I wanted to do it on my dad because my dad is a really hard worker. Since I was a little girl, he did not stop working until this day he still works a lot.
>
> Frank: How did your mom react to it?
>
> Ana: She was happy because she knows that is true. My dad does work a lot. Sometimes, he comes home until 2 in the morning because he is just working.
>
> Frank: What was your favorite part of the class or a favorite project?
>
> Marie: The Lotería Project. Honoring your family members. Somebody who inspired you. I did mine on my grandma because she raised me since I was little. I'm really close with all my grandparents but she in my eyes was the strongest and I just feel like a lot of people take others for granted,

> especially in my family. She does a lot and nobody, I don't hear anybody say thank you or tell her that they love her, nothing. For me to get the opportunity to honor her in such a way and show other people who don't even know her it was just a good opportunity and then when I showed it to her...I can't express how it made her feel.
>
> Frank: Tell me a little about that, how did she respond to you doing something about her in a class?
>
> Marie: At first she was like, 'Why did you do that about me? You should have done it about your mom, or something.' And I was like, 'well yeah but even though I don't spend every day with you, like I would like, I just want to show everybody how strong you are... you as a person and then after that she accepted the idea she's like, 'that's so sweet, wow you're so nice, you're so special', all that.

These statements capture how impactful this assignment can be for students, their academics, and peer and family relationships. I was thoroughly impressed with what the students developed with their projects in terms of both creativity and originality of their portraits. The assignment is a keen way to have students explore how important people around them influence who they are academically, culturally, and personally. Students build their analytical skills in the essay portion of this assignment by connecting facts from course materials to the lived experience of their influential person. Additionally, they discuss in their essay the connections between their person's life history and how this has shaped who the student is individually while also better understanding how the life histories of both themselves and their significant figures are interrelated to other social phenomena and/or impacted by society.

Through this assignment, students were able to understand the struggles their featured person faced and capture that person's aspirational influence in their lives. Figure

12 shows a sample submission from Francisco, a recent immigrant to the U.S. and a senior, that shows both the creativity of the assignment and his analytical abilities.

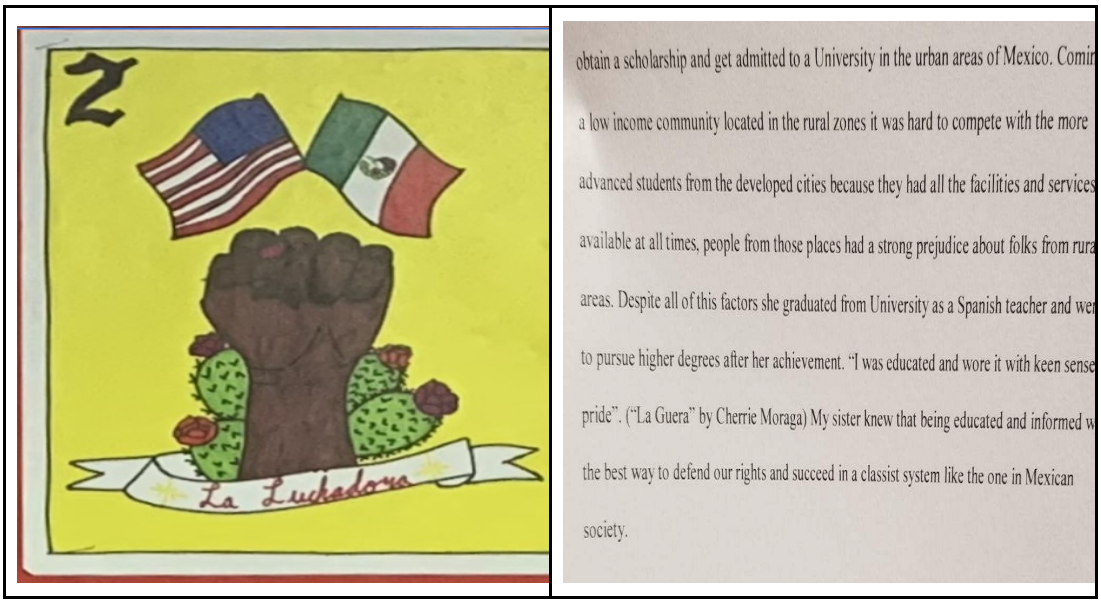

Figure 12: Example of Lotería portrait card and essay excerpt

His card entitled *La Luchadora* features a brown feminine hand, the U.S. and Mexican flags, nopales or cacti native to Mexico and used in Mexican cuisine, and bright colors. This symbol relates to the power fist iconography used by people of color and socially progressive activist movements (Armbruster-Sandoval, 2017; Blackwell, 2016). In the excerpt from the essay on the right we can see how Francisco talks about his sister, the inspiration behind the piece. He discusses class dynamics, how class and rurality impacted access to education for his family, and specifically recognizes the barriers his sister faced coming from an impoverished area of rural Mexico while trying to better herself. He also highlights that she persisted in school and went on to the university, completed her higher education, and earned her degree and teaching credential despite the circumstances she faced. He then connects his sentiments about his sister's

achievement to a quote presented by Cherrie Moraga, acclaimed professor and queer Chicana writer, regarding the pride associated with being an educated person of color. Francisco finally makes an assertion that the best thing for a person of color to be is educated so that he or she has the knowledge and resources to understand and defend his or her rights. The elements of Francisco's project featured here show his amazing abilities to create an art piece and analytical essay that honors his sister, discusses important social issues, and displays pride for his siblings' accomplishments.

Many of the projects that I analyzed from both cohorts of Ethnic Studies students had similar creative stylings with exemplary details and essays that featured prideful and analytical statements akin to Francisco's submission. Again, one of the aims of this assignment is to use the Lotería card to honor a family member and challenge stereotypes about students' families and communities prevalent in our society. For example, a student may want to critique the sexualized representation of women in the Lotería card game itself. As previously mentioned, the La Lotería game features some problematic societal stereotypes in its cards such as *El Negrito* (The Black Man)*, El Borracho* (The Drunk)*, La Dama* (The Woman), and *La Sirena* (The Mermaid). Each of these cards presents a stereotypical representation of men and women; for example, *La Sirena* displays a sexualized representation of the female body through a mermaid with exposed breasts. Here we can see a comparison of gender representations in the traditional Lotería cards for women *La Dama, La Sirena, and La Chalupa* and men on the left with *El Soldado, El Mundo, and El Valiente.*

Figure 13: Examples of problematic representations in "traditional" Lotería cards

These examples show how gender is commonly considered within our society and also reflected in *La Lotería*. The emphasis on male bravado compared female passivity and aesthetics in these cards reflects how our society focuses on gender behavioral and beauty standards for men and women. Students were able to understand how societal sexism and racism can be viewed in cards like these. As we well see with the example I show below, learners created various representations that showcased the wealth and power of their female family members and communities that contested societal sexism and racism often featured in the traditional game.

I found notable examples of students developing these imaginative and critical Lotería card representations. For example, Betty, a Chicana senior, developed a great reimagined female representation through her Lotería card.

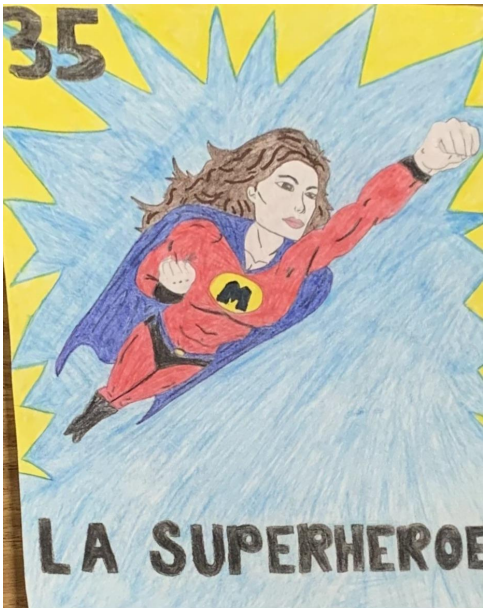

Figure 14: Example of student's Lotería portrait

La Superheroe depicts a feminine woman who is also a muscular superhero flying into view. Betty's Lotería depiction visually critiques the passive and weak female representations in *La Dama, La Sirena,* and *La Chalupa.* The traditional cards reflect societal stereotypes and notions about women where their dress, bodies, and domestic roles are the focus of their humanity (Alex, 2018). Betty's card gives greater depth and imagination to the role of women, specifically her mother who the card is dedicated to. It is also important to note the level of detail present on a student's Lotería card not only the use of various colors but also the styling of the superhero figure. The student's card resembles a comic book cover with the pose of the superhero and overall design. The M on the superhero figures chest symbolizes mom, Betty shared that she dedicated the

project to her mom. It is clear that this student was able to use her project to honor her mother, rethink visual depictions of femininity through an empowered woman superhero caricature, and contest stereotypes about female passivity and weakness (Garcia, 2017). Likewise, the powerful Latinx representation featured in Betty's card contests the misunderstanding of laziness commonly associated with Latinx/Chicanx communities (Chavez, 2013). Betty's work along with others featured below show how students develop creative and critical cards that reimagine identity and contest societal stereotypes.

Many Lotería Identity Portraits featured aesthetics that were built from the traditional La Lotería game while also providing critical and imaginative depictions of cultural identity. Here we can see more examples of the assignments where students incorporated design elements of the traditional game like bright colors, depictions of people and or objects, and catchy names. The assignments featured below show varying degrees of artistic style and detail, bright coloring, and a central feature (mostly people) that are important to the students. One element that stands out is the title of the cards. Word choices by students include La Fuerza (The Force/Strength), La Soñadora (The Dreamer), Los Triunfadores (The Achievers), La Valiente (The Valiant Woman), El Protector (The Protector), and Mi Motivacion (My Motivation) to name a few.

