



# Fostering Self-Esteem and Confidence: A Third Space for Latinas in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade

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## Context:

I am an 8<sup>th</sup> grade U.S history teacher at a charter school in Lincoln Heights. My school is part of an organization that oversees 17 charter schools in the Valley and in Los Angeles. My school is 1 of 10 middle schools within the organization. My students are predominantly Mexican-American, bilingual and bicultural. They come from various parts of Lincoln Heights and neighboring communities. When the school year began I noticed that the school's heavy focus on rigor and behavior was leading to a lot of resistance around the school campus and in my classroom from both boys and girls in my classes. Nonetheless, I often found myself reflecting on what I initially thought was reactionary behavior from the girls. However, after following up with them I found that the girls were not being reactionary but were frustrated with the school system, "What is the point Ms., no one listens to us, they only care about, grades, intervention and the community hours. We are always going to be told what to do." (Journal Week 5, November 2, 2017) The strong emphasis that is placed in rigor and school behavioral expectations has created a sense of defeat within these young women

## Research Questions:

What happens when a space is created for young 8<sup>th</sup> grade Latinas that focuses on building confidence and self-esteem?

## Sub Questions:

- How can cultural practices help young girls build confidence and self-esteem?
- Why are spaces that focus on cultural practices necessary for 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls to build confidence and self-esteem?

## Methods

### Action Plan Overview:

I designed an eight week action plan with the intent of creating a safe and empowering space for the 8<sup>th</sup> grade Latina girls in my classes. I integrated cultural practices, and community circles as a way to facilitate dialogue about issues impacting the lives of the girls in the club. The study took place outside of class time as a third space during break and lunch time in two different formats:

Format 1) formal club meetings once a week on Tuesday during lunch time.

Format 2: Open door policy for girls that participate at least once in a formal meeting. 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls will be able to go to my classroom during break and lunch throughout the week as a

### Objectives:

Week 1

- Develop safe and community
- Set purpose of Third Space "Girls Club"
- Open door policy welcome girls to my classroom during break and lunch throughout the whole week.

Week 2

- Continue to develop safe space and community
- Develop positive relationships with each other
- Open door policy welcome girls to my classroom during break and lunch throughout the whole week.

Week 3-5

- Develop and foster dialogue process through community circles
- Open door policy welcome girls to my classroom during break and lunch throughout the whole week.

Week 6

- Bring in Transformational Role Models to Space
- Open door policy welcome girls to my classroom during break and lunch throughout the whole week.

Week 7-8

- Reflection

## Data Collection:

- Field Notes
- Reflections
- Sign In Sheets (Tuesday Club Meetings/ Open door policy)
- Surveys
- Photographs

## Theory:

1) Solorzano and Bernal's (2001) writing informed and guided the objectives of my action plan. For example, one of my primary objectives was to bring in "transformational role models" into my classroom, "[...] transformational role models are visible members of one's own race/ethnic and/or gender group who actively demonstrate a commitment to social justice [...] transformational mentors use the aforementioned traits and their own experiences and expertise to help guide the development of others. Thus, a mentor is involved in a more complex relation-ship than a role model in that she or he is someone who participates in one's socialization and development." (p. 322).

2) De los Rios' (2013) ideas of the need to cultivate *sitios y lenguas*, rehumanizing spaces for youth to create new knowledge, acceptance and a sense of responsibility towards their communities informed my action to create a space outside of the classroom.

3) The Circle of Healing: "The action this piece informed to create a circle for the meetings with the girls. Through these circles I will be able to introduce my students to cultural practices, "The Healing Circle is symbolic of the circle of life; all beings are interrelated. The Elders and the teachers use the Talking Circle as a place to teach important lessons about the sanctity of all life. [...] It is through listening and sharing that we learn how to get in touch with our true selves." (Stevenson, 1999, pp. 9)

## Findings

### Finding 1:

I was able to develop teacher-student relationships that I was able to leverage in the classroom.

- Through the creation of a third space I was able to build trust with the girls who attended the meetings and visited my classroom during break and lunch during the rest of the week.
- Girls that were not receptive or open to dialogue with me began to share about their families, their friends and the challenges they were facing in school.
- "Ms. you listen to us, and reason with us. Mr. won't even let me explain" (March 15, 2018)
- How has the girls club impacted your experience as an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student?  
"I became a better student." (Girl's Reflection) "I became more confident." (Girl's Reflection)

### Finding 2:

Through the creation of a third space, 8<sup>th</sup> grade Latinas developed agency.

- Girls sought support with Community Service Requirements, Academics, Conflict with Peers, and Communication with Adults
- Girls in the clubs began to seek my support in completing their community service hours. Instead of keeping quiet or walking out of my class, girls began to share their community service projects and the areas in which they needed support. For example, girls began to come to my class to work on their journal reflections, their trifold posters, and their service hours during break, lunch and after- school.
- The students also began to take responsibility and control of their academic progress. Girls began to meet in my class during break, lunch and afterschool for tutoring, and many came to work in the classroom even if they did not need support.
- Students also began to respond to adults differently. Students are generally not allowed in the school building during break or lunch and had been reprimanded first semester for attempting to stay in the building. We discussed ways in which they could respond to adults in these circumstances.

Guest Speaker:  
"Transformational Role Model"



## Conclusions

I learned that 8<sup>th</sup> grade Latinas urgently need third spaces where they feel welcomed, authentically cared for, and are able to speak about issues that impact their everyday lives. Eighth grade girls need teachers that are "transformational mentors" and "transformational role models" that are available to them outside of class time. When girls feel safe, and trust the adults in the classroom they are able to develop agency in their academics, relationships, and other issues impacted their well being. Unfortunately, when schools focus on discipline, and test preparation student-teacher relationships that can be leverage in the classroom are difficult to develop.

## References

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