**The Moral Ethic of Cariño for Justice & Equity: Nurturing the Voices of Immigrant-origin youth through Critical Literacy**

Literacy Research: Practice, Theory, Method, and Practice

# **Abstract**

Supportive, respectful teacher-student interactions are essential to a positive learning environment for linguistically and culturally diverse students. In this article, I focus on one case from a larger study that examined the teaching practices and perspectives of four secondary teachers of immigrant-origin students of generation 1.0, 1.5, and 2.0. In this article, I explore methodological foundations that shape the case of Mr. Sparks, a veteran Social Science teacher at Dreamers High. I describe the practices and perspectives that inform Mr. Sparks’ pedagogical approach to teaching critical literacy and the ways in which it facilitated students’ ability to articulate their connections to critical sociopolitical issues.

Using case study and critical discourse data analysis, this study’s findings highlight how one teacher's perspectives of students shaped immigrant-origin students’ critical literacy practices; the importance of including student voices in curriculum design; and how one teacher crafted critical literacy units centered on advancing equity and justice beyond the ELA classroom. My data analysis revealed that a *moral ethic of cariño* emerges at the intersection of the teacher's practices and perspectives, demonstrating the critical role that teachers play in honoring students' lived experiences.

Keywords: Teacher Practices, Teacher Perspectives, Immigrant-origin students, Critical Literacy, Student Voice

# **Introduction**

e Donald Trump’s election generated a heated debate over the future of immigrants Mr. Sparks’ classroom. During the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump’s political platform promised to enforce geographical borders to control the flow of immigration, build a wall on the Mexican border, banMuslim refugees, end sanctuary cities, terminate Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) programs, and deport millions of undocumented immigrants. These policies ultimately impacted thousands of students in American schools. During his presidency, Trump’s actions disrupted, adversely affected, and shattered the lives of millions of immigrant-origin students and their families.

Mr. Sparks’ students were no exception to this painful reality. Mr. Sparks, the high school teacher who is the focus of this study, identifies as a Black man with some Irish and Filipino roots, and loves history and Hip-Hop culture. He and his family reside just a few miles away from Dreamer’s High. HERE SAY SOMETHING ABOUT HIS COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE, ETC. Upon reflection about the challenges that his students faced, Mr. Sparks was quick to situate their experiences within the broader historical context:

All of my kids know somebody that is an immigrant or is undocumented. And a vast majority of my students are having to deal with living in a constant state of fear. When Donald Trump was elected that fear was truly palpable around here. There was a lot of fear throughout my class and the school in general, just like in society, but we had to deal with it in a way at Dreamers High that I don't think a lot of other schools had to deal with. Actively and consciously demonstrating sensitivity to our community, reminding our teaching community to be aware of the things that we say, and simultaneously making kids realize that they also need to be sensitive about the things that they say. Because even though they might not know it, somebody in the class might be undocumented. Someone in our learning community, in our school, in our class might be losing their parents because their parents are undocumented. And even though students might be documented, sometimes their parents aren’t. It's a tricky situation to process and a very scary real-life issue to make sense of. I know it's not unique just to our school, but those are definitely some of the things that my kids are dealing with.

(Mr. Sparks, Orienting Interview)

 On the day that I arrived to meet Mr. Sparks, his students surrounded him jovially as they debated about the hip-hop musical choice for the senior rally they had attended at their high school gym. He candidly shared his concern regarding his students’ daily experiences and the tense political context they found themselves in. Sparks’ concern demonstrated a critical consciousness and equity-oriented lens that considered and understood the immigrant experience with delicacy and nuance. paying particular attention to the social and psychological stressors that his students faced. Ultimately, he knew these factors would detrimentally impact his students’ learning experiences and he made it his mission to create a positive and safe learning environment for them.

During the Trump era, both overt and covert forms of racism increasingly surfaced. Mr. Sparks sensed an urgent need for students to analyze historical and current social events such as these from a critical perspective. For Mr. Sparks, teaching students to engage in this discourse was as imperative as teaching them arithmetic, science, and literacy. Exposing his students to critical literacy through the careful analysis of current events was a pivotal starting point for his instruction.