Figure 15: Numerous examples of Loteria portraits from both Ethnic Studies sections

Mi Motivacion is an important card to note from the set of submissions featured above in Figure 15 developed by one of the more interesting participants from my study. Francine developed this card to honor her late mother who passed away the previous due to complications with cancer. She is African American Woman, senior, returning from continuation school after struggling academically who found both home and space in the Ethnic Studies class. She mentioned during the circle presentation how important it was to do this assignment for her late mother and that her passing motivated her to go back to traditional school and go on to college. This assignment and the Ethnic Studies curriculum provided this student from a different racial and ethnic background than the

majority of her classmate's space to honor her mother and find community with her peers through sharing their pieces, which is a byproduct of *Academic Familismo*. Throughout all of the assignments and examples provided here, we can see how students connect with each other in familial ways.

Ethnic Studies utilizes aspects of students' culture to provide them with opportunities to create critical work that challenges stereotypes, discusses social issues, and honors their families. Much of what we have seen in this chapter shows that Ethnic Studies curriculum and teaching, developed by Mr. Garcia on his own with little institutional support, has amazing potential to develop students' academic abilities. This educational framework and curriculum provide important epistemological interventions and corrections to mainstream education through adding previously excluded and/or misrepresented insights and histories from people of color and other marginalized groups (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Loewen, 2008). Further, Ethnic Studies styled assignments, constructed through CRP frameworks, draw from students' cultures and communities to interweave learning with personal aspects of students' lives (Au, 2009; Dueñas et al., 2019; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Zavala, 2018). What we can see from all the data points referenced in this chapter and others is that students are emphatically engaged in their academic work largely because the curriculum features aspects of students' communities and cultures. Students are motivated to complete projects and participate in activities that center on their personal backgrounds. As I have shown throughout my research, Ethnic Studies courses and curricula motivate students to succeed because this education framework draws directly from the youths' experiences. Students are more likely to

engage in learning and coursework when they feel their identities and backgrounds are important to the class; in other words, youth want to learn when they feel their identities matter to their overall learning. Thus, this educational framework can motivate learners to be more engaged in assignment development and activities because they are able to showcase and honor their identities in the classroom.

Conclusion

The Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project is a powerful example of how Ethnic Studies assignments can build *Academic Familismo*. This assignment provided students with an avenue for showcasing their families, for critically engaging social stereotypes with artistic representations, and to utilize their analytical skills to better understand the social injustice their communities have faced. Participants' statements show how they felt they were able to meaningfully connect with classmates and build stronger relationships with their families through completing this assignment. Samples of work shown above reveal how students were able to create dynamic artwork that reimagine representations of BIPOC women and culture in positive ways that instill pride in students. Additionally, we can see how this project and curriculum develop students analytical writing skills through Francisco's essay excerpt from his project "La Luchadora." Nicole's statement about the way this assignment motivates academic success is also noteworthy,

> Frank: Oh wow. Do you feel that having the opportunity to write about your family pushed you to do better or was it easier for you to excel in the assignment because it was tied to your family?

> Nicole: Definitely. I feel like a lot of... I know some people don't really use their parents as their main success...but I do. I base my success mainly on my parents and everything for my parents.

We can understand through these multiple examples that Ethnic Studies curriculum and assignment builds *Academic Familismo* and educational success. Teaching through this educational framework creates learning environments that validate students and their culture while also enhancing their peer and familial relationships. These beneficial dynamics encourage greater student engagement with learning and assignments that translates to better overall academic performance. This is consistent with findings from previous research that shows Ethnic Studies education has numerous educational benefits and encourages higher education achievement (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020).

Across the assignment case studies, I showcased in my research and this particular assignment, it is clear that Ethnic Studies bolsters students' cultural and academic identity, enhances their important interpersonal relationships, and motivates educational achievement. The *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project* develops students' academic identity through having their families and communities be the central site of knowledge creation. Students honor their families and reflect on their important person's histories in a way that allows youth to draw inspiration from this background through this project. Embedding students' personal information within the curriculum transforms youths' backgrounds into academic materials that they and their peers can learn from. Students build their academic identity from this dynamic because they see

their personal background as an important source of academic knowledge and that their identity is educationally significant.

Chapter 6: Why We Need Ethnic Studies; Academic Familismo *Supporting students learning, peer and familial relationships, and building their academic identities through Ethnic Studies*

Figure 16: Students from the Ethnic Studies class on the last day of school

Ethnic Studies is more than just an educational framework that includes important voices and perspectives from communities of color and other marginalized groups. These courses and curriculum increase students' engagement, and the learning environment helps youths form familial connections to their peers and the class more broadly. I found that youth built strong peer relationships where they felt like their classmates were family members and students wanted to support the academic growth and social well-being of their peers. Ethnic Studies students also built a strong connection to the course in that they regularly participated in campus-based activities that showed the work they did in the class. Additionally, many of the students helped to recruit future students through campus and classroom presentations thereby ensuring the long-term sustainability of Ethnic Studies at IE High. In both cases students developed a deep love and respect for Ethnic Studies peers and the course to ensure each is successful respectively. The

phenomenon of creating family within the classroom provides an important answer to one of my fundamental research questions, *how does Ethnic Studies impact students' relationships within the classroom and overall academics?* I found that students who participate in Ethnic Studies classes connect meaningfully with this curriculum and their peers as they learn about their collective cultural backgrounds and, by extension, communities and families through completing related assignments. They build *Academic Familismo* or an educational sensibility where students feel a familial connection to their peers, Ethnic Studies class, and as a result to education more broadly. When students experience *Academic Familismo* or have these deep connections to their educational context and learning, they do better on assignments and academics generally. Ethnic Studies and *Academic Familismo* specifically motivates student engagement and success by allowing youth to honor their families and culture with projects that also helps foster meaningful relationships with their peer and home communities.

Indeed, we see how students are more engaged in their learning and course vis-a-vis the assignments I analyzed for this project. What I found over the course of my fieldwork was that Ethnic Studies students were highly engaged in their classroom work and various projects due in large part to the nature of curriculum they were learning. Ethnic Studies curriculum allows students to showcase their home families and cultural backgrounds through their coursework, which connects education to their personal identity (Dueñas et al. 2019; Gonzalez et al., 2006; Sleeter, 2011; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). As we saw with the *Dia de los Muertos Shoebox Altar Project, World Cafe,* and the *Linguistic Loteria Identity Portrait Project,* these types of learning activities that

draw from personal elements of students help to foster a more engaging and invested learning classroom environment. Students are more motivated to complete these projects and participate in activities because they showcase their families and communities in their work. We saw this time and again with samples of students' work I presented throughout various chapters. Samples of students' work show how Ethnic Studies developed incredible assignments that celebrated those from their personal lives. Furthermore, participants' statements show that they were highly motivated to complete projects and assignments because they could honor their family members in the Ethnic Studies course. My conversation with Nicole regarding the impact of the *Linguistic Loteria Identity Project* really captured how students felt about completing projects centered on their parents' backgrounds and struggles with the utmost effort.

> Frank: Oh wow. Do you feel that having the opportunity to write about your family pushed you to do better or was it easier for you to excel in the assignment because it was tied to your family?
>
> Nicole: Definitely. I feel like a lot of... I know some people don't really use their parents as their main success...but I do. I base my success mainly on my parents and everything for my parents. Like I don't care how mad maybe sometimes we get, like in a fight or something or because they simply don't understand or... you know? I really appreciate everything that they do for me and that's something that helped me write the essay really easily.

It is clear that Ethnic Studies motivates students' academic engagement and success because youth could honor important people like their parents in their coursework.

Relatedly, the Ethnic Studies class gave students opportunities to enhance their relationships with family members through completing these projects. Students invested heavily in creating elaborate and thoughtful shoebox altars and Lotería portrait cards that

celebrated their deceased and living relatives. During my interviews, participants mentioned how completing projects like these helped enhance their relationships with various family members. For example, participants' sentiments about the *Dia de los Muertos Shoebox Altar Project* show how this assignment enhanced their familial relationships. Here Cathy talks about the project dedicated to her aunt had helped the relationship between her and her cousin.

> Cathy: I think the one that stood out to me was the one for the Dia de los Muertos project. Because you really had to, you took time to actually find a person you wanted to do it on. And then you would, because some people did on artists. I specifically did it on my aunt. But you'll get to, I didn't really know a lot about my aunt so you really, because she died when I was younger. So, I didn't really, I don't remember a lot. But people who do it on artists, they get to learn more about how like what they did, or what their favorite food was. And you get to basically represent them.
>
> Frank: How did it feel doing a project about your aunt? Like, for an actual grade, you know?
>
> Cathy: Yeah. I actually felt proud of it because especially for my cousin it meant a lot to her that I was doing a project on her mom. And especially because she died of breast cancer. So, it meant a lot to her.

Sam similarly described how dedicating his shoebox altar to a deceased cousin helped to strengthen a bond between him and the brother of the departed family member.

> Frank: What were some of the assignments that have stood out to you so far?
>
> Sam: One that I liked was the shoe box [altars] of our family members because I had recently had lost a cousin who had died and he was very young and so I wanted something to remember him... when Mr. Garcia talked about the shoe box altar project and that you can do it on a family member, that really got me to think of ideas and how I can remember my cousin forever. Give him a good remembrance.
>
> Frank: Did you tell your family that you focused your shoebox on your cousin?

Sam: I did! I had told my cousin, because my other cousin who was his brother, he was really sad he had died. They were very close and when I had finished my shoe box project, I showed him and he started crying and he told, "Right now he's [my bother, your coursing] probably smiling and happy for what you did for him."

