

Race and Oral History 2021 UCSD

Interviewee: Marysol Gomez

Interviewer: Andrew Lu

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Andrew: Okay, so my name is Andrew Lu and today is May 15, 2021. Today I am interviewing Marysol Gomez for the UCSD oral history project through a Zoom video call. Thank you for being here today. Could you please state your full name, date of birth, and place of birth?

Marysol: My name is Marysol Gomez. I was born on September 30, 1983 and I was born in Anaheim, California.

Andrew: So to start off with, could you tell me about yourself and your background leading up to where you are now?

Marysol: Oh, okay. That's a big question. Well, I am -- So I am the child of two Mexican immigrants from the state of Zacatecas. My mom and my dad came to the US as undocumented people in 19 -- 1981. They came and I was born in Anaheim and I was raised in in -- I was raised in a very close knit, very new immigrant community in Anaheim. And eventually we came down, down to San Diego through a family link and we've been here. I've been in San Diego since I was about 11 close to 12.

Andrew: So I know you're a teacher at San Ysidro High School. What led you to becoming a teacher there?

Marysol: Specifically in San Ysidro?

Andrew: Yeah, specifically in San Ysidro.

Marysol: Well -- well -- I wanted -- I was looking for a job, obviously and I, I had some connections to San Ysidro, but I didn't really know a lot about the school. All I knew was that I

was a new -- I had finished graduate school and I was a new teacher and I was just excited to get a job and start teaching. And it just so happened that there was an opportunity at San Ysidro, but it wasn't really -- It was almost, I mean, I was in the South Bay, but it wasn't really like I was looking particularly for San Ysidro that's just kind of how the cards lined up.

Andrew: So where did you get your aspiration? to become a teacher?

Marysol: You know, I've always been a very bossy person. Since I was a kid, I for the longest time, I was one -- So I was one of six kids, I was the only girl so I had five brothers. And I was kind of like always like the bossy, the bossy person. I think that -- but that was just since I was a child and I was always very gregarious and chatty, and things like that. But for me, it happened kind of, I kind of got absorbed into teaching. I really, I started college, and I really, you know, I was started tutoring and things like that and I just felt really comfortable in a classroom. It felt very natural, like very organic to me to interact with a lot of students, even from a very young age, like 18, 19. I was like, when the teacher would step out, I felt totally comfortable, like telling the students like guiding them, teaching them and it was just something that just felt really good to me, like very, like instinctual. So, so that's so which is very good. I feel very lucky. Not a lot of people get to say that, that they -- that they really found something like their calling just real -- at such a young age. And I really felt like, I really felt like I did. So yeah, I've been, I've been, I've been in in some form of education now for 17, almost 18 years.

Andrew: Did you specifically want to teach high school students? Or was it like, you know.

Marysol: Yeah, I've always wanted to teach high school students because I've always stayed in high schools. I'm not I'm not a huge fan of, of like elementary school, I really value elementary school education, but it's not something that I really had a passion for. I think that working with high school students has always just been my thing because I love, I just love interacting with

young people, and in all from all backgrounds, all ages, because I feel like they teach me so much about the world, about themselves, about me. It's just really, really fun and exciting to kind of have that, that exchange of energy that to me, that's it's so it's a privilege and so. Yeah, I'm, I'm a high school teacher, I don't know if I could, I don't know if I could do the younger kids, I don't have that, like the sense of humor, you know, the little kids are like, have like that slapstick humor, and I'm just more like, can't relate.

Andrew: So your students express themselves a lot. Is that right?

Marysol: Yes, yes, they yeah, and I try and I try my hardest, I try my hardest to give them that space to do it, whatever it is that they want to express. You know, however, they want to express themselves, I really, really tried to let them know that when they're in my classroom, that they, they can just be themselves, and that I'm going to respect them. And that they, that, that their classmates are going to respect them and everybody has that space. You know, and that, in turn, they should, they should show that respect to me and their classmates. So all together, we're kind of like a little, little a community a safe space, if you will. I know, it's super cliché, but it is that it is a very important energy. But I feel that I really strive to cultivate with my students every day.

Andrew: Yeah, I think it's really important having -- it's such a turning point in their lives as high school students, you know, I think, I think it's really admirable, having a safe space for them to really start to express who they are.

Marysol: Yeah. Yes.

Andrew: So, during this whole COVID-19 pandemic, how do you help students who may not have the resources at home to live to their full potential, because it's an absolutely new environment for them?