Literature Review?

Some scholars argue that students should be given the opportunity to explore their thoughts and opinions about the world around them and learn how to critique and interrogate social structures and systems (Comber, 2006: Vazquez et al., 2019). In doing so, adolescents begin todevelop a strong sense of self. For immigrant-origin youth, this process may not be so simple if the learning environment does not account for their lived experiences and their vast linguistic repertoires (Martínez, 2018). Therefore, the inclusion of critical literacy within thecurriculum is crucial to make reading, interpretation, and texts relevant for all students . In this article, I examine how Mr. Sparks embodied a *Moral Ethic of Cariño - HERE ADD A VERY BRIEF DEFINITION OF MORAL ETHIC OF CARINO - in his* teaching practices and perspectives relative to the lived experiences of immigrant-origin students. In this article, I ask, what are the interactional moves, teacher perspectives, and critical literacy practices that informed Mr. Sparks’ curricular choices? How did those interactional moves, teacher perspectives, and critical literacy practices amplify students’ voices and increase their participation?

# **The *Moral Ethic of Cariño* for teaching Critical Literacy through a Justice & Equity Lens**

Prominent Latine scholars have highlighted the importance of cariño in the context of relational approaches to teaching Latine youth in K-12 school settings (Valdés, 1996; Nieto, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999; Rólon-Dow, 2005; Bartolomé, 1994a, 1994b; Curry, 2021). They have long urged educators to conceptualize cariño as a form of relational practice oriented towards humanizing the personhood of Latine students in schools. In addition, much work has been done around the conceptualization of the ethic of care in education (Noddings, 2012, 2013; Noddings & Shore, 1984). DEFINE THE ETHIC OF CARE HERE. While the concept of cariño is not new, the theorisation of the *Moral Ethic of Cariño presents a novel way* to unpack teacher perspectives and practices in working with immigrant-origin Latine youth. For immigrant-origin Latine students, the moral ethic of cariño refers to a framework of caring based on teacher’s pre-existing positive perceptions of their students and the ways in which these perceptions center a student-centered approach in the reading and writing curriculum. This includes, but is not limited to, the authentic inclusion of their multilingual and multicultural identities in the praxis of teaching and learning. The Moral Ethic of Cariño moves the field of education to consider how teachers' perspectives might be embodied in pedagogical practices to either limit or advance learning opportunities for linguistically and culturally diverse students, particularly in as it relates to language and literacy practices (Author, 2020; 2023). I situate this novel theoretical frameworkwithin the literature on critical literacy particularly as it relates to language and literacy education of linguistically diverse students of immigrant-origin.

 For immigrant-origin students, it is particularly important that educators engage in instructional practices that facilitate students’ free expression in reading, writing, listening, and speaking activities (Muhammad, 2020). The cornerstone of creating a positive learning environment is an ethic that is humanizing, nurturing, respectful, and caring which includes the development and implementation of culturally relevant curricula.(Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paris & Alim, 2017). The interactions between teachers, their students, and the selection of curricula directly reflects how teachers perceive their students. Teachers with a critical literacy orientation support student learning under structures that support their ideas, their personhood, and an unwavering belief in their intellectual capacity (Author, 2020; Bartolomé, 1994; Darder, 1991; Freire, 1972; Janks, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999 . Extant research indicates that humanizing teaching practices centered on an *ethic of cariño* that embodies critical literacy, can positively alter the learning experiences of immigrant-origin youth (Author, 2020). An *ethic of cariño* posits a humanizing teaching stance that honors the students' lived experiences.An *ethic of cariño*  positions the teachers' perspectives of her students in ongoing understanding with her students' lived experiences and then juxtaposes such knowledge with her curricular practices.