Rosa statement about how the *Dia de los Muertos Shoebox Altar* project really shows how Ethnic Studies curriculum and assignments can have widespread impacts on students' families.

Frank: What was significant about doing some of the class projects? Why did they really speak to you?

Rosa: The Dia De Los Muertos! I did my on my grandpa cause I never met him. But when it came to my Papa Tonyo, I grew up with my mom's stories and everything she ever told me. So, I felt like I knew him even though I wasn't even thought of. My mom was 17 when he died, and she didn't have me until she was 29. So just growing up, seeing his picture, seeing the stories, I felt like even though I didn't meet him physically, I felt like I have some connection with my grandpa...I feel like as well with the Dia De Los Muertos project, it got me closer to my mom because she was able to talk about her dad more and able to honor him because we never celebrated Dia De Los Muertos. She was more like, "I'd rather just leave it to the side and know they're dead and not really talk about it." I had told my mom, I was like, "I don't know what to do." I was like, "I'm just going to do grandpa but only if you're okay with it." When I did it, she sent it to her sisters in Mexico. She sent them a picture. My aunt posted a picture of it on her Facebook, my altar. My grandma saw it. My three uncles who rarely talked to my mom, they saw it and they're like, "Wow. That's beautiful. No one has ever done that for our dad." You know?

Frank: That's really cool. So, what were some things that your mom said just about you doing it? How did she react to just having her dad being featured in that way?

Rosa: She cried. She cried a lot. At the same time, my nephew was doing a little project as well for his school, but he's younger. He's in elementary school. He asked his mom who was my cousin. She was like, "I want to do altar on my Papa Tonyo." That's his great grandfather. My cousin, had posted about it saying like, "Wow, I can't believe. My grandpa has touched this many lives even though he's not even alive himself." My

> mom, she posted the picture of the altar that we were together on. She posted in the comments and she was like, "I'm going through the same thing. My daughter had a project as well. It brought back so many memories and it just brought back everything and it felt like my dad was here."

Similarly, the *Linguistic Loteria Identity Portrait Project* also enhanced youths' family relationships because they were able to honor their family members through their work.

> Frank: did you do your Loteria project on someone in your family?
>
> Ana: yeah, I did. My dad.
>
> Frank: did you share your project with him?
>
> Ana: He works so I told my mom about it, and I told her how I wanted to do it on my dad because my dad is a really hard worker. Since I was a little girl, he did not stop working until this day he still works a lot.
>
> Frank: how did your mom reacted to it?
>
> Ana: she was happy because she knows that is true. My dad does work a lot. Sometimes, he comes home until 2 in the morning because he is just working.
>
> Frank: What was your favorite part of the class or a favorite project?
>
> Marie: The Loteria Project. Honoring your family members. Somebody who inspired you. I did mine on my grandma because she raised me since I was little. I'm really close with all my grandparents but she in my eyes was the strongest and I just feel like a lot of people take others for granted, especially in my family. She does a lot and nobody, I don't hear anybody say thank you or tell her that they love her, nothing. For me to get the opportunity to honor her in such a way and show other people who don't even know her it was just a good opportunity and then when I showed it to her...I can't express how it made her feel.
>
> Frank: Tell me a little about that, how did she respond to like you doing something about her in a class?

> Marie: At first she was like, 'Why did you do that about me? You should have done it about your mom, or something.' And I was like, 'well yeah but even though I don't spend every day with you, like I would like, I just want to show everybody how strong you are... you as a person and then after that she accepted the idea she's like, 'that's so sweet, wow you're so nice, you're so special', all that.

Regardless of the project or learning unit that students were working on at the time, youth shared what they were learning with their family members and this often enhanced their familial relationships.

> Frank: Oh, that's cool. So, you've kind of been sharing some of the stuff you've been learning about with your parents and family members?
>
> Gloria: Yeah, I always do. I always try to tell them, "Oh, this is exciting stuff that we've been learning in class."
>
> Frank: How have they reacted to it? Have they been pretty fascinated and interested?
>
> Gloria: Yeah. My dad is interested. Because, he didn't have ethnic studies in school. So, when I start telling him things that he hasn't learned about, his eyes widen. He's trying to listen to me. It's so fun seeing them. They'll help me with my homework because they want to learn what we're actually doing. So, it's pretty exciting just seeing how interested and intrigued they are.
>
> Frank: That's very cool. So, it's almost like you've become a teacher in a sense. Right?
>
> Gloria: Yeah.

These statements demonstrate that Ethnic Studies assignments and projects can positively shape students' relationships with family members. *Academic Familismo* born out of Ethnic Studies education strengthens these home familial bonds in ways that can also shape academic engagement and address a persistent issue in our public education system. First, when parents are more involved in their children's education, students tend

to academically excel (Anthony & Ogg, 2019; Villenas & Deyhle, 1999). Schools have struggled with involving parents, particularly those from marginalized communities, because these institutions fail at meaningfully including families in the educational process for their children (Yosso, 2005). From language barriers between teachers and parents to educators holding biases against BIPOC and working-class families, school officials have not made their institutions welcoming to diverse communities (Au 2009; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2006; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Ochoa, 2013; Valencia, 2010). This disconnect between schools and families from marginalized communities further compounds the historic academic gap between white and non-white students. Excluding families of color doesn't give these historically disadvantaged students the familial support they need to do better in school (Dueñas et al. 2019; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Ethnic Studies and *Academic Familismo* incorporate these diverse communities into the classroom through the curriculum and assignments that make BIPOC students' family backgrounds and histories an integral part of learning. My research shows that the inclusion of these families into the learning experience helps strengthen bonds between youths and their family members. Many students mentioned that when they shared their Ethnic Studies work with their families, family members became interested in the youths' learning and wanted to recreate various activities at home. This positive relationship at home will motivate students to continue their learning and share how they are doing in class with parents, which will increase youths' motivation to perform well in class.

Why Ethnic Studies: The importance of culturally relevant education for student success

Understanding the relationship between Ethnic Studies, culturally reflective materials taught in these courses, and academic performance that I flesh out with my analyses of these Ethnic Studies projects is important as we have greater conversations about education reform. Implementing Ethnic Studies courses that use culturally relevant curriculum, learning materials, and assignments can both increase student engagement and better serve students of color. One of the primary ways our education system has failed communities of color historically is by excluding their history and epistemologies from the mainstream curriculum. This has led to a persistent lag in academic achievement for students of color compared to white students (Brown & Rodríguez, 2009; Cabrera et al., 2014; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Ethnic Studies courses infuse that missing knowledge, history, and insights from these marginalized groups that students of these communities connect with both academically and personally. Consistent across all assignments I analyze for this project, students are more engaged with the class overall. This higher level of academic engagement has real material effects in terms of increased outcomes. "ES participation had large positive effects on each of our student outcomes. Specifically, ES participation increased student attendance (i.e., reduced unexcused absences) by 21 percentage points, cumulative ninth-grade GPA by 1.4 grade points, and credits earned by 23 credits" (Dee & Penner 2017, page 129). Indeed, as unearthed in previous research, Ethnic Studies courses encourage both quantitative and qualitative student achievement outcomes that bespeaks the potential of curricula and pedagogy to better serve students' learning overall.

While my project did not specifically examine quantifiable academic achievement, I do show how students thrived in the Ethnic Studies learning environment. Data points drawn from classroom observations, samples of students' work, and testimonials revealed the academic benefits and outcomes of Ethnic Studies. Briefly, students demonstrated their ability to read, write, speak, compute, pose and solve problems at sophisticated levels through these projects. Additionally, students could engage in multiple collaborative activities and communicate with each other effectively to solve problems. We can clearly see how students were able to perform exceptionally along these various academic measures through the samples of their work featured in various chapters. *Academic Familismo* in many ways helped to foster these types of academic outcomes as students' cultural and quotidian lives were interwoven into the curriculum where they could explore their backgrounds through project-based learning. Students built knowledge through investigating their families and communities with the various assignments I highlighted here. Ethnic Studies curriculum and pedagogies helped the students draw sources of resilience and determination from elements of their personal backgrounds while engaging with various course materials. Youth then shared this work with their classmates which created opportunities for students to connect with their peers in meaningful ways that made the overall educational experience more enriching. They bonded and identified with each other's familial backgrounds and provided social emotional support to their fellow learners in ways that made the class feel like a family.

As I've argued throughout this work, *Academic Familismo* helps students build important academic skills that will serve them well throughout their educational and

professional journey. Assignments that they completed in this course pushed them to do introspective research on their backgrounds in order to find important information and use theories and concepts from their texts to provide unique analysis. These projects asked students to consider how important their families are and develop complex projects or respond to analytical questions in order to show their individual family members helped youth succeed. Additionally, youth were charged with developing complex three-dimensional and visual projects for the *Dia de los Muertos* and *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project* assignments. These specific activities, along with others I didn't address in this work, require students to draft, develop, and problem solve given the nature of the projects. Students had to use their problem-solving skills when engaging with activities like *World Cafe* where they had to respond to analytical questions with statements, follow up questions, and visuals. Additionally, students had to work and share with their various classmates over the academic year. Many of the activities and assignments completed in the Ethnic Studies class had students speaking in small and large audiences, which helped to develop their public speaking and interpersonal communication skills. Lastly, we saw how students were able to analytical think and write through assignments like *World Cafe* and *Linguistic Lotería Identity Portrait Project.* Ethnic Studies pushes students to analyze their own lived experiences and those of their communities in order to show how social barriers have impacted them and their families as well as how each has thrived despite these hindrances. In totality, we see through my research how Ethnic Studies and *Academic Familismo* helped to build students' creative, problem solving, analytical, and critical thinking skills. These skills are vital for youth to have as they matriculate on to

higher education and/or the professional world (Dueñas, et al. 2019; Hung, Smith, Voss, Franklin, Gu, & Bounsanga, 2020). As our national and global society moves toward a more knowledge and technical based economy requiring individuals to communicate and collaborate with others from diverse backgrounds to solve our most pressing social problems, these skills that students develop in Ethnic Studies courses will be vital for them to thrive.