Marysol: You know, it's been super challenging, because we have a lot of restrictions in terms of our interactions with students, like I can't physically give them, you know, items, I can't, you know, touch them, I can't do you know, I can't, you know, I can't, I can, I can't even go to their house, I can't do any of those things. There's, it's very, very strict. But the biggest thing that I've tried to do, I guess, to, to help students has really just been to listen to them, and to give them to listen to them, and give them a lot of flexibility, like, I allow, this year, I've allowed my students to take mental health days off. So they can literally go into Google Classroom, fill out a form and tell me, I'm taking a mental health day, and there's no questions asked. So that's been really, really important because students have utilized it. And so something like that, we I constantly have a dialogue going with them and doing deliberate check ins where I'm like, I'm not teaching you today, we are talking. How are you? What are your concerns? What are, what's, what's something that you're, you know, struggling with in distance learning? What's something that is going well in distance learning, right? So it's, it's this constant dialogue of that, and then, and then I'll and then still having honest conversations about mental health, and, and telling them you know, like, there's been points where I've been struggling, right. And I'm like, if Miss Gomez, who is Miss Gomez, who is you know, pretty resilient adult, and is, you know, you know, has, you know, more formal education and professional experience and all this stuff. If I'm struggling, okay, if I, if this is very challenging for me, what could I expect? How, I'm not going to disconnect that from your reality, you're a young person, going through something incredibly traumatic, you know, really feeling disconnected. And, and I want you to know, that I see you, and that I get it. And I'm struggling too, you know, and, and I think the kids really appreciate that, because I think oftentimes, as teachers were, you know, in these sometimes, we get kind of put in this, like, kind of not a pedestal, but this kind of higher, you know, place of wisdom and

things like that. And, and, and I think I've just been really honest with students and be like, No, I'm struggling to, I don't know the answers either. This is hard for me, too. So let's talk about it.

Andrew: How did you really build that connection with your students to get them to open up like this?

Marysol: Oh, gosh, it's been really hard, you know, online because in person, I'm like, on them like they can, I'm in their space. You know, I'm like, Yeah, like, let's talk like they see me stomping around class and things like that. You know, it's ta -- it, it's taken me, it's taken me much longer this year because of the, the online learning. But I think it's just been really coming from a place this year of vulnerability for me, and just being vulnerable. And so the kids know that if I'm putting myself out there, I feel like that kind of created that space where she's where they're like, okay, she's not like, she is being honest with us. And it's okay to be honest with her. And I think that's really what worked for me this year is just really coming from a place of, of vulnerability. And that was really hard, because I'm essentially, you know, we're interacting right now, but from the very beginning, it was like, I was just talking to icons on the screen. And that was incredibly uncomfortable. For, for the, in the very beginning was very uncomfortable for me so.

Andrew: So it basically became this reciprocal relationship, where you opened up to each other, and that really built up their trust in you, right?

Marysol: Yes, yes, definitely. Yes, most definitely. Most definitely. But it was a sort of evolution, you know, it didn't just come like that. You know, we were all just, you know, we just kind of had to meet each other. So, so, but yeah, it just worked out. Like, it took a lot longer, though. Usually, you know, I do have to build that rapport and that trust with students, but it does not take me. It took me months and months and months, right. To see, and you've seen my

interactions with the students now, that took months. Okay, that was not overnight, like zoom. And the kids are like, hah, yeah, you know, no, it was not, it was nothing like that at all, especially with the freshmen students, because they're freshmen, and they were just coming from, they come from all different kinds of theater (?) schools. And they were just kind of feeling each other out and feeling out there. Literally, their first year of high school is online. So it's like, what, like, what's going on? You know, so.

Andrew: And it's, it's great, having that moment, that magical moment where they really, like, start to trust you. And you get to feel that? How does it make you feel specifically like that, that moment, when you when everyone opened up to you,

Marysol: You know, everybody has different moments. Like, I wouldn't say that there's like, one specific moment, because there's some students that, that are immediately drawn to me, but there's some students, you know, believe there's some students that never really feel that connection, which I totally respect. I think, when I was a younger teacher, I was like, Oh, my gosh, like, they don't like me, or they don't, you know, and it was nothing, it's nothing like that. It's, you know, everybody. That's the difference between teacher centered, teacher centered learning and student centered learning. And it's like, you kind of have to just meet the student, where they are at, and, and developmentally, and things like that. And I think it's really powerful. It's, it's, it's a powerful thing, when, when you do feel that, that the student can rea -- that the student really trusts you. And that they're, that they, that they open themselves up to your guidance, that's incredibly, incredibly powerful. But with great power comes great responsibility, right? And I'm very, very conscious of that, too. I try to be as best as I can.

Andrew: So how's the pandemic really affected the teacher student dynamic, since it's not like a physical classroom anymore?