# **Critical Literacy**

**NAME OF SCHOLAR**defineS critical literacy as a social justice work methodology in education based on practices that lead students to interrogate the world around them (Freire, 1972; Janks, 2013). Critical literacy in its ideal form, leads to an emancipatory process where students read the “word but also read the ‘world’” around them (Freire & Macedo, 1987). This approach to literacy equips students with the tools to decode and unmask normalized ideological dimensions of texts, social norms, cultural practices, institutional practices, and sociopolitical selective interests (McLaren, 1994).

From its initial stages, critical literacy has been associated with self-growth, self-awareness, an ethics of care, and taking action (Freire, 1972). At the core of critical literacy is the regard for critical approaches that culturally and historically situate language use, discourse, texts, their authors, readers, and users as social, cultural, and political contexts (Giroux et al., 2013). The aim of critical literacy is to enable students to critique texts and discourses, understand how words are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in order to contest and transform social and semiotic relations (Janks, 2013).

In the Freirean sense, critical literacy requires that teachers lean into crafting opportunities for students to explore and construct knowledge through engagement with texts and discourse that question issues of power, inequalities, disparities within social-economic status, documentation status, and oppressive and unjust forms of social structure. Such opportunities within the context of critical literacy, positions immigrant-origin students to deconstruct the discourse and reconstruct it from their own critical lens and experience (Janks, 2010).

 In *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire described a teaching approach wherein students become consciously aware of inequitable social structures through critique. Such an approach in critical literacy provides the space for immigrant-origin youth to challenge social injustices and inequalities. Critical literacy practices are enacted when students adopt a critical stance to read the world around them and interrogate it freely within complex texts (Brannon et al., 2010: Vazquez, 2014b). As Freire posited, the act of reading cannot happen independently of the world in which the reader exists and therefore, we read the word to read the world (Freire, 1985).

# **Immigrant-Origin Youth**

I define immigrant-origin youth as individuals who are under the age of 18 and belong to either generation 1.0, 1.5, or 2.0. The term 1.0 refers to children that are new to the host country and the term 1.5 describes individuals that migrated to the host country during their teen years (Rumbaut, 1997; 2004). The terms 2.0 includes children of immigrants who are born in the host country, in this case the United States. It is important to note that by no means are these immigrant-youth groups homogeneous nor is this work suggesting that these groups are a monolith. However, the students in this study did share a common challenge at the time this data was collected (during the Trump administration) - a constant fear of deportation for themselves or their loved ones.

# **Researcher Positionality**

As a scholar, former high school teacher, and immigrant, I came to this work with a deep commitment to improve the learning conditions for immigrant-origin youth. I believe strongly that the experiences of immigrant-origin students and their families are often glossed over in our schools, leaving this very vulnerable population of students with a subpar learning experience. As a former English teacher, alumni of Dreamers High, and an immigrant myself, I am a partial insider from multiple positions. My insider perspective on the students and community allowed me to share background information on how students responded to Mr. Sparks and made sense of the critical curriculum that he had them engage in. It is however, important to note, that returning to Dreamers High after three decades in my new role as a researcher situated me as an outsider to the community. I was and continue to beacutely aware of my multiple and simultaneous identities and positionalities as I engage in this critical scholarship on the education of immigrant-origin Latinx youth.

Before I describe the methods I used in this work, I would like to briefly describe what motivated this line of inquiry and how I positioned myself in Mr. Sparks’ classroom. I was only six years old when I came to the United States. Being born in El Salvador during a time of civil war provided me with insider knowledge that many young children had to face, as many of us were forced to grow up quickly, uproot what we knew to be home, and immigrate to a new country. Learning in a new language and cultural context was not an easy task for me and my older siblings. As an immigrant student, I understood first-hand the ways that the students in this study made critical personal connections to what they read in class in relation to the oppressions that they experienced daily. As a former teacher, I was aware of the importance of including critical literacy that leads students to question social structures and urges them to call for change. As a researcher, I acknowledge that new methods are required to identify effective pedagogical practices and perspectives that we employ in the teaching of immigrant-origin youth.