Furthermore, these courses help students build their academic identity, something that our current education system rarely does for marginalized youth (Collins, 2009; hooks, 2003; Kozol, 2005; Valenzuela, 2010; Sojoyner 2016). The lack of culturally diverse, reflective, and representative curriculum as well as the overwhelming whiteness in our education system in terms of faculty and administrators has made it extremely difficult for students to connect their learning and schooling generally (Sleeter, 2001; Rodríguez, 2008; Ochoa, 2013). Our increasingly diverse student population has rich sources of knowledge and insight that can be utilized by educators to explore our societal histories and social realities so that youth have a keen understanding of the world around them (Au, 2009; Gonzalez et al., 2006; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). What I have shown through this project is that Ethnic Studies taps into learners' backgrounds to highlight the educational assets they have that will help them achieve in schools. Incorporating youths' familial, cultural, and community backgrounds provided them with opportunities to connect with the course that made learning more enriching and engaging as evidenced by the numerous data points highlighted in various chapters. Additionally, classmates built important relationships that made the course more engaging where students wanted to

work together on projects and activities as well as give important feedback and encouragement on various completed assignments. As students completed this coursework, they came to understand how important their personal identity and background was to the shared learning in the class and forging peer bonds. Thus, their individual identities that were originally seen as merely personal were transformed into academic identities that were integral to the educational experience of the course. Ethnic Studies building academic identities in this way again further connects youth to the curriculum and course in a way that bolster their academic performance. As students see that their identity matters to their own learning as well as their peers' education, they want to be in their classes and engage in course work.

This project fills significant gaps in the existing literature in that I show how the Ethnic Studies curriculum and learning environments shape students' social realities and academic outcomes. Scholarship on these courses focuses on quantitative academic outcomes, students experiences with the classes generally, or center on theoretical discussions about applying Ethnic Studies at various educational levels (Au, 2009; Acosta, 2013; Cabrera et al., 2014; de los Rios, 2017a; Dee & Penner, 2017; Dueñas et al., 2019; Kwon & de los Ríos, 2019; Romero, 2010; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Zavala, 2018). My work shows how various elements of the Ethnic Studies curriculum help students build important academic identities and relationships that lead to better outcomes and higher levels of engagement. Scholars can use *Academic Familismo* that I developed through my research as an analytical tool to understand how students form meaningful connections Ethnic Studies courses and learning communities. This grounded

theory may be useful in future investigations of these courses and other related classes like Women/Gender, (Dis)Ability, and Social Justice education classes are developed in the K-12 education system. What we can chiefly discern from this work is that Ethnic Studies bolsters students' education engagement, peer and family connections, and helps them develop a strong sense of academic identity.

Understanding how these courses impact students in these nuanced ways is important as we see a greater push to mandate Ethnic Studies in the K-12 and higher education systems (Tintiangco-Cubales, Kholi, Sacramento, Henning, Argarwal-Rangnath, & Sleeter, 2015). What educators and education stakeholders can learn from my work is how these curricular points benefit students both socially and academically. We are seeing a growing movement across the U.S. to have these types of courses adopted in our school system (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). Those who want to advocate for having these courses and curriculum can use evidence highlighted in my chapters to show how these courses help youth thrive academically. Additionally, assignments I feature in this work can be adopted by or adapted for other classrooms in an effort to provide students with Culturally Relevant Curriculum. Thus, my work also has important implications for education reform as my findings and data show why students need access to this curriculum specifically because of how beneficial it is.

In the following section, I discuss the importance of *Cariño* methodology in working with youth of color and marginalized communities. This methodological approach helped me fully engage with my participants in a way that I was also able to experience *Academic Familismo* as I aligned my role as a researcher to supporting the

student's education and social well-being while I collected my data. I meditate here on how researchers and institutions can utilize *Cariño* based approaches to better serve their affiliate communities through data collection and advocacy. Scholars can use this research practice to build relationships with communities in order to study their quotidian realities and use this information to change participants' material conditions. Like with my data, research conducted through a *Cariño* framework can give back to study participants when data is used to reform efforts and public policy development.

Cariño Methodology: Caring and Advocating for Research Participants and Communities

> Olivia: Yeah. You guys are not just a teacher that'd be like, "Oh finish this." That's it. And then no conversation. You guys are more like "So what's going on? How you guys been?"
> Frank: "How's it going with your family?" That kind of thing. Does that kind of add to that familial dynamic that you were kind of describing in a sense?
> Olivia: Yeah, like a family? These are like our uncles talking to us.

Olivia's statement above captures the sense that students had about how Mr. Garcia and I interacted with the class over the academic year, *these are like our uncles talking to us.* What she is getting at here is that we, the instructor and researcher, built a familial relationship with the students that also worked to foster the general sense of *Academic Familismo* felt in the classroom. When I originally set out to conduct this ethnography and explore how students interacted with Ethnic Studies, I wanted to blend in seamlessly with their quotidian classroom realties. I also felt indebted to serve the school community and students through my work because I believed in the power of Ethnic Studies to support students' academic and social growth. My sentiments about Ethnic Studies stem

specifically from my desire to study education frameworks that better serve students, particularly those from marginalized communities. In other words, I care about kids and their education. Conducting this research from a caring perspective helped me build important relationships with my community and participants. The *Cariño* relationships I forged with students helped to create meaningful and trusting interview environments where students felt comfortable sharing their insights about the Ethnic Studies classroom as if they were discussing the class with a family member. These conversations with participants yielded amazing insights about the academic and social impacts of Ethnic Studies, as seen throughout my chapters.

I developed this sense of care for youths' education through my own experiences with K-12 schooling that harmed more than helped me. I specifically wanted to improve the education systems to better serve youth who came from similar backgrounds as my own. Also, my *Cariño* based research approach stems in part from this awareness of our problematic public education system and follows what scholars have been meditating on in-terms of working with youths and communities (Duncan-Andrade, 2006; Valenzuela, 2010). The concept of *Cariño* emerged from Valenzuela's path breaking study on Mexican and Mexican American students where she showed how teachers and school environments didn't adequately care for youth in a way that ensured their social-emotional health and academic growth. Her project shows that youth thrive when educators take the time to fully understand their students. This includes teachers learning about and appreciating students' cultures, communities, and educational interests (Valenzuela, 2010). Jeff Duncan-Andrade (2006) extended this idea of *Cariño* into a

research methodology where he discusses how researchers should approach a community from a similar sense of care. He argues that scholars need to care about research participants, building their scholarly endeavors around helping their study community get the resources they have been deprived of due to various forms of social injustice. A *Cariño* informed researcher seeks to study the specific needs of a community informed by what the study population wants the scholar to focus on. *Cariño* research may also involve studying a social issue that impacts a community that the researcher belongs to or can improve the social institutions that disparately impact a marginalized group. Regardless of the aim of the study, researchers provide support and service to their study community during the data collection process. This service can include supporting the community with everyday needs and using data and findings from the project to advocate for the participants (Duncan-Andrade, 2006). *Cariño* researchers are ones that wish to study a community to understand their realities and experiences thereby producing new knowledge on a subject while also using their data and position as academics to better the material conditions of their participants. Like with *Cariño* education where teachers seek to imbue students with knowledge and make sure youths are taken care of socially and emotionally, approaching research in this way means caring both about developing scholarship about a topic while also ensuring that your community is cared for and empowered through the research.

Ethnic Studies pedagogies and this research following the traditions of the field embody aspects of *Cariño* in that the motivation for teaching and scholarship stem from a deep sense of care for embattled communities. Ethnic Studies as an educational

framework and social justice movement emerged to honor the stories and perspectives of marginalized groups. Students and scholars wanted to showcase their communities' insights in education because of a sense of love and care for their peoples. Now, this field's education practitioners draw academic insights from their students to meaningfully include their classroom communities' insights into the learning process. I saw this in IE High's Ethnic Studies classroom where Mr. Garcia designed a curriculum and learning experience where students' personal and cultural backgrounds drove the learning process. My work was also informed by this nexus between Ethnic Studies and *Cariño* that I wanted to highlight stories and perspectives from underserved students that could be used to improve our educational system. I, like Mr. Garcia and the Ethnic Studies founders, set out to build important academic insights from the voices of those not traditionally found in mainstream learning materials. I centered my work because I care about youth and want to do all I can to improve the school conditions that they and future generations will have to navigate in order to end social injustices that Ethnic Studies activist have been fighting against for generations.

