Tanya Domi:
Hello, this is Tanya Domi. Welcome to The Thought Project recorded at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, fostering groundbreaking research and scholarship in the arts, social sciences and sciences. In this space, we talk with faculty and doctoral students about the big thinking and big ideas generating cutting edge research informing New Yorkers and the world. I'm delighted today to welcome our guest, Veronica and Mike from Professor David Bloomfield's Urban Education Doctoral class here at the Graduate Center. Veronica, tell me about yourself, what year you are in the PhD program in urban ed, and what is your major project this year?

Veronica Paredes:
Sure. Hello everyone, and thank you for having me. I'm happy to share this space with Michael. I am currently a third year PhD student urban ed department Grad Center. Ideally, I'd like to do research alongside immigrant origin teachers to really get to see how it is that they use what they come across in their daily lives through their own cultures, particularly like Latinx immigrant origin and how they're bringing in that knowledge and making sense of it and using it in the classroom with students to foster solidarity between them. I'm interested in grounding that in a lot of the colonialist work and excited to see how this class and this project can serve as a way for me to start thinking through how to work alongside immigrant Latinx teachers. So I am putting together a podcast based on an affinity group that I just reached out to. About three of us, we're coming together this week to record and then use some of the stuff that we're bringing to the table and highlighting some of the things that, the connections between their pedagogy call work and their lives and how they're doing what they're doing, and then bringing that to light in a form of one or two series podcast episodes. So I'm excited to kind of explore the ropes a little bit.

Tanya Domi:
It sounds interesting. I'll come back to you and ask you about how you're going to leverage that perhaps into a dissertation. Mike, tell me about your project, which Professor Bloomfield discussed with me before we came down here and you about restorative justice. I'd like to hear about your project, what year you are in this PhD program here in urban ed and what you plan to do with this project.

Michael Alston:
Well, thank you. Thank you for having me. This is really cool. I've never been in a recording studio before, so this is very, very cool. My name is Michael. I am