Setting

At the time of the study, Dreamers High[[1]](#footnote-2), a public high school nestled in the heart of Silicon Valley, enrolled approximately 1400-1500 students and served a diverse student body: 78% Latine, 10% Flipinx, 7% Asian, 2% Pacific Islander, 2% African American, and 1% White. The average household income was less than $42,000 a year (the annual median income in the surrounding area was $117,474). ANYTHING ELSE YOU’D LIKE TO ADD ABOUT THE SETTING?

# **Methodology**

The case-study highlighted in this article comes from a larger study that examined the teaching practices and perspectives of four highly effective secondary teachers of immigrant-origin students of generation 1.0, 1.5, and 2.0. This article explores the methodological foundations that shape the case-study of one of the teachers of the aforementioned study, Mr. Sparks. Using ethnographic case study (Crewell, 1998), I described the voiced perspectives of Mr. Sparks. This article draws on my prolonged observations and day-to-day immersions in Mr. Sparks' classroom as well as the analysis of Mr. Sparks teaching practices. I highlight his critical literacy and interactional choices that contributed to his students’ articulation of critical opinions that countered the U.S. anti-immigrant narrative.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection for this study was initiated in the summer of 2017 and was carried out through summer of 2018. Primary data sources of this study include interviews (n=12) focused on Mr. Spark’s perspectives and practices. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to 60 minutes. I visited the school weekly for 32 weeks and was in Mr. Spark’s classroom for a total of 18 visits lasting 90 minutes per class. I made observations and took field notes during each visit. The classroom visits and interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Teacher interview transcripts and classroom audio recording transcript visits were openly coded (Saldaña, 2009). Secondary data sources included informal interview transcripts (n=10) with students and Mr. Sparks during and after classroom visits.

## **Analytic Approach**

I examined Mr. Spark’s literacy choices by describing interview and interactional data through reconstructive discourse analysis. I utilized NVivo coding (Saldaña, 2009), a method that uses the participants’ words as codes. I took an inductive approach (Creswell, 2013), engaging in coding that was open, axial, and selective (Corbin & Strauss, 2014), followed by thematic patterning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Seidman, 2006). Rather than looking for a list of identified “best practices” or a matrix of critical literacies, I actively searched for interactional moves that reflected critical orientations to teaching, such as those described by Freire (year). Within these teaching interactions, I identified moments where the teacher centered critical literacies that amplified the voices of the immigrant-origin youth, , dignified and affirmed their lived experiences, and equipped them t with the skills to become experts in the content.

***Reconstructive Discourse Analysis*. Reconstructive** discourse analysis allows researchers to examine the relationship between language and power in formal and informal literacy education settings. It is characterized by an interest in examination of language by users in context, nonverbal aspects of communication and social and cognitive aspects of interaction (Wodak, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2014). In this study, Mr. Sparks deconstructed sociopolitical issues that framed immigrant populations as a problem and (re)constructed the learning space toward a more liberatory one whereimmigrant-origin students were able to critique and challenge the narratives framed against them. By engaging in specific critical literacy and interactional moves, Mr. Sparks centered the voices and experiences of his students, embodying what I call a *Moral Ethic of Cariño*. In this work, I adopted a “reconstructive” (Bartlett, 2012; Haddix, 2010; Luke, 1995, 2004; Rogers, 2017; Rogers & Mosley Wetzel, 2013;Mosley & Rogers, 2011) --approach to analyze Spark's critical literacy and his interactional moves with his students. Drawing on discourse data from conversations in his American Government classroom, I examined the ways in which Mr. Sparks “held space" (Hikida, 2018) for students to engage in critical dialogue by reconstructing a learning space that allowed his students to counter narratives of their immigrant communities. I **put the discourse data in direct conversation with data from field notes and interviews in order to situate focal transcripts within a broader ethnographic context (Creswell, 1998) .** I engaged in a reconstructive approach to discourse analysis (Rogers, 2017) by carefully examining teacher and student interactions with an eye towards discerning and unpacking critical literacies that addressed injustices and pedagogical choices that centered the voices of immigrant-origin students (Luke, 2004; Mosley and Rogers, 2011). Part of enacting a reconstructive discourse analysis with respect to the teaching of immigrant-origin students involved situating discourse data within a broader ethnographic approach to understanding Mr. Sparks and his students. This required me to focus on the interactional level of the transcript, as well as zoom out and put interactional data in conversation with other data sources, such as the interview and field note data on which I draw on this article.