I situated my work and designed my research around a *Cariño* based methodology where I actively engaged with the school community working with both students and teachers on matters related to the Ethnic Studies course. I regularly worked with and alongside students through participating in class discussions, activities, and presentations as if I was a teacher assistant or someone enrolled in the classroom. As I shared in chapter five, students came to expect my contribution to course conversations and I facilitated several activities and lessons while conducting my research. Over the course of

my fieldwork, I discussed my research, my educational and cultural background, and brought my toddler daughter to the class so that students got to know me and my family personally so that they could connect with me following the *Academic Familismo* and *Cariño* frameworks. I also helped students with college applications, with navigating the best options for selecting higher education institutions, wrote letters of recommendation for participants' scholarship applications, and gave them social and emotional support as needed. I wanted to serve the students and share with them who I was to ensure I built trust as well as community. I indeed was able to connect with students in the class and participants shared deep and profound insights with me through the process of my fieldwork and during interviews. We in effect exchanged parts of our identity and experiences during the research, which follows the ethos of *Cariño* methodology. A *Cariño* research framework is one where the researcher gives more than he extracts from the community he studies. This was also true of the way in which I worked with Mr. Garcia while I conducted my study. I worked closely with Garcia, helping with facilitating assignments and developing his curriculum over the academic year. I provided him with classroom and instructional support while in the classroom to show my appreciation for allowing me to collect data. I also helped with promoting his course to other colleagues and the wider campus community so that we could showcase the amazing work he and his students were doing through Ethnic Studies. I, again, gave of myself to individuals involved in my work because of my *Cariño* research approach where I wanted to aid my research community to show my gratitude for allowing me to collect data about their lived experiences. I think that it is monumentally important for

scholars and academic institutions to adopt this ethos of caring and *Cariño* about our communities as we move forward with research on and service for marginalized groups.

It is well known that the academy and scholars across the gamut of academic disciplines have (mis)used BIPOC Communities to construct understandings about the social world, develop and sustain ideas about race, racial difference, and racism, and to garner academic accolades (Da Silva 2007; De Genova, 2005). Specifically, much of the previous anthropological and sociological research has done more to entrench problematic thinking and theories about race and racial difference rather than leading to the empowerment or justice for BIPOC and marginalized groups (Hale & Hale, 2008; Sudbury & Okazawa-Rey, 2015). Given this troubling history, I believe that researchers and research institutions need to reconsider their role in developing academic inquiries and scholarship that will serve rather than harm these subjugated and exploited populations. The academy can address this extractive and harmful past by adopting a *Cariño* ethos and methodologies when developing new projects and relationships with study populations. Again, *Cariño* research aims to study how forms of societal and systemic injustice impact historically marginalized communities. Additionally, this research should develop institutional and policy recommendations that can advance equity and justice for these groups. *Cariño* research is not merely about collecting data and developing scholarship about a topic; rather, it aims to provide data driven resources and recommendations to support underserved communities (Duncan-Andrade, 2006). I provide here a model for thinking about *Cariño* oriented research praxes between scholars, institutions, and communities

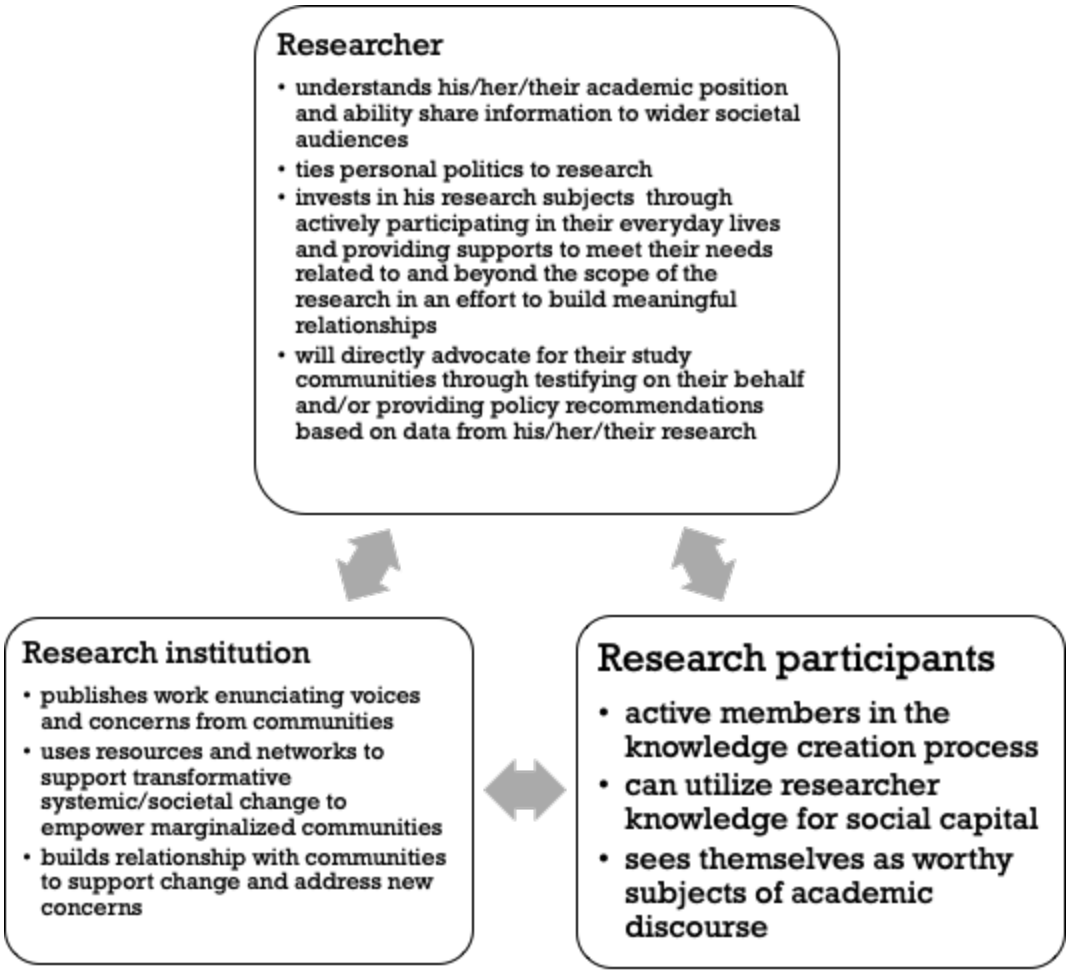

Figure 17: Cariño model for research relationship

This model outlines a relationship between the three parties where each contributes to the knowledge production process as equal partners. Within this framework, the onus is placed on the academic and the institution to use their positional power to bring awareness to issues facing their study participants and populations to transform the material conditions of those most marginalized. *Cariño* research praxes provide a pathway for correcting the notoriously problematic relationship between academia and BIPOC groups by centering academic inquiries on investigating persistent social justice issues and developing methods for change. This methodological framework will help

academia amend the ways in which it had been complacent with and/or complicit in the subordination of various communities and reorients institutions and institutional agents to actively deal with persistent and future social issues.

A summary of my findings from my research and this recommendation about scholarly praxes are important take-aways from this broader discussion about Ethnic Studies in K-12 schools. While my work provides an in-depth view into what learning looks like in these classrooms with a specific how this curriculum impacts students' social and academic relationships, my project was limited and more work needs to be done on this matter. In the next section I discuss the limits of my project and ways that future scholars can build from my work.

Limitations of my Projects and Future Directions of Research on Ethnic Studies

My first of its kind Ethnic Studies ethnography adds an important knowledge on the importance of Ethnic Studies to our K-12 students. However, this work has important limitations that I want to note to be both transparent about my research and provide recommendations on how we can continue to study the impacts of this educational framework. First, I must address that this research is qualitative by nature following constructivist and inductive approaches to data collection and analysis. Qualitative research aims at capturing the lived experiences of individuals within a subject matter and building theories from observational and interview data. In my case, I observed about 50 students actively enrolled in two sections of the course over an academic year and interviewed about 20 of these youths. I also interviewed an additional 15 students who completed the class the previous year. I also collected students' sample completed

assignments and numerous photos of youth interacting in the classroom as textual data. While this study community (sample size), length of field work, and these data collection practices (observational/conversational/textual) yielded robust information about the nuanced impacts of Ethnic Studies pedagogies and curriculum on students learning there is more work to be done on this matter. I did try to understand the short- and long-term effects of this learning environment by having conversations with two different cohorts of students but I wasn't able to continue studying either of these groups beyond the timeframe of my fieldwork. Also, much of the "hard" data was derived from pictures and samples of students engaging in Ethnic Studies education. This body of data gives us important clues about the nature of this educational framework as well as how youth directly benefit from engaging with it. However, I must note that these findings cannot be generalized nor predict how students will engage with Ethnic Studies education. The compounding testimonial evidence derived from multiple cohorts of students I provide here suggests that we can make some conclusions about how Ethnic Studies supports youths' social interactions and academic performance. But I cannot say with certainty that the outcomes of the course or a similar study like this can be replicated given the qualitative nature of my project.

Given that this work is qualitative, I must also note that these findings stem from a subjective analytical standpoint and this work is not objective nor conclusive. My conclusions stem from my personal experiences in the classroom and data I gathered from my observations of and conversations with students. My ability to collect rich data stemmed in part from the type of relationships that I built with the class and campus. As

previously mentioned, my work is informed by a *Cariño* methodology where I built trust with my research participants through sharing my personal background and providing support to Ethnic Studies students and the wider IE High campus community. Additionally, I was able to connect with the students given that I was Latinx, had lived in the Inland Empire for almost two decades, and came from a similar working class and immigrant family background. Students were able to identify with me as I understood and could relate to their cultural and biographical experiences. This made me what is commonly known as an *insider*, a researcher who comes from the community that they are studying (Contreras, 2017; Hale & Hale, 2008). My insiderness allowed me to develop a rapport with students in ways that someone of a different race, ethnicity, class status, and/or gender identity could not. My specific identity and methodological approach in many ways informs, shapes, and limits this research both in scope and replicability. Despite these facts, I did my utmost to maintain empiricism throughout my research. I followed strict standards of ethnographic research where I developed university and school district approved data collection instruments as well as carefully collected and analyzed my data following qualitative scholarly standards. Thus, while I cannot claim that this work is objective nor predictive, the sample I used, my extensive fieldwork, the diverse data set collected, and the empirical standards I followed shows that this work meets the highest academic standards. The scholarly community can use the *Academic Familismo* concept I developed or *Cariño* methodology I utilized in future research as well as potentially make generalizations about Ethnic Studies based on my findings.