Marysol: You know, it's really, yeah, it's, the thing is, it's a, you know, we are all struggling to make this an active learning environment versus a passive learning environment. But unfortunately, you know, we're just working with, with our contexts, the best that we can, you know. There, you don't have control, you don't have control over the students, right, they can just log out, they can, they're not showing their cameras. I don't require my students to show their cameras until they, until I take attendance. And they only do that. So I make sure they're not asleep, at least they can pretend, right? That, that they're, you know, that they're active, but it definitely has changed a lot of things. A lot, you know, the biggest struggle has been, for me, has been the medium. Because what I do is, is very, what you know, the biggest thing has been the perform -- I want to say like the performative aspect of it. Right, that I'm in this medium. I'm in the screen. My students see me from, you know, the shoulders up, right? And, and I've had to sort of try to, try to translate my work in this, in this space. And that's been super challenging because in my classroom, it's just a whole different, it's a whole different energy, right? I always kind of like to refer to my classroom kind of like as a lab, right, it's like a lab in a good way, there's just so many really great moving parts, at you know, there's so much going on at the same time. And, and I'm just kind of walking around making like little tweaks here and there, and trying out new things, and revisiting old ideas and doing all these things. So it's just been really difficult to kind of step away from that and get into this sort of digital space. But here we are, and, and we're just trying to all of us are just trying to make the most of it. And then and I think that, you know, finishing up the year, I'm pretty satisfied in terms of, of, of what we've all been able to accomplish given our, given our limited context so.

Andrew: So how do you make these assignments for the students since you mentioned, like, you know, what, making little tweaks and stuff like that, what, what really sticks to help the student learn?

Marysol: Right now, you know, right now, I have found that the biggest thing is using multiple sources of media and using a lot of visuals, and using a lot of videos. You know, and having students kind of conduct their own investigations in terms of, of what works for them, what kind of what kind of content they want to absorb. You know, and I provide texts, and in, in, I tried to, I almost feel like, all right now online, like as a, like in distance learning, I kind of feel more like a curator of information. And, and but ultimately, I try to honor my students perspective, and I try to find just interesting material, anything that's interesting to them that is culturally relevant, that's huge, for me, culturally, culturally relevant and interesting. So that I think that's, I think that's the best way, you know, to present information and that's, I try really, really hard to do that.

Andrew: So how's virtual learning, like change the students perspective, on this type of learning? Since it's a lot more hands on not not to say hands on, but it's definitely more more active in terms of the content that they have to, you know.

Marysol: I think that, you know, I think that it's, it's changed student's perspective, in terms of like, they have become more conscious of their role as active independent learners where they usually like to rely on their teachers to kind of put the smack down, right, like, I'm usually the one that's just like, no, like, sit there read, you know, annotate a text, right, let's do this, we're good. Like, I have like the methods for them to kind of guide them like deliberately. And so that in itself, they are, they are really understanding that but they are also appreciating the -- their school space and they miss they very much miss the school setting. I mean, it's, they really miss school. And I think that they are coming to terms with the fact that, that their, that their school is

a, was a space for them to really do much more than just learn content. And, and, so I'm excited to get back because I feel like the students are going to be just that much more engaged and happy to be there because now they kind of know what we've, what we, what the space that we provide, particularly at San Ysidro High School, we just have a really cool, we have an, an amazing school with with wonderful staff and wonderful opportunities and, and programs for the kids and, and I think the kids really miss that they want to go back. Very much so.

Andrew: So the students like really noticed the impact that being on a school campus has on their, on their lives?

Marysol: Absolutely, absolutely. I mean you know, we have even, you know, the other day one of my students was telling me how, you know, we have a couple of students on campus already. And even our wonderful beautiful cafeteria ladies, you know, the they were out there having a snack break, you know, and the cafeteria ladies are like, hi, come get your snack! It's free! It's free! Like they're, you know, you know, and the students are like, okay, yeah, I got or I already got one, okay, but they are even our cafeteria staff is like, so happy to see them and to provide for them. And it's just, it's so beautiful. It's, it's, you know, and the kids, they feel it, they know that. Right? And it's, it's, it's wonderful so.

Andrew: So there's this like sense of belonging, right, like this, this mode of movement of return to a, actual campus?

Marysol: Yeah, yeah. And I feel like all of us, as a staff, were kind of like standing there with our arms open, you know, because we're all really, really excited. And like I said, not only, not only the teachers, but you know, we are -- our cafeteria workers, our, our wonderful custodians and the people that do maintenance on campus, I mean, our campus looks gorgeous. I walked into my classroom after, you know, not being there for almost a year, and my classroom is

spotless, and it's just like, I just walked in, and it was like, ahhhh! You know, and it's, it's really, really, it's great. So we're all super excited to get back soon. We're all very, very excited.

Andrew: Yeah, so with everyone's energy, how do you think the students are gonna react once they really get onto campus and they start, like interacting with everybody, learning?

Marysol: Oh, my gosh, I think it's just, we're all just gonna have a bunch of fun. I just imagine that we're all just gonna have a bunch of fun. Especially, you know, because we start our new school year in late July. Because we're year, we're a year round school. So we started our new school year in late July, and I think the kids, we're all just gonna have a bunch of fun. I just, I think that everybody's just ready to like, you know, just have a great time.