For the purpose of this article, I focus specifically on talk-in interaction (Goffman, 1967) or what Schegloff (1988) refers to as conversation-naturally occurring speech between two or more speakers. I utilized an inductive analytic process to selecte specific events in which the teachers’ pedagogical choices and interactional moves were observed and coded. I carefully selected a curricular unit that spanned a two-week period that represented what I observed as an ongoing practice in Sparks’ classroom.

I transcribed participants’ utterances carefully, understanding that transcription is both an *analytical* (Ochs, 1979) and fundamentally *political* (Bucholtz, 2000) process in that it involves crucial decisions about what to include (and omit) and how to represent it, and in the sense that such decisions are always made by someone who is positioned socially and politically in relation to the participants whose speech they are transcribing.

I focused on a two-week class unit in which Mr. Sparks utilized class discourse as a space for students to brainstorm their ideas for a writing task. I closely examined one whole class interaction, accompanied by teacher interviews excerpts and student class contributions. These interactions represented Mr. Spark’s commitment to teaching critical literacy practices along with the discourse analysis of his interactional moves with his students. Such student-teacher interactions were contested, constructed, and (re)constructed within the context of classroom discourse. After completing a line-by-line analysis of the teaching moment, I went back to the teacher interview data. I identified instances when Sparks explainedhis pedagogy. I then triangulated findings from the discourse analysis with Sparks’ stated commitments to teaching from the interview data and noted emergent themes that led me to my findings.

# **A Critical Curricular Unit on Justice & Equity**

During a two-week period, Mr. Sparks introduced students to the principles and elements of the bill of rights and the first ten amendments to the constitution. Students analyzed their virtues and vices by contextualizing howthe first ten amendments to the American Constitution through current and historical events. Culminating the unit, students were expected to produce a stance that would then be included in their written expository reflections in which they were prompted to*: Identify an amendment of your choice. Write about what this amendment offers, and provide examples from current or sociopolitical events to demonstrate how and why the selected Amendment is particularly relevant to the way this country and its democracy operates*.

Students spent the first week learning the first ten amendments. **The analysis of this study, draws attention to Mr. Spark’s unique way of brainstorming sessions for writing, as it required his students to reflect on their ideas orally and engage *in talking those ideas out,* an instructional practice that he used for brainstorming where students shared their ideas in small group or whole class discussions.**

**Findings & Discussion: A Moral Ethic of Cariño for Justice & Equity**

# Through discourse analysis of classroom interactions across a two-week justice and equity unit in an American Government class, I found that Mr. Sparks centered his critical literacy practices by centering his (1) students’ experiences as critical knowledge for praxis and (2) by crafting critical lines of inquiry in class discussions that deemed student voices as experts. In addition, I found that Mr. Sparks embodied these critical pedagogical choices by engaging in interactional moves based on a critically conscious and equity-driven lens. Below, I share the case study that illustrates these findings.The case-study exemplifies what a *moral ethic of cariño* looks like in the teaching of reading and writing, specifically in the case of a social science classroom.

The Case Study

Mr. Sparksinvited his students to take a deep dive into immigration policies and examine the deficit narratives expressed about their immigrant community in his social justice & equity research unit. Students led the exploration of this topic using his talk it out strategy.Mr. Sparks explained his *talk it out strategy* as follows:

For my students it is important that they talk it out, this is a time in my curriculum where before they write their ideas, they express those ideas freely with their peers, whether it be in small group discussion or as a whole class. I’ve seen this become a game-changer for my students. If they can say it, they can write about their stances.”