My project has important implications for future research. One important way that we can better understand the nature of the academic impact of these courses is to conduct longitudinal studies of students who take these courses to show how they perform academically beyond completing the initial class. These longitudinal studies can focus on either examining how students perform in other academic courses or in additional Ethnic Studies classes. This type of work can verify the long term academic and social impacts of Ethnic Studies on students thereby showing how important these classes are to support student learning. Again, one of the persistent issues in education has been increasing students of color academic engagement and the persistent achievement gap between White and non-white youth. youth of color have been unable to meaningfully connect with mainstream curriculum and pedagogies within the public education system because these learning materials feature only White history, culture, and perspective (Loewen, 2008; Yosso, 2014). Studying how Ethnic Studies courses can impact long-term academic engagement would provide helpful evidence to support policies mandating that schools offer these courses. Additionally, I was unable to compare students' academic performance across various classes because my focus was on the experiences of students within the Ethnic Studies course. I featured in previous chapters various participant testimonials that discussed the clear differences between Ethnic Studies and traditional classes. Their statements provide clues as to why students would do better in Ethnic Studies courses compared to other classes. However, more data is needed to show students perform differently and form peer relationships across these courses. This comparative data can be used to enhance existing courses and inform policy on including

culturally relevant education in public school curriculum. Lastly, we need more quantitative data on the academic outcomes for students who take these courses. Emergent research on Ethnic Students and its effects on academic performance show that students who complete these courses have better attendance rates, test scores, and GPA scores (Cabrera et al., 2014; Dee & Penner, 2017; Sleeter, 2011). Thus, we need more quantitative research that captures how these courses benefit students so that we can make important policy decisions that will expand Ethnic Studies course offerings and programs.

Supporting Ethnic Studies: My Recommendations and Final Reflections

This project has given the scholarly community profound insight into the nature of Ethnic Studies education and how students engage with this form of education. Through this work, I have seen how learning this curriculum can support students' social-emotional well-being and academic achievement. My conversations with participants have also given me insight as to how we can think about future education policy that can support and expand these programs and support the teachers of these courses. Before I give my closing statement on this research, I provide some recommendations below as to how we can grow Ethnic Studies in order to honor the sentiments of my participants and better serve students like them who also come from marginalized communities.

1) Ethnic Studies is vital to building student interest in learning generally and specifically about our cultural differences. This work shows how these courses increase academic engagement and multicultural appreciation. Thus, I recommend that schools adopt at least one general Ethnic Studies course in order to promote cultural awareness and bolster youth desire to learn within and beyond initial courses.

2) While providing at least one Ethnic Studies course could be considered enough to deal with persistent education issues and provide the increasingly diverse student body with an education that reflects their respective cultural backgrounds, a single class is not enough. I consistently had students from both cohorts of IE High's Ethnic Studies courses state that they wished the school offered more classes. The initial class had sparked their curiosity to learn more about other cultures. So, it is vital that schools consider adopting multiple courses like Chicanx/Latinx, African American, Asian American, and Native American Studies courses in order to provide students with a plethora of opportunities to learn about the various cultures and social realities of the communities around them.
3) Schools must do more to allow students to explore their family history through their assignments. I found that coursework focused on students' familial backgrounds both increased their interest in completing projects and enhanced their kin relationships. Additionally, participants mentioned that their parents became more interested in their schooling after sharing about Ethnic Studies. Increasing parent of color engagement with their youth's schooling has been shown to increase students' academic performance (Gonzalez et al., 2006; Redding, Langdon, & Meyer, 2004). Thus, providing youth with either Ethnic Studies curriculum, course work in other academic disciplines, or both that focuses on exploring their families' histories, cultures, and accomplishments can bolster both student and parent educational engagement.
4) It was truly an honor to work with Mr. Garcia and in his classroom. Like many public-school teachers of color, he is overworked and not provided sufficient resources (Kohli, 2009). With regard to Ethnic Studies, IE High nor its district provided him with the adequate support to build and refine his course and curriculum. Rather, I saw Garcia invest heavily in building his Ethnic Studies curriculum so that students could have an enriching learning experience. Photos I feature in previous chapters show how students engaged and benefited from Garcia's course. Thus, we must provide Ethnic Studies teachers with appropriate resources, professional learning opportunities, and course release time/prep periods that will allow Ethnic Studies educators to develop effective courses.
    a) Building from what I mentioned above, schools and districts will have to make a concerted effort to recruit new and existing faculty to teach these courses. A foreseeable challenge with growing Ethnic Studies in our K-12 schools will be finding qualified and vested educators who want to teach these courses. So, institutional stakeholders will need to scour their faculty ranks for educators willing and prepared to lead the course and curriculum development process. Additionally, districts will need to partner with

teacher training programs to ensure that the next generation of educators are prepared to teach Ethnic Studies. District and teacher education program partnerships should also focus on developing pathways for trained and willing Ethnic Studies educators to get well paid positions at school sites. The only way to make Ethnic Studies sustainable for generations to come is to ensure that existing faculty have the resources they need to teach Ethnic Studies effectively and actively solicit new educators to teach these courses.

5) Providing Ethnic Studies for all students is important to deal with many of the persistent issues in our education system that I have outlined in this work as well as provide our students with enriching learning opportunities. However, we need to also consider how we can provide youth with other courses focused on Gender and Sexualities, (Dis)Ability, and Environmental Studies courses that advance related forms of social justice. Many participants noted that they wanted more specific Ethnic Studies classes as well as courses focused on Women and LGBT+ issues and experiences. I concur that it is important to offer courses that focus on Race and Ethnicity as well as Gender and Sexuality. It is safe to assume that courses focused on the struggles of other marginalized groups with increased students' awareness of and compassion for these communities like we have seen with Ethnic Studies. Thus, we must also develop and implement Feminist, LGBT+, Disability, and Environmental Justice studies education to educate youth on other pressing issues facing our society and provide them with tools to combat these injustices.

I am extremely thankful that I was able to research Ethnic Studies in the K-12 context to understand how this educational framework supports students' social and academic well-being. Spending a year in the classroom, watching youth work, seeing amazing projects, and developing important insights from witnessing this learning dynamic first-hand not only enriched my understanding of what we can do with education but also spurred me to fight for Ethnic Studies to be implemented in our K-12 schools. Personally, I wished I had access to these courses in my youth. I took my first Ethnic Studies course my last year of undergraduate studies. As I conducted my research,

I developed the same interest for learning this culturally relevant curriculum as many of the students had. Seeing how students engaged with this curriculum and built important relationships with peers while also enhancing their familial bonds made me realize what our school system has been missing for decades. Schools have deprioritized familial learning to emphasize basic skills and *traditional* academic competencies (Lipman, 2013). Our public education system's focus on traditional fields of knowledge has led to generations of students disconnecting from learning, myself included. Ethnic Studies has real potential to make school engaging and build student interest that is often diminished by our current curricular focus. Centering learning through students' experiences and cultures infuses their personal identity into the classroom. As I have argued here, bringing students' backgrounds into the curriculum helps to build youths' academic identities that will also motivate them to perform better in school. Additionally, including students' personal elements such as their culture and family history is an act of loving these youths' whole selves. Learning is an act of love and should be rooted in the people, communities, and cultures around us. Consider that our first teachers are often our parents, siblings, and grandparents who share how we should treat each other and honor our cultural histories. Schools have not done enough to provide this loving learning environment for our youth, which has led to disastrous consequences particularly for BIPOC Kids. So, incorporating and focusing on youths' backgrounds and making this a central feature of learning reframes education as an act of loving youth and merging their personal and academic identities.

This project gives important evidence of the overall impact of Ethnic Studies curriculum, which can be used for future public-school reform policies. *Academic Familismo* will provide scholars with a new framework to consider how education and specific curriculum impacts students' relationship with school and their peers. We definitely need to continue studying this Ethnic Studies and *Academic Familismo* to show how necessary infusing BIPOC communities' history, cultures, and social realities can help us better understand and appreciate all social groups in our society. As we emerge from the Trump era and the COVID moment, providing students with Ethnic Studies courses and curriculum that will help them build *academic familismo* thereby bringing our diverse youths and communities together. I urge educators and P-20 school system leaders to adopt these courses to celebrate and love the diversity in our society. Let's bring students together through an education that helps them build family connections, empowers their academic identities, and pushes them to learn more and begin to actively change the world around them.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1 IRB Consent Forms

(Current Ethnic Studies Student Participants)

Title of Study: Why We Need Ethnic Studies Now! IE: Education Justice History, Action, and Curriculum Implementation to Better Serve Students of Color

Principal Investigator:
Franklin C. Pérez, PhD Student
Ethnic Studies, University of California Riverside
Study Contact Telephone Number: (951) 719-7264
Study Contact Email: fpere009@ucr.edu

Dear Student,

I am inviting you to participate in a study about your Chicano Studies class and its impact on your sense of identity and overall academics. The purpose of the study is to understand how Ethnic Studies/Chicano Studies classes help students better understand their culture and do better in school overall. This study will be conducted by Frank Perez, a doctoral candidate and graduate student researcher from the University of California, Riverside. This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. I encourage you to contact me with any questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep. We are excited about this project and we hope to learn from you about excellence in the local schools.

- **Procedures**

You are being asked to participate in an individual interview that will take place after school and to be observed during the regular school day. Interviews will be conducted on Tuesdays after-school after 6th period in Mr. Flores classroom or at a time and location most convenient for you. The interviews will be audio-recorded. I expect that your participation in this research will minimally interrupt your school day. However, your name will not be mentioned in any of the audio recordings or transcriptions. All interviews, observations, and engagement will be completed in consultation with the school and teachers. Only the University of California, Riverside Institutional Review Board (IRB) and I can access the data.