Andrew: Yeah.

Marysol: Yeah.

Andrew: Yeah, I think that's great. Honestly, like, being stuck on a computer screen is one thing, but actually being able to get out there and interact with people of your age, and people who are out there for you, you know, there's

Marysol: Yeah.

Andrew: There's that great connection.

Marysol: My sister, my, my youngest sister is actually a junior. And she is, you know, and she's, you know, I'll say she's a, she can be kind of an introvert. And she's even excited. And I'm like, Oh, my gosh, if my sister's excited, I can imagine all the other kids because, you know, like, I think, just this has been, this is, it's been enough, too much of this kind of screentime is been everybody's over at, we're all just getting, we're all just ready to, to just get back to it. And, you know, and be together again.

Andrew: So how has the pandemic really impacted students' social lives, like you've noticed, you've mentioned that they're stuck on the screen all this time? Do they really communicate with each other? What happens there?

Marysol: You know, what? No, you know, unfortunately, yeah, it's very much impacted the student's social life, because if they don't know each other, from prior years, then they don't really reach out to each other. Everyone's kind of been on their own little island. And obviously, there's, you know, depending on the household, on how strict the parents are, in terms of their interactions with other students outside of the household, it's been very, it's been varying right. So I think that, um, you know, it's been, it's been really, really tough. It's been really, really tough on students to not be able to make those, those daily connections, right, and those, forming those, those networks because they're not in this physical space with people that that they would normally not interact with. And so it most definitely has been, has been tough.

Andrew: So as a teacher, how do you really like help the students interact with each other? The student student dynamic has definitely changed and it's a lot more reliant on like the teacher really trying to get everyone together.

Marysol: Yeah, you know, I do a lot so I do a lot of things like I said, like, check ins. And then obviously like, my, my biggest savior, savior has been the chat box. I have students put a lot of comments in the chat box because they're very, very shy in terms of like, they're very, first of all, they're very camera shy. And then also they're very, they are, don't like to unmute themselves either because it is a form of public speaking and now you're speaking to a group of strangers right? And I, I try to be more sensitive. So I guess I do like to stick to my chatbox because I feel like at least there, they can kind of express them feel like they can express themselves a little bit more freely, rather than making them like, turn on their camera and talk to me because not ever --

most students are not comfortable doing that. They're young, they're kids, they're awkward. They're, you know, they're not going to just, you know, turn on the cameras, like Miss Gomez, and, you know, chat away that they don't have that, there. They don't have that ability in terms of in this space. Right. So I really tried to honor that. And I think that the kids, you know, it'll be like, I do like simple things like, okay, you know, how are you doing today? Put, what's your like, put an emoji in the chat box that describes what how are you doing? You know, and then the kids just line up their emojis, right? and things like that. So, I mean, simple things like that, at least to kind of replicate a little normalcy. But in person no, I do a bunch of other things like, a bunch of other things that the kids just, I like to put them in socially awkward spaces in person.

Andrew: Yeah, so so like, this chat box has been a form of like communication with between students and students in you.

Marysol: Yeah, the chat. Yeah. And with each other, right, with each other. So, so that's, that's what I that's what I, I tried to do, and again, in whatever limited form.

Andrew: Yeah, have you noticed the students, like really open up through the chat box, like describe, you know, really open up to questions really give detailed answers stuff like that?

Marysol: Some do. Yeah. You know, a lot of them are particularly responsive. They are, you know, again, it was a transition into this learning, but I think a lot of them really do open up. And then a lot of them just don't, they don't, they don't feel comfortable there. They're just kind of like, hanging on. Unfortunately, a lot of, I do have that population of students that are hanging, just hanging on and just, they're just waiting to get back. And their interaction with distance learning is very limited. And they're because they are not. They don't like it.

Andrew: So if ever -- every student has their own circumstance at home, especially since it's like a really unstable pandemic, how has San Ysidro High School really provided resources for the students to be on an equal playing field, so to speak?

Marysol: Oh, gosh, I mean, we have done so many things like on, you know, on our campus, I mean, I can't even speak to the amazing work of my colleagues in our administration. I mean, there's a lot of opportunities, like I'm thinking of our visual, you know, our visual arts and, and, and, you know, like, specifically, I mean, holding online workshops for like the theater kids, you know, doing having socially distance, you know, dance practice, right, which is really great. I one -- my, my colleague who teaches photography literally drove to every single students', every single one of his students house and dropped off materials for photography. We, you know, our campus. In the beginning, we also provided lunches for the community, right? So if you had a child at San Ysidro, and even if you didn't have a child at San Ysidro, you could pull up and get a lunch provided by the cafeteria. Our administration is you know, is constantly, we've officially become a vaccination site. We're going to be a vaccination site starting next week. So I think it's been like a group like collective effort. It's been a collective effort on behalf of everyone, everyone has another colleague of mine is does pet food distribution and, and every single person at San Ysidro everyone kind of, you know, like, like, we contribute, as we say, in Spanish, granito, granito de arena, like a grain of, you know, a grain of sand everybody does. Their gives their little grain of sand. And, and, and, together we, you know, we, we've, we come together and it's a really beautiful thing that we do, you know, when everybody just kind of harnesses their talents and, and connects with the students and in various ways, it just becomes really powerful. Super powerful.