 (Mr. Sparks, Week 1 of Justice & Equity Unit)

Reflecting on his curricular choice for brainstorming in the writing process, Mr. Sparks noted that he intentionally positioned his students’ experiences as critical knowledge to draw and build from. Thisinterview data speaks to his sensitive approach in implementing a uniqe modality to brainstorm ideas for writing through class discourse and discussion. An important approach for immigrant students who are acquiring English as an additional language, this alternate approach to brainstorming proved critical as it allowed students to orally make sense of the assigned reading.

For Mr. Sparks, a *moral ethic of cariño* involved critical pedagogical choices informed by his positive perspectives of his students. I posit that an isolated attempt at only one of these is not sufficient and argue that a *moral ethic of cariño* is enacted when a teacher takes up both the critical pedagogical practices in the classroom informed by the teachers’ positive perspectives of their students. In this case, the studentss critically engaged with texts and wereencouraged to challenge the status quo.

 *Talk it Out*. Growing up, Mr. Sparks, was expected to share opinions on sociopolitical issues. These conversations as a young boy shaped his worldviews and gave him confidence as he grew into an adult.

I approach discourse with my students in such a way where I want to make sure that they understand that their opinions matter. As a young person, I was somewhat treated like an adult. My father always talked to me about things that sometimes were uncomfortable to talk about. Social issues like class, race, and inequality. And sometimes maybe we would talk about things that others might have viewed as premature to talk about to a 13-year-old but I loved it. I loved talking to my dad about issues of race, societal structures that wronged Black and Brown men. That's the world we live in.

(Mr. Sparks, Orienting Interview)

As a self-identified Black man, these critical life experiences influenced Mr. Sparks’ approach to his own students. Like his father did for him, Mr. Sparks urged his students to formulate a stance, develop critiques, and have opinions about social issues that they faced. His class dialogues often placed race at the center of social analysis as he affirmed the everyday experiences of people of color. Sparks walked his students through weekly discussions of current events that placed these issues at the center of his curriculum. Scholars like Rolón-Dow (2005) have urged educators to address issues of racial inequality and social injustices in the schooling process, arguing that it is imperative for educators to actively seek ways to sustain conversations about racial matters within current schooling contexts. Furthermore, scholars like Bonilla-Silva argue that in the post-civil rights era, race and racism in the United States operate in subtle ways and sometimes may even be difficult to identify (Bonilla-Silva & Embrick, 2003).

 **Critical Conscious Perspectives & Critical Lines of Inquiry in Discourse and Writing**

Another way that Sparks demonstrated a moral *ethic of cariño* was through his critically conscious approach to teaching his students; he consistently led them to read the word and read the world around them. During Sparks’ Justice and Equity uni in his American Government class, Sparks began his class by asking, “Who here can define discrimination as seen and heard in an American context?” Without hesitation, 25 of the 28 students sitting in his classroom raised their hands, ready to engage. In Mr. Sparks’ class, students were expected to research current events and situate themwithin the class content. In this curricular unit, students were studying the bill of rights and its implications in real life contexts.

David, a student in Mr. Sparks’ 12th Grade American Government class raised his hand, seemingly pensive, and shared:

The chaos that Trump is causing at the southern border is discrimination at its finest. Trump’s policy separates families. Separation of children from their parents is by far the greatest discrimination. I had read over the weekend because I knew you would ask us about current events, and I want to talk more about this issue of children being separated from their families to control immigration. And I mean, *why is this only happening on the Mexican border and not at the Canadian border*? And who is thinking about the trauma that the kids will suffer? In that article I read, a three-year-old boy was detained in El Paso, TX. He was a boy from Honduras, his dad escaping gang-violence. Like, in this class we have read about civil rights and liberties of people and well I think that separating children from their families violates the constitution? This is discrimination. Our president is not thinking of the long-term effects on these families, the children and our society.