- **Compensation and Reimbursement**

You will be provided a $10 amazon gift card for participating in the study. I will provide you with the gift card at the end of the academic year. If you choose to withdraw from the study before completion, you will be provided with the tickets at the end of the academic year as well. Participation in the study is free of cost and no travel is necessary since the study will take place during the regular school day at your school site.

- **Risks**

Participation in this study poses minimal risk to you and other participants. During the interviews you will be audio-recorded. However, your name will not be associated with their interview or any other data. You may also ask not to be audio recorded at any time. However, there is no significant risk expected. Finally, all data will be collected solely for research purposes with prior consent and identifying characteristics such as your name will be kept confidential.

- **Benefits**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information gained from this research may help your school and other educational professionals develop new and improve existing Ethnic Studies courses and programs.

- **Withdrawal or Termination from Study**

You are able to end your participation from the study at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Withdrawal from the study will not impact your grade or evaluation in school.

- **Confidentiality**

All results of this research will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your name or other identifying features will not be used in any analysis or in any reporting of this research. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants, including yours, will remain anonymous. Only the University of California, Riverside Institutional Review Board (IRB) or I may access the data. IRB monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

- **Compensation for Injury**

If you are injured as a result of being in this study, the University of California will provide necessary medical treatment. The costs of the treatment may be billed to you or your insurer just like any other medical costs, or covered by the University of California or the study sponsor [Franklin C. Pérez], depending on the number of factors. The University and the study sponsor do not normally provide any other form of compensation for injury. For further information about this, you may contact the UCR Office of Research Integrity via telephone at 951-827-4802 or via email irb@ucr.edu.

- **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator, Franklin C. Pérez, via phone at (951) 719-7264 or email at fpere009@ucr.edu. Questions about your rights or complaints as a research subject should be addressed with the IRB Chairperson at (951) 827-4802 during business hours, or contact them by email at irb@ucr.edu.

- **Voluntary Participation**

Participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no and may change your mind at any time, refuse to answer certain questions, or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grade or evaluation in school.

- **Signature**

I have read this form and have decided to participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the details of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Printed Name of Student/Participant	**Signature** of Student/Participant	Date

(Former Current Ethnic Studies Student Participants)

Title of Study: Why We Need Ethnic Studies Now! IE: Education Justice History, Action, and Curriculum Implementation to Better Serve Students of Color

Principal Investigator:
Franklin C. Pérez, PhD Student
Ethnic Studies, University of California Riverside
Study Contact Telephone Number: (951) 719-7264
Study Contact Email: fpere009@ucr.edu

Dear Student,

I am inviting you to participate in a study about your previous Chicano Studies class and its impact on your sense of identity and overall academics. The purpose of the study is to understand how Ethnic Studies/Chicano Studies classes help students better understand their culture and do better in school overall. This study will be conducted by Frank Perez, a doctoral candidate and graduate student researcher from the University of California, Riverside. This consent form will give you the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. I encourage

you to contact me with any questions at any time. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

- **Procedures**

You are being asked to participate in an individual interview that will take place after school and to be observed during the regular school day. Interviews will be conducted on Tuesdays after-school after 6th period in Mr. Flores classroom or at a time and location most convenient for you. The interviews will be audio-recorded, you may also request to not have your interview recorded at any time prior or during the interview. I expect that your participation in this research will minimally interrupt your school day. However, your name will not be mentioned in any of the audio recordings or transcriptions. All interviews, observations, and engagement will be completed in consultation with the school and teachers. Data from the study will be reported to the school and district administrations as well as your district's school board. While I will present data related to the study to various school and district officials, I will not share any identifying data about you so that your identity can remain confidential. Only the University of California, Riverside Institutional Review Board (IRB) and I can access the data.

- **Compensation and Reimbursement**

You will be provided a $10 amazon gift card for participating in the study. I will provide you with the gift card at the end of the academic year. If you choose to withdraw from the study before completion, you will be provided with the tickets at the end of the academic year as well. Participation in the study is free of cost and no travel is necessary since the study will take place during the regular school day at your school site.

- **Risks**

Participation in this study poses minimal risk to you and other participants. During the interviews you will be audio-recorded. However, your name will not be associated with their interview or any other data. You may also ask not to be audio recorded at any time. However, there is no significant risk expected. Finally, all data will be collected solely for research purposes with prior consent and identifying characteristics such as your name will be kept confidential.

- **Benefits**

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. However, the information gained from this research may help your school and other educational professionals develop new and/or improve existing Ethnic Studies courses and programs.

- **Withdrawal or Termination from Study**

You are able to end your participation from the study at any time. You may refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Withdrawal from the study will not impact your grade or evaluation in school.

- **Confidentiality**

All results of this research will be treated with strict confidentiality. Your name or other identifying features will not be used in any analysis or in any reporting of this research. The results of this study may be published or presented at professional meetings, but the identities of all research participants, including yours, will remain anonymous. Only the University of California, Riverside Institutional Review Board (IRB) or I may access the data. IRB monitors research studies to protect the rights and welfare of research participants. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

- **Compensation for Injury**

If you are injured as a result of being in this study, the University of California will provide necessary medical treatment. The costs of the treatment may be billed to you or your insurer just like any other medical costs, or covered by the University of California or the study sponsor [Franklin C. Pérez], depending on the number of factors. The University and the study sponsor do not normally provide any other form of compensation for injury. For further information about this, you may contact the UCR Office of Research Integrity via telephone at 951-827-4802 or via email irb@ucr.edu.

- **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about participation in this study, you should first talk with the investigator, Franklin C. Pérez, via phone at (951) 719-7264 or email at fpere009@ucr.edu. Questions about your rights or complaints as a research subject should be addressed with the IRB Chairperson at (951) 827-4802 during business hours, or contact them by email at irb@ucr.edu.

- **Voluntary Participation**

Participation is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no and may change your mind at any time, refuse to answer certain questions, or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Whether you choose to participate or not will have no effect on your grade or evaluation in school.

- **Signature**

I have read this form and have decided to participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the details of involvement and possible risks have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand I can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

_____please indicate (Y/N) here if you choose to not be interviewed. Y indicating yes that you would like to be interviewed. N indicating that you would like to not be interviewed.

_____ _____

Printed Name of Student/Participant	**Signature** of Student/Participant	Date

Appendix 2 Interview Protocols

Former Student Interview Protocol

1) What motivated you to take this Ethnic Studies class?
2) How was taking this class different from your experiences with other/"traditional classes"?
3) Why was it important for you to take this class? Would you take another Ethnic Studies course if they were available?
4) Were you inspired by the course? In what ways?
5) Do you feel you connected with other students in the Ethnic Studies class? If so, how?
a. How are the relationships that you made in the Ethnic Studies class different than friendships/relationships that you make in other classes/school generally?
6) Tell me about your relationship with your Ethnic Studies teacher? Do you feel more connected to this teacher than others? If so, why?
7) Would you recommend Ethnic Studies classes to other students? What is the biggest reason you think students should take these courses?
8) Tell you academic level (freshman/sophomore/junior/senior)?
9) How old are you?
10)How do you racially/ethnically identify?
11) How do you identify with regard to your gender?

Current Student Interview Protocol

1) What motivated you to take this Ethnic Studies class?
2) How is taking this class different from your experiences with other/"traditional classes"?
3) Why was it important for you to take this class? Would you take another Ethnic Studies course if they were available?
4) Are you inspired by the course? In what ways?
5) Do you feel you connected with other students in the Ethnic Studies class? If so, how?
a. How are the relationships that you made in the Ethnic Studies class different than friendships/relationships that you make in other classes/school generally?
6) Tell me about your relationship with your Ethnic Studies teacher? Do you feel more connected to this teacher than others? If so, why?
7) Would you recommend Ethnic Studies classes to other students? What is the biggest reason you think students should take these courses?
8) Tell you academic level (freshman/sophomore/junior/senior)?
9) How old are you?
10)How do you racially/ethnically identify?
11) How do you identify with regard to your gender?

Appendix 3 Ethnic Studies Assignment Informaton

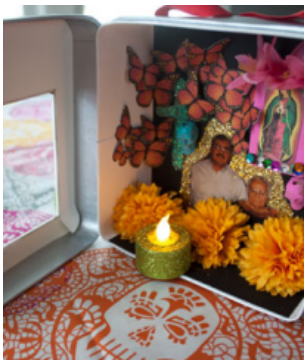
Dia de los Muertos – Shoebox Altar Project

Objectives(s):

- To create a creative, artistic, and thoughtful piece of work through hard work and effort.
- To culturally immerse ourselves in a tradition from a Spanish speaking country.

Final Product:

- A *Dia de los Muertos* miniature altar modeled by the *altares* made in Mexico during November 1st and 2nd of every year. These *altares* should be traditional with a personalized twist.

Altar Requirements	Altar Examples
Every altar should follow all the requirements of a traditional Mexican altar – remember, it has to be authentic, but personalize it. 1. Papel Picado (picked paper design) 2. Vela (candle – provide a fake one) 3. Cempazuchitl 4. Calaveras de Azucar (decorated skulls) 5. Pan de Muerto (Day of the Dead bread) 6. A photograph of the deceased 7. Something to drink (water, etc.) 8. Something to eat 9. Ofrendas (items of particular interest to the deceased) ** None of these items have to be real – feel free to think outside of the box and	*Use your shoebox in any way you'd like. Remember your altar has to have at least two level (in any way you want).*  

make a cup of water out of Play-Doh, or make cempazuchitl flowers out of paper, etc. Get creative! Extra Items (Challenge yourself): 1. Arch in the back 2. A path leading up to the shoebox altar (should be attached to the altar) 3. Calacas	

Project Timeline:

Activities	Due Dates
Assembling the structure of the altar.	
Begin covering, decorating, and creating altar.	
Critique Gallery Walk	
Continue working on finalizing altar.	
Final Altar due.	
Public Presentation	October 29th and October 30th

Final Draft Due Date: _____

Final Product Due Date: October 28th – public display in library on October 29th and 30th.