Andrew: So are these contributions like organized? Or are they like from everyone coming to like giving forth their individual input? And then it just becomes a collective output?

Marysol: Yes, absolutely. That's exactly what it is. Everyone does their individual input and then it, yeah, collectively as a community in San Ysidro, it just comes out. It's, you know, we're like, we just have a lot, so many moving parts. And yeah, and then we collectively, we just come out with, with great work. And, and I'm really proud of that. And that's why I've, I've been at San Ysidro for so long, because I really respect all of the efforts of my colleagues and what they do. I always feel like, I'm, I'm working with a lot of like, like minded people. And, and I'm really proud of that, and I don't want to not work in a space like that I really enjoy it, you know, I really, really enjoy it.

Andrew: So everyone's working, working together to really ensure that the students can come back to campus or are like getting through this virtual learning environment as best as they can. Right?

Marysol: Absolutely. Yeah. And in their own in their own capacities. I'm just so inspired. I'm so inspired by my colleagues, like, I'm always, I'm like that teacher, like I, I'm always like, the biggest cheerleader of everyone, like, I'm always, you know, whatever, a colleague of mine that is doing anything to kind of really have a genuine impact on the lives of students and supporting them through this, through this pandemic, is a rock star to me, and I'm their biggest fan. I'm always like, I'm always the biggest fan. I think they're so cool. And it inspires me, I'm like, What am I doing? You know, what's what's going on with me? I should be, I could be doing more. I mean, it's just so inspirational, and and awesome to share a space with, with, like minded, talented people. Yeah.

Andrew: So have students, like really embraced these, these, like you know, these, the collective output that everyone has really put forward?

Marysol: Yes, absolutely. You know, absolutely. The kids really, really understand that we go above and beyond to, to take care of them. And to, and to, and to love on them. And, and they Yeah, oh, they know, they know. They know. And even you know, with the limited amount of students that we have, we've had absolutely zero behavior issues, zero issues with enforcing social distancing with, with getting, you know, getting students on task with anything we had, we have had zero issues. And I think because the students really understand that we're, that we are here for them, that we work very, very hard, you know, to, to help them in every way possible.

Andrew: So do you think the pandemic has given San Ysidro High School an opportunity to really like, open up the students' mindset when it comes to, you know, the role of the school or like how much the school really cares for them?

Marysol: Yeah, I think so. I think that the students are really appreciative of it. Now, I think that it was a big shock. That they realize like, no, my school is a really important space for my community, for my family. And, and, like I said, I think we're excited to have them back. They're excited to come back. And I really feel like this next year coming in. When we have more. When we have more in person classes. I think this, this next year is going to be a, an explosively fun and productive year because everybody's just has so much energy, to to, get get, to catch up, to catch up on projects, start new projects, make up projects, do whatever, like nothing is impossible. And I think everybody's collectively feeling that yeah.

Andrew: Yeah. So for like some of these students like the freshmen, it's like, finally opening that page, the like the new page on their life coming back to campus, really getting to enjoy that moment with everyone.

Marysol: Yeah, for sure. I mean, I started my -- the last week when I was doing my, my class from my classroom. I mean, even the students like, Oh, can we do a classroom tour? They wanted me to tour them like around my classroom because they wanted to see what it looked like and you know, things like that. Yeah, especially the freshmen but also the, the students that are going to be seniors, you know, I think they're like, oh, man, like, I really like it there. I better enjoy my last year because I really, really liked it there.

Andrew: So the school is really aiming to be this hub, hub. One Everyone comes back to really like, get into business but also like, kind of celebrate I guess like that moment everyone comes back together, right?

Marysol: Yeah. And and, and this has all been like this, our campus. This feeling, this, this feeling of family has been. This is not something that had, that has been created overnight. This has been an effort since our school opened in 2002. It was opened under my former boss Hector Espinosa, who took it upon himself to really create this atmosphere of family. And it was it this this effort in this in this context has been very, very deliberately created in this community in San Ysidro because San Ysidro was not very much, you know, 20, 30 years ago was not this kind of school, I don't think would have ever been imagined in the community of San Ysidro 30 years ago. No, absolutely not. It was just a very, very different context. You know, and so our, our, our school has been absolutely revolutionary and changing the, in really uplifting the, the San Ysi -- the San Ysidro and the border community as a whole. Absolutely.

Andrew: So the foundation of the high school really brought the whole community together, right?

Marysol: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. You know, it's incredible. And, and I and my, my former boss, Hector Espinosa, I just think, you know, I, every time I see him, I always, I'm like that

emoji with the stars in in their eyes, because, because he, I think he just had, he had that vision. He broke ground at the school and he had the vision. He knew that, that he was going -- that he could, along with some really good people really create this space and revolutionize and and and uplift an entire community. And I, and I think he was he was brilliantly successful, brilliantly successful at it. He has since retired. God bless him as he should, because he worked incredibly hard to do to do this. But yeah, super, super, super, super lucky to feel a part of that. Wow.

Andrew: So San Ysidro high school really, like brought the whole community together all these students coming in? Are they part of something more, once, once they like, really get involved with the high school?

Marysol: Yes, absolutely. Um, yeah, we've had, you know, we've had the pleasure of graduating some incredible people. I mean, you know, and, and not even, you know, I mean, we always aim for our students to, to pursue, pursue higher education. But even beyond that, I mean, we just have a lot of students that, that have just gone on and have just really become quality members of society, interesting people, you know, and that really, really just also come back. And it's really lovely that they never, they don't forget us. They don't forget our school. And even if it's just sending us an you know, sending sending me a random email, like life update, Ms. Gomez, and then they'll just tell me, I'm doing this, I'm doing that, or, you know, a lot of our students return to campus to talk and to be guest speakers, and to do projects with the kids. You know, and they, they, it's really, it's really beautiful that they don't forget us, and they come back. And it's, it's always just wonderful. Like, you know, me being in my classroom doing my thing, and I just have a random student just walk in, and from, like, six years ago, and I'm like, you know, I'm always like, I always I'm always like, I always freak out of course, and you know, but yeah, it's

it's really, really incredible. Some of, some of our kids are just absolute superstars, superstar people.

Andrew: So it really looks like San Ysidro, their experience there has really left like a mark on them. Hmm. And so they come back and give back to the community and the cycle continues. How does that really like affect the whole community as a whole?

Marysol: You know, I yeah, I mean, it's, it's just like I said, it's, it's something that is like that. It just, it's just transformed. It's, it's transforming the community, you know, you have the students coming back, but they're also you know, now they have siblings, you know, that are also going to go to the school, we have wonderful parents that come and volunteer, that, you know, volunteer their time, their, their precious time to, to do, make copies for us, you know, and, and do these wonderful things. And, and it's just kind of like, a, like, it's a reciprocal sort of thing, you know, it's a reciprocal kind of relationship. So, so that's, that's really, that's really, really lovely.

Andrew: So has the pandemic really affected this whole giving back? Or has it really, like, sparked this movement to do more for the community?

Marysol: Yeah, you know, like I said, yeah, it has definitely had an impact because logistic like, it's just been all been logistics. We cannot have in like the beginning it was like if you're going to make copies for the students, make sure that you make a copy a week prior because you can't touch the paper, because then it might have Covid on it, and then it was just logistically been a nightmare. So we've definitely-- has limited has limited our interactions. Yeah severely, so everything we've had to be very cautious about social distancing, about you know things like that, but I think again, it's just been a, you know, forced hiatus, if you will. But come this coming new year, I just imagine that there's just going to be so much going on campus. Because we're, we're all energized and pumped and ready to get back to it.

Andrew: So going back to virtual learning of the topic of virtual learning, has it proven to be effective in teaching high school students? Especially since you know every student has different circumstances at home and so, the community has stepped up to really provide for these students. Has it still proven to be effective?

Marysol: No, I don't believe distance learning is -- I think it's effective but for a very, very, very small minority of students. Very, very small minority like -- I don't know, I didn't like -- at least from my students, maybe it's effective maybe three, four percent of my students. No I don't believe, it absolutely not. It has shown a lot, it has, I feel like distance learning has really shed light on a lot of educational inequity unfortunately and a lot of different challenges that education, I mean we are barely starting to tackle. I -- in -- and, and as a result, as a consequence of the pandemic, I mean you know, I have my work, I have enough work for me up until I retire. Okay, there's a lot of things that are going to need to be addressed and corrected because of the pandemic. I have students that have, I mean this year, I have students, I look at their transcript the year prior. You know, their ninth grade year when they were in person and they have four point o's, excellent, excellent. Superstar students and this, this year through distance learning, they are not even, they're not even, they're not even earning F's, they are earning non-completions because they don't even -- they don't even interact enough to even earn an F in their class. So that's how extreme it is, that's how extreme it is, there's going to be a lot, a lot of issues and a lot of things that we're going to tackle as a result of this pandemic for sure. Oh yeah. Work is cut out for us for many years to come in terms of the, the collateral damage that has been the result of this.

Andrew: Could you expand on some of these educational inequalities that students face, what do you specifically mean?

Marysol: It will, okay, well, I mean in terms of very simply in terms of you know, infrastructure, I mean students' access to wi-fi. Simple, something as simple as that. You know you have students that have, you have a handful of students that don't even have wi-fi, parents cannot afford to, to pay for, for their wi-fi, the students that do have wi-fi either the connection is very, very poor or they have multiple devices that have, siblings, things like that. So their, their, their access to this information and to this network is very limited, okay. It also is very time consuming right? If I'm gonna -- if Ms. Gomez puts a, you know, if she posts a PDF [Portable Document Format] of a text; right, how long is it going to take for them to download it, or how long is it going to take to display right? So, so things like that, in terms of you know, students being at home with. Do -- you know, there -- it's an assumption that, that for a lot of these students, that their home is a safe space and that might not be the case either, right so. You know, I mean there's students in special education, students that you know, that are special education students that require accommodations and, you know, and a lot of attention. How do we translate our work that we do in person to those students? We can't, we can't and so you know. Students that have, that have issues, that have challenges linguistically in terms of developing their academic language and their communication skills, well, I don't have them in the classroom now. I can't make them, I can't make them, I can't make them speak to each other, practice that language, practice those skills. So I mean there's just I could, I could go on, I could go on and on about these kinds of issues, I mean it's a very, very unfortunate. It's very, very unfortunate, because in the end, it's our students that are suffering, it's our students that are suffering because we are not, we are you know. We are choosing as a, as a, as an American society and as a people to, to divert our energies and resources to other things like, like you know, raging wars and spending on defense and things like that. And it's very heartbreaking because I mean this

pandemic has really just taken the lid off of what, of how much of a disservice we're doing to, to our, to our youth. Yeah.

Andrew: So how are you and other faculty preparing to really help the students come back and catch, catch up or open up these resources for them again, that they might have lost before, how, how, how will they adapt?

Marysol: Well geez, I'm -- like I said well, we're just -- it's kind of like. You do the best that you can, you fight the good fight every day. You know, I understand these, these, these inequities and these challenges are so, there's such a macro level, I mean like, you know it's like kind of standing, standing at the beach and getting ready to get slapped by wave right? But, and for a long time I, I you know, even before the pandemic, I struggled with, with kind of how to deal with these inequities and now I'm just like you know what? The only thing I could do is the best that I can every single day and, and, and just work really hard at developing my craft and in and, and being in a constant evolution of what I do in terms of pedagogy and, and who I am as an, as a teacher. But also just, just serve at you know, I didn't really realize until you know, I don't know, maybe two years ago, how much just my being there and my presence is important to students and I think that it's you know, all I just -- it's very simple, I just want to be. I want, I want to continue my evolution as a professional and as a creator of, of, of you know, of all of this. You know this, this space, but I also just want to be a good person and, and I think that when students see that, that's also very, very powerful and, and I, and that's just kind of where I'm, I'm just, I'm just going with it. And, and obviously, you know, continue to you know, smash the white supremacy, patriarchy every day, like smash! That's what I do every day. [laughed] That's what I do, I'm like, if I'm not -- like that's what I do and I always say, like I tell the kid -- I always, I've said this for years, I'm like you know I have little sticks, little sticks, but I stick it

to the man every day, even though it's a little, I don't care, they're always going to feel me. I'm always there just chipping away. And, and I think that's just, that's in itself, in itself powerful and I, and I try to tell my students that too. It's like, this is what I'm doing, what is it that you're going to do? What is it that you want to do and how are you going to, how are you going to change the world and how are you going to use your talent, right, to do something powerful and uplifting and, and revolutionary for society. What are you going to do right? And I always say, they have the same, like we are walking revolutions, all of us are walking revolutions, so what is your revolution, what is it that you want to do? And, and once I have so many kids that really take that to heart and I said, then they just go out and they're amazing people, like amazing. So it's exciting.

Andrew: I definitely resonate with that because back in high school, it's -- school was my safe space away from home, you know it was where I could be with friends, be with teachers who really like cared about me, even though we were, you know. Maybe it's like a class a day, but it's still like that emotional connection, I felt really helped grow, really helped me grow to who I am today. Yeah, that's why I have a lot of respect for teachers that just, have -- play such a big impact, have such a big role in students' lives and yeah. Thank you, thank you so much for really--

Marysol: Oh no no--

Andrew: Talking about this.

Marysol: It's a -- you know what though? But look, it is a, it is not this like -- for me it's not like this I'm, like I said, I don't like to, like to see, I don't, I don't like to approach teaching like in this hierarchy right? I don't believe in that, I -- it is something so reciprocal because my students give so much to me. And I learned so much from them, I learned so much from them and, and

they are so incredibly talented and, and so. Sometimes I just feel like I'm a professional, like, cheerleader you know? I'm just like, you're awesome, you're awesome, you're awesome too! And you know, and that's, and that's just kind of like. You know it, they're just, they're just really, really, really fun and cool young people, young people in general are just awesome. I don't know, I just have a huge bias for that, I'm, I'm a really big fan of young people. Just the energy, the creativity, the sensitivity, the -- they're just so cool.

Andrew: Is there anything else you would like to share before we end this interview?

Marysol: I just want it, you know, I just wanted to just kind of make, make it, reiterate a point and I, in you know, we've been in spaces earlier like to, to just really talk about what it means for representation and, and for people of color right? What representation means and, and it's like, I'm just very grateful, I'm very grateful for you know, for Professor Alvarez, along with his father right, who, who, you know, you know, I don't know if it's Professor Alvarez senior, but being a young person of color in a school where I was, I very much felt alone and scared and I didn't, I definitely you know I did feel like an intruder, like I wasn't good enough and I didn't understand why I was on this campus while I was at UCSD [University of California San Diego]. And, and then I just. You know, I took Professor Alvarez senior's, his class first and then I walked in and I saw someone that could look at, look like he could be my uncle or my grandpa right? And he kind of used the same language as me and he talked to me and taught me about the significance of my culture and, and how interesting my background was and he, and he was just so incredible and then he ended up referring me and writing me a letter of recommendation to do -- I ended up doing field research in, in Jalisco (?) in Mexico. So I got this opportunity to go into Mexico and do this wonderful research with the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies and that was amazing and then I took you know, Professor Alvarez's class too and he was just

incredible you know, a young academic right? I you know, this was many years ago and doing some really groundbreaking research. It, you know in history, and then, and he just gave me the same space, he gave me, you know, I was this really kind of gung ho angry kind of stomping around right? Like this quasi social active, social, political activist and I was just -- wanted to know everything and talk and, and he, and he always just gave me the space. And it just felt good and, and, and you know, and I'm just so grateful and, and now working with you guys and having this opportunity, it's just like one of those full circle spaces, because now I'm out in the community. Working with people of color, which is you know, wonderful, but then I can kind of just go back and, and connect, you know and connect back to UCSD and, and you know, and then, and then even moving forward, just foment (?) those connections for my students in the future and we're just, we're having, we're getting more and more kids over there and I'm so excited. Because we're all nerds, super nerds, I mean come on! I'm always like, welcome, because we're just really, I'm just so excited, I have so many you know kids headed, headed over to UCSD and I can't, I'm like, makes my heart flutter because that's, that's my school. So thank you, thank you for giving me the space, I appreciate it Andrew.

Andrew: I'd like to ask one last question if that's okay with you.

Marysol: Yeah sure.

Andrew: So this, this space that Professor, that Professor Alvarez gave, gave to you. Do you extend that to your students like, it feels like this is, like, like you said, this full circle and it helps the students as well.

Marysol: Yeah, no, yeah absolutely you know, just even taking part of this project, where it was like. You know, talking to the students and having you guys, in even in online learning right? Like the kids see you and they're like, okay, like I even get that vibe from the students like when

you guys show up, you know it's like oh, it's time for business right? And, and I yeah, it's wonderful, it's, it's wonderful because we are now collaborate -- collaborating and, and giving, allowing the students to, to see possibility. And that is amazing, that in itself is amazing, for them to see possibility and for them to see like I can be at UCSD. Why? Why not? I could do it, you know. Like one of my students who is going to start in the fall, I'm like, what are you going to major in mijo, and he started, he says that he's like, I just want to study diseases. I don't know what that major is called, but I want to just look at diseases, it's important. And I'm like yeah, do it, do it, cool, yeah you do it. So lots of you know, lots of great energy and I like the fact that the students are feeling more comfortable with that. Like no, I need to be there, I deserve to be there and not only do I deserve to be a top, you know, at, at, a at, a top institution like UCSD, but like, you guys need me, you need me. Right? You need people like me and I, not only do I deserve to be there, you need me and I will be successful.

Andrew: Okay, thank you very much for this interview. It's been really, it's been a great opportunity for me to really be here with you and hear your insights on these questions.

Marysol: Awesome, awesome, well thanks again, for giving me this space and, and thank you again for, for your, your collaborative, collaborative work with your colleagues with doing our, our college survival guide and it's just I couldn't be more thankful to you guys for sharing your energy, it takes a village. People always think, oh yeah, like educating youth, really empowering youth is like one person coming in and putting the smackdown. No, everybody, it's our entire village has to come together and then together we uplift everybody and I'm really glad that you guys decided to join our village.

Andrew: Thank you very much, I'm very happy to be part of that village.

Marysol: Yeah, it's great.