 (David, Week 10, Classroom Visit #7)

The nuanced and explicit discriminatory actions that underscored the current event that David referenced revealed his understanding ofthe importance of analyzing racial discrimination in social issues. David analyzed what was happening at the southern border and articualted a critical understanding of “discrimination.” David problematized the nature of this policy and the social and psychological trauma that vulnerable immigrant families faced. He also questioned the equity of such a policy when he asked, “why is this only happening on the Mexican border and not at the Canadian border?” Mr. Sparks attentively listened, and tookcopious notes, and wrotethem on the board. Informed by a critically conscious perspective, Mr. Sparks created an environment wherestudents freely expressed their ideas and interrogated the world around them.

During Mr. Spark’s current events classroom discussions, students engaged in leading and directing class discourse through Socratic inquiry. Sparks valued the power of inquiry and immersed his students in class discussion. This was evidenced by the way that he crafted space for his students to discuss their ideas without injecting much of his opinion.

# **Equity-Oriented Perspectives & Student Experiences as Critical Knowledge in Praxis**

Finally, Sparks enacted a *moral ethic of cariño* through an equity-oriented approach to his students by centering their experiences as critical knowledge. Through every current events analysis, students discussed and debated, evaluated peer and teacher comments, read or re-read critically, annotated the text, wrote to learn and took a stance, and collectively critiqued, interrogated or problem-solved. Students expanded on each other's ideas through their own interpretations of texts and made connections to their lived experiences as they chimed in with additional data points. For example, in response to David’s claim that Trump’s immigration policies separated families were discriminatory, Naye added her analysis of the inhumanity she saw in Trump’s immigration policies as reflected in his executive order. Naye shared:

I had read online that there is no system in place to reunite children and unaccompanied youth with their parents once they are separated. There seems to be no logic to this. I feel like we are being treated as less than human. Kids detained at the border, go to sleep at night without their families. I have a nine-year-old sister and a three-year-old brother. Those two have a hard time going to sleep without my parents. I would say that this policy is inhumane and will cause more harm than good in the long run. I agree with David, we do have to ask, *why is this only happening in the Mexican border*?

(Naye, Week 10, Classroom Visit #7)

Naye built on David’s idea that Trump’s immigration policies were discriminatory and pushed for further investigation as to why this was only happening at the Mexican border. She raised another valid point about the trauma that kids detained at the southern border endured. Naye also made a personal connection that not only showed how viscerally she understood and felt the situation, but also how unacceptable it was. David & Naye’s sophisticated analyses of this current event was typical of how students would engage in class discussions.

During the same class visit, following David and Naye’s share-out, the following class discussion unfolded between Mr. Sparks and his students:

 01 Martin: So, you know what David mentioned about the three-year-old boy?

 02 Sparks: You mean the children being separated from their families?

 03 Martin: Yeah, so where is our justice system in all of this?

 04 Martin: or like our constitution?

 05 Neto: When families are detained, do they even get Spanish-Speaking help?

 06 Fito: I doubt it! This alone feels like a violation of human rights.

 07 Naye: So how do we as a people, push for human rights of these

 08 Naye: families and children? This is a constitutional fight, Qué, no? [ ]

 09 Fito: like, where is *their* right to due process?

The brief discussion reiterates Mr. Sparks’ classroom culture where his students’ experiences served as valid evidence to suppor their claims. He validated his students' meaning-making and in this way, encouraged them to continue to voice their ideas.

Martin (line 01) circles back to the notion that children were being detained at the Mexican border and seemed distraught that a young boy at the age of three would also be subject to such a process. Mr. Sparks (line 02) named the phenomenon, “separate from their families” and critically posed an inquiry. This critical line of questioning within the context of classroom discourse set the stage for students to unpack, in their own terms, what was happening to migrant families at the Southern border. Note that this was the only time that Mr. Sparks contributed throughout the entire conversation, as he held space for his students to engage in discourse without him. Martin (line 03) quickly made the connection to our justice system and critically interrogated the role of it (line 04) in this process. Neto (line 05) interjected himself into the discussion offering a critical question in regards to language asking the class, “do they even get Spanish-Speaking help?” Notably, this critical line of questioning in classroom discourse was modeled for him by his teacher. Fito (line 06) speculated and posited his own interpretation of this situation setting the stage for the critical connections that would ensure in subsequent contributions by his classmates. Naye (line 07) connected the role of citizens to the constitution’s role in advocating for human rights (line 08). Fito (line 09) then made the critical connection to the U.S. constitution’s bill of rights and the migrant families’ right to due process of law, content that was presented a few days before through class readings and Mr. Sparks’ course lectures. Building directly on one another’s utterances, students grappled together with the equality that such constitutional rights were designed to offer people. At this point in the conversation, Mr. Sparks’ students wereengaging in critical lines of questioning on their own, actively listening to each other - all made possible byMr. Sparks yielding of power to his students.

Studentswrote compelling expository essays that centered stories of migrant families from their own research or experiential knowledge. These critical conversations served as catalysts for their writing and in large part this was made possible because of the critical practices and perspectives that Mr. Sparks embodied. In this case, a perspective informed through an equity-oriented lens of his students and literacy practices that involved centering his students' experiences as critical knowledge as evidenced in class discussions, enacting what I call a *moral* *ethic of cariño*.

The case of Mr. Sparks highlights the critical literacy practices that he engaged his immigrant-origin students in his American Government classroom. In this article, I argued that Mr. Sparks carefully crafted critical literacy units that centered the experiences of his students and in doing so, created a learning environment where students felt free to critique, interrogate, and make critical connections to the social science content. Ultimately, his students humanized the difficulties that their community experienced within a real-life context and critically interrogated their roles as citizens of a democratic nation.

Mr. Sparks achieved this by enacting critical literacy practices that centered students' experiences as critical knowledge and engaging students through critical lines of inquiry in discourse and writing. His interactional moves with his students were deeply rooted in instilling critical consciousness in his students and teaching them with an equity-oriented lens. Mr. Sparks’ critical literacy pedagogies and interactional moves embody a moral ethic of cariño. Throughthis analytical process, I identified and analyzed Mr. Sparks critical literacy choices that contributed to a positive classroom space for his immigrant-origin students’ generation 1.0, 1.5, 2.0 where they critically interrogated equity and justice within their own sociopolitical context.

# **Implications**

In an era where anti-immigrant sentiment was robust, Mr. Sparks chose to amplify the often fearful and uncertain voices of his immigrant-origin students. To support effective learning in diverse classroom settings, t teachers need to engage with their students by boldly centering their experiences as critical knowledge that then informs curricular content and design. This practice requires that educators, like Mr. Sparks, immerse themselves in the ongoing process of soliciting and utilizing their students’ narratives. These findings and analyses offer important practical implications for classroom teachers interested in taking up critical pedagogical approaches that center the lived experiences of immigrant-origin students. First, teachers can make critical pedagogical choices based on a *moral ethic of cariño* to positively impact the learning experience of students of color (Lomelí, 2020). A *moral ethic of cariño* reflects a liberatory teaching stance that honors the students' lived experiences and positions the teachers' perceptions of their students as constantly shifting and evolving.

In this paper, I demonstrated how Mr. Sparks honored his students’ lived experiences by incorporating them into his curriculum (Freire, 2015). Mr. Sparks’ critical literacy approaches encouragedhis students to uplift their voices to interrogate equity and justice within their own sociopolitical contexts. In validating his students' lived experiences as critical knowledge, Sparks humanized their learning experiences. Mr. Sparks employed the moral ethic of cariño by prioritizing critical literacy pedagogies that were informed by the students’ knowledge, YOU NEED SOMETHING MORE POWERFUL TO END THIS. WHAT DO YOU WANT TO LEAVE YOUR READERS WITH?

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1. Names of all institutions and persons are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)