Mr. Garcia's World Café Breakdown

1. Students are assigned a reading (article/book) chapter that they read at home and in class over a period 1-2 days
2. Students are assigned to a randomized group of students the day prior to the in-class World Cafe activity
3. Mr. Garcia creates students group with different peers for each iteration of the activity so that they will have opportunities to connect with different individuals for each iteration of the assignment
4. Students are assigned to a starting station with a number that corresponds to their group number. The station includes markers, a large sheet of butcher paper, and a critical thinking question that all students in the class will respond to.
    a. Responses can be either a written response or a visual/drawing that symbolizes the way they answer the question.
5. Students are given 5-7 minutes to respond to the question. The time is brief to force them to think quickly and stay on task. Also, the response times need to be brief so that students can complete the activity within the class period.
6. Students rotate across several stations, responding to questions at each station during the class period.

. A key feature of this portion of the World Cafe assignment is that as students rotate stations, they review what previous groups wrote and/or drew in response to the station's question. In-coming groups to the station have a chance to consider what previous groups contributed to answering critical thinking questions and then respond themselves. This method of response is additive, meaning that each group adds to the consensus response to a particular question. Students while engaging in this activity are able to gain insights from their peers and add their perspective to a larger sourced response to a question, following a collaborative learning and knowledge building environment.

In my observations, students fill the entirety of response sheets with short statement responses and pictographs.

7. Mr. Garcia allows for a few minutes at the end of the period for the students to share thoughts about the assignment, important statements/pictures they saw at the various stations, or reflect on the process of engaging in the world cafe before the end of the period.
8. The following day, Mr. Garcia displays the World Cafe response sheets across the classroom to conduct the final two phases of the activity: Gallery Walk and *The Harvest.*

. Gallery walk consists of students perusing the response sheets and all their peers' contributions to answering the various questions. Students spend a short time reading over the ideas they and others presented while participating in the activity, keeping in mind that they will have to share what they review with the wider class during *The Harvest.*

a. *The Harvest* is a larger class activity where students "harvest" all of the knowledge developed through the assignments. Students gather in a circle, facing each other, and individually share important ideas\s they gathered over completing the World Cafe. Students at this phase of the assignment are gaining valuable knowledge from the peers while also sharing their perspectives thereby constructing a large source of academic insight from diverse perspectives. Essentially, they have come together collectively to tackle critical thinking questions and respond to them through incorporating everyone's interpretations.

Name: _____ Date / Period: _____

World Café Notes: Readings for Language and Identity

On Debrief World Café Day 2: From presentations and posters, respond in writing and/or visuals

Station	Source	Written and/or Visual Responses
Station 1	How does Cesar Chavez's words speak to our society today? "Once social change begins it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read."	
Station 2	Why does white privilege exist? Peggy McIntosh - "I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege…my school gave me no training to seeing myself as an oppressor."	
Station 3	On Language, by Tammy Gomez – Consider the entire poem and respond to the speaker's last two rhetorical questions: "So where do I pay? and What did you create?"	
Station 4	Gloria Anzaldua – "Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language." Why is ethnic and linguistic identity important and what issues arise by this?	

Station 5	Richard Rodriguez – Is it really possible to maintain your private speech (home language) and develop your public speech (school)? What is gained? What is lost? What is celebrated?	
Station 6	Gloria Anzaldua - How do Chicanos straddle borderlands? How are we crossroads to others? How does this influence or deny identity issues?	
Station 7	Gloria Anzaldua - How do *we* tame a wild (metaphorical) tongue? If so, who or what is doing the taming of wild tongues? If not, how do we celebrate wild tongues?	

World Café Notes: Readings for Language and Identity

On Debrief World Café Day 2: From presentations and posters, respond in writing and/or visuals

Station	Focus Question / Source	Written and/or Visual Responses
Station 8	In Cervantes' poem, explain the current relevance of stanza 5: "I'm marked by the color of my skin…" Why is skin color still an issue in our society today? Also, provide examples or connections.	
Station 9	Cervantes - How can we support each other in taking the next steps in ending racism? The speaker says: "Outside my door/there is a real enemy/who hates me."	

Station 10	Moraga says, "I was 'la guera': fair skinned…I had it made." Contrast this with Cervantes' idea of being "marked by the color my skin." What commentary are these authors suggesting to you, me, & society?	
Station 11	Explain the profound connection and reawakening Moraga felt when she says: "I lifted the lid to my lesbianism." What connections is she making to other people, other groups?	
Station 12	Regardless of any group you belong to, why does being silenced and oppressed prevent people from truly being free? Why is being silenced like starvation? How does silence affect race, class, and gender?	
Station 13	"The danger lies in ranking the oppression. The danger lies in failing to acknowledge the specificity of the oppression." What does this mean? Do we abandon oppressed people or do we become allies? Explain.	
Station 14	Moraga - "…it's frightening to acknowledge that I have internalized a racism and classism, where the object of oppression is not only someone outside of my skin, but the someone inside of my skin. In fact, to a large degree, the real battle with such oppression, for all of us, begins under the skin." What is the root of oppression? Why do people participate in systems of oppression?	

Linguistic Loteria Identity Portrait Project

This is a two-part project. You will create a *Loteria Identity Portrait*, and then you will write a synthesis essay. In the essay, you will explore and integrate the ideas mentioned by the authors in our readings from this unit and apply any concepts to how you are exploring your own languages and identity.

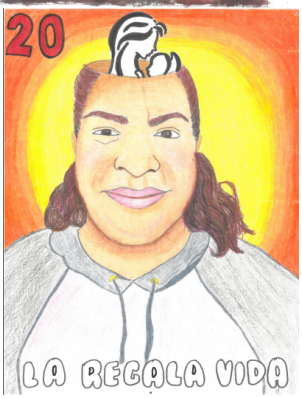
I. <u>Loteria Identity Portrait</u>:

1. As you have been exploring what shapes your linguistic identity, begin by choosing a person who has influenced you the most in your life so far. Who has helped mold and shape your language and identity? This person could be a

parent, a legal guardian, an aunt/uncle, family member, or a close long-time friend. Do not choose a celebrity!!!

2. Create an image that captures what this person does in his or her life. How do you see this person? Will you capture him/her at work, school, home, or somewhere else? What specifically about him/her influences your identity? We are mirrors of others.
3. Title the Loteria Portrait with a name of how you see this person. It could be more than one word. Refer to the visual examples included.
4. Add any other information to the Loteria Portrait that is associated with this person like: a number(s) or symbol(s). The number(s) could represent age, years you have known this person, or however you identify with the number.
5. Choose color(s) to cover the entire Loteria Portrait. Choose colors for your person and the background that truly captures this person's identity. The colors are a symbolic extension of the person. Mostly importantly, be creative!!!
6. Add any other creative elements that captures your person in the Loteria Identity Portrait.

Examples of Loteria Identity Portraits:



Loteria Identity Portrait Essay Guidelines

Throughout this fiscal year, we have been exploring and discussing issues related to language and identity. As you explore your own idea and the ideas presented by the authors from our literature, consider also framing your ideas around Tara Yosso's Cultural Wealth Model, particularly with Linguistic Capitol. Use the following writers' concepts as you begin discussing what language means, and what it means to you: Gloria Anzaldua, Cherri Moraga, and Lorena Dee Cervantes, and many others. You may also use any of the other selections of literature and poetry that has been presented to you in class. How could these writers frame your language and identity? What are their struggles? How have they overcome those struggles? How do you relate to them? How do you learn from them?

Writing Prompt: In this essay, use the person you chose for your Loteria Identity Portrait to write how his/her identity mirrors your own. What strengths have you learned from this person? How has this person helped shape your own language and identity. Most importantly, synthesize a few concepts that any of the authors mention, from the readings, that relate to your discussion on language and identity and also how it relates to your person from the Loteria Language Portrait.

II. Essay Guidelines:

Section 1: Introduction Paragraph

- Begin with a general overview of the person you chose to create a Loteria Identity Portrait. Define this person's identity and importance/influence to you.
- Follow all introduction protocols as taught in your English class – structured introduction.
- The final sentence of the introduction must be a thesis statement where you create a claim about why he/she is important to your own identity.

Section 2: Multiple Body Paragraphs

- Consider all the work (readings) we have done with issues facing your own linguistic landscape community. What issues stand out that your person and you have confronted in your life? How do these issues relate to your thesis?
- What challenges, obstacles, or identity issues did/does your person face in the world? Connect with any of the challenges facing any of the authors: Anzaldua, Morgara, or Cervantes or any others studied. Remember to cite or quote them, using MLA format, to support what you are saying in your essay.

Section 3: Conclusion

- What have you learned about your own identity through all of our readings so far? How does "*La Guera*" or "*How to Tame a Wild Tongue*" speak to your identity formation?

- Also, how will you use what you have learned to further develop your own language and identity? What challenges do you foresee in the future? What is the beyond for you?

Loteria Identity Portrait Due Date: _____ Essay Due Date: _____

Loteria Identity Portrait Final Project Student Responses

Title of your Loteria Identity Portrait: _____

Your Name: _____Period:_____

Student Reponses: