



# Confianza y Unidad: Building Better Relationships Amongst Students Through a Community-Grounded Praxis

Danielle Torrez

University of California, Los Angeles, Teacher Education Program



## Introduction

I am a social studies teacher at a large urban high school outside of downtown Los Angeles. My year-long critical teacher research project focuses on understanding how a community grounded praxis can facilitate trusting and caring relationships amongst my students. The project is grounded in the tenets of Ethnic Studies, according to Elexia Reyes McGovern and Tracy Lachica Buenavista (2016) and in the humanizing theories of Paulo Freire (1968) and Maria del Carmen Salazar (2013).

- **Ethnic Studies:** Curriculum that the study of race and ethnicity; it employs interdisciplinary methodologies in research, pedagogy, and serves to examine and dismantle systems of power. Elexia Reyes McGovern and Tracy Lachica Buenavista (2016)
- **Community-grounded praxis:** Centering my teaching and pedagogy around the needs of the community. – Elexia Reyes McGovern and Tracy Lachica Buenavista (2016)
- **Humanizing Pedagogy:** understanding of sociohistorical, sociopolitical, and sociocultural contexts of students' and teachers' lives – Maria del Carmen Salazar (2013)
- **Confianza:** mutual trust. - Salazar & Fránquiz, 2008

## Research Question

How can a community grounded praxis facilitate trusting and caring relationships amongst students?

## Methods

**Context:** My students are 10th graders in my Advisory class at a high school just outside of downtown Los Angeles. It is a predominantly Central American immigrant community. 8 of the students in this class are recently arrived to the country, as well as the school (less than 1 year).

### Participants:

	Grade Level	Gender	Classroom	Primary Language	# of Students
1	10	Female	Advisory/Pathways	Spanish	5
2	10	Male	Advisory/Pathways	Spanish	3
3	10	Female	Advisory/Pathways	English	9
4	10	Male	Advisory/Pathways	English	8

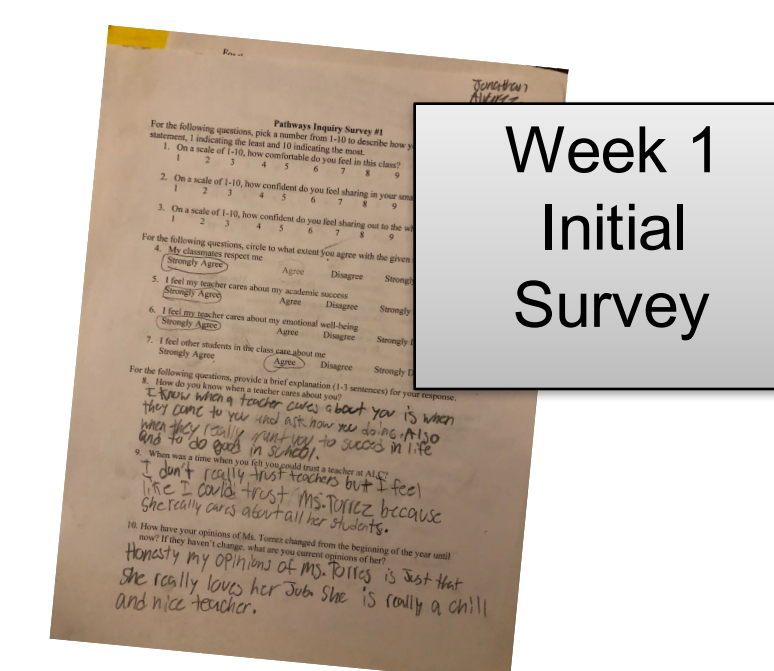
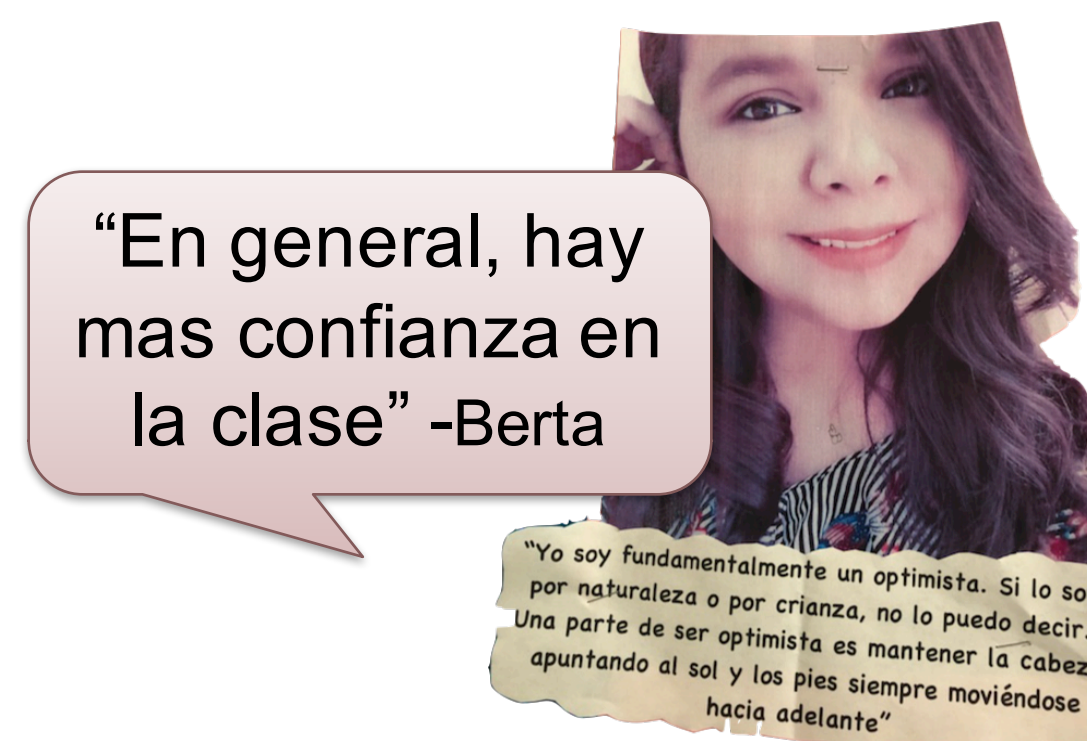
### Action Plan:

Week #	Objective	Data collected
1	Measure students' initial feelings about sense of belonging in class/school.	10 Question Survey
2	Generate on-one-one communication between myself and student in native language through community circle and focus group interviews	Journal Reflection on Community Circle Interview transcription
3	Encourage students to share with each other in English and Spanish through mixing seating & small group discussion	Journal Reflection on Process of Moving Seats
4	Students sharing with each other about themselves through student-led and centered project.	Journal Reflection on Community Circle
5	Working on Student-led Project	Photos Journal Reflection
6	Working on Student-led Project	Photos Journal Reflection
7	Measure student's final feelings about sense of community and identity in the Pathways class through community circle and focus group interview	Journal Reflection on Community Circle Interview transcription

## Findings

### #1: English Language Learners feel a greater sense of trust when given the opportunity to share their needs with me and other students.

- In the initial survey, students expressed that they knew a teacher cared about them when they were asked about their personal lives and even noticed when they were having a bad day.
- At the end of the action plan, the female cohort of primary Spanish speakers expressed a sense of *confianza* (trust) that they felt they had with other students in the class, a significant outcome given the fact that those same students had shared initially a lack of trust they felt with other students.



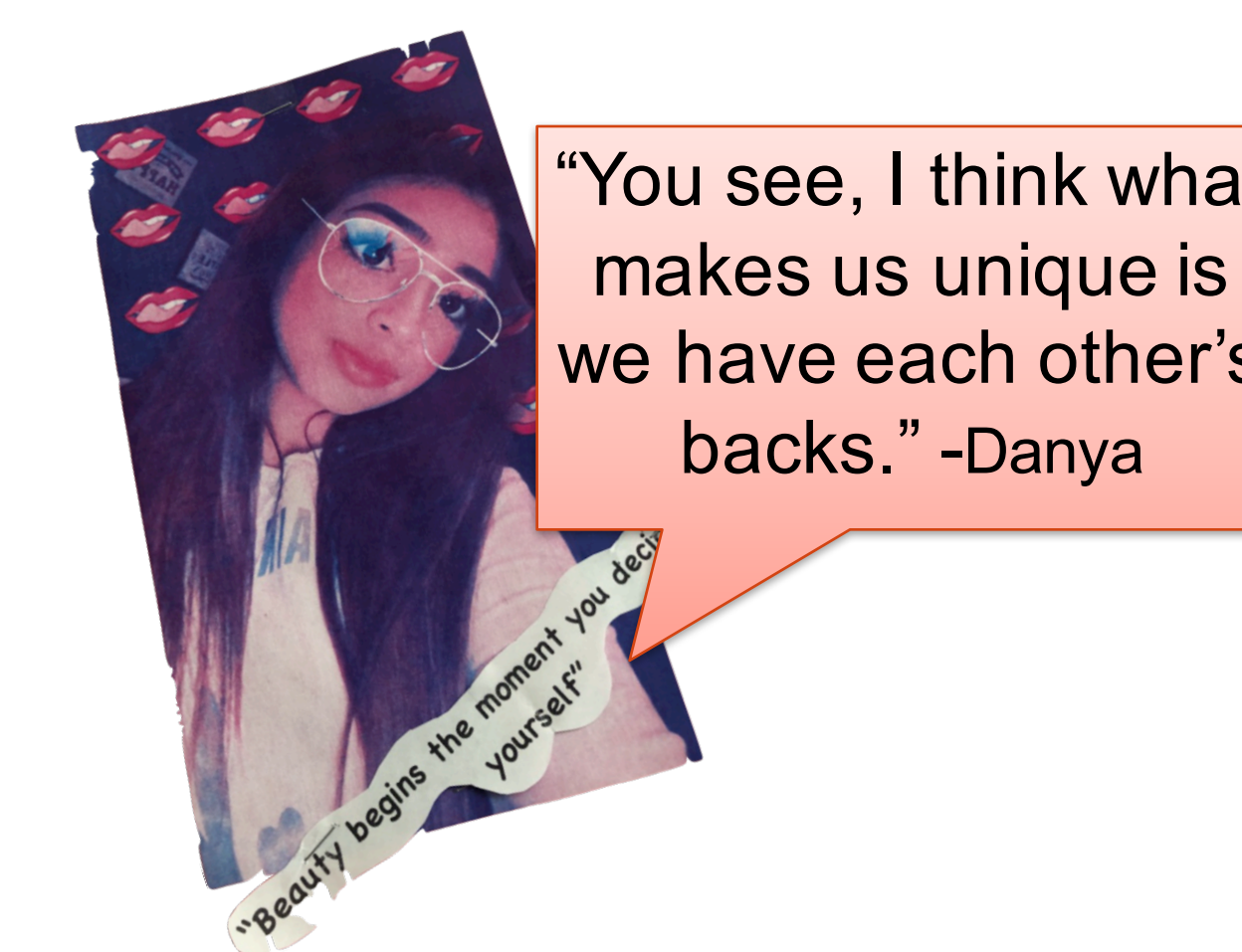
### #2: More unity within the class was created through changing the physical and emotional space of the classroom.

- Students, both primary English and Spanish speakers, expressed that they felt more unity in the class.
- Students sense of unity came from the fact that they were able to communicate more with each other in small groups and through the greater commitment to translating our community circles.



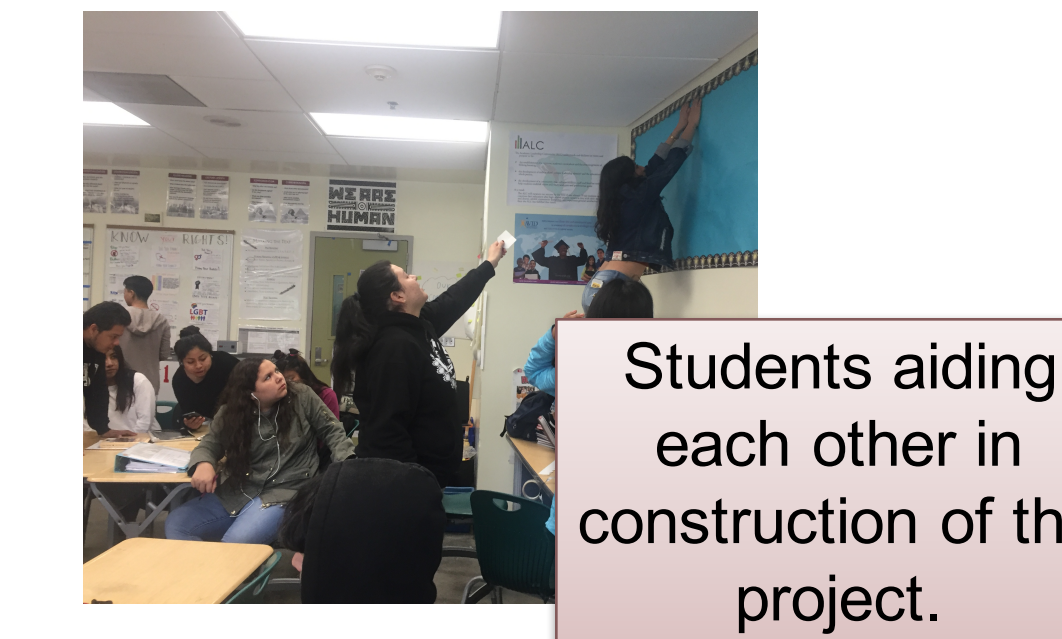
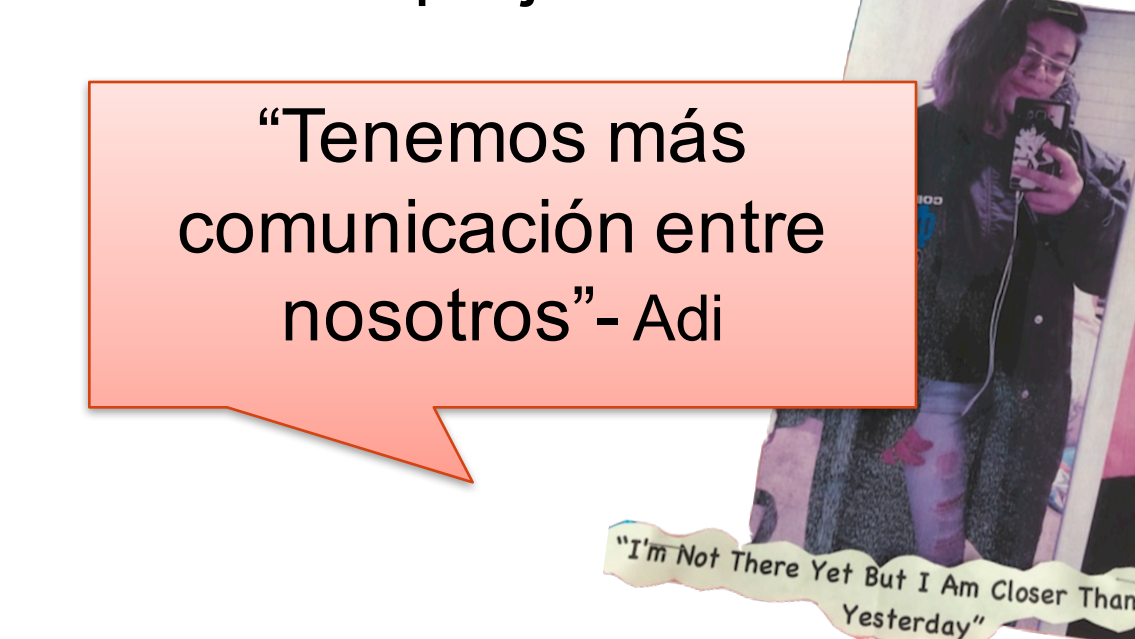
### #3: Loyalty develops over time and through consistent and continued effort both on the part of the students and myself.

- Since the beginning of the year, I was trying to convince students that I was going to stay and not "give up on [them]" as the previous teacher had.
- Throughout the project, students developed loyalties with each other through helping each other with the project and through more frequent interactions with each other.



### #4: Students felt they had more communication with other students and myself when we collectively made a greater effort to use Spanish.

- By the end of the project, students who spoke primarily English were making a greater effort to utilize more Spanish and communicate with the students who spoke Spanish.
- This communication was facilitate by the necessity to collaborate on the project.



## Discussion

- What I realized through this project was that an Ethnic Studies frame was necessary to repair the broken community that I came into. It was necessary to start off my project by listening to and understanding the needs of my students. It was clear that there was tension and even hostility at times between the students who spoke primarily Spanish and those that spoke primarily English. Through changing the seating chart, committing to translations and collaboratively as a class to create the project, students were able to bridge the divide and create more trust, unity and better communication. It wasn't necessarily about what we were creating but the process we (as a class) went through to collaborate and create the project.

- I will continue working from a community-grounded praxis and continually communicated with my students so I can assess their needs as a community.
- I am still curious how I can support my students who are learning English to push themselves to be vulnerable enough to practice their English with me and with other students. Even though students translated to Spanish, there wasn't always the same effort to translate to English. I am wondering how I can honor their native language while also making them feel safe enough to practice English.



## References

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Herder and Herder.  
 Salazar, M. del C. (2013). A Humanizing Pedagogy: Reinventing the Principles and Practice of Education as a Journey toward Liberation. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 121-148.  
 Buenavista, Tracy Lachica and Elexia Reyes McGovern (2016). *Ethnic Studies with K-12 Students, Families, and Communities: The Role of Teacher Education in Preparing Educators to Serve the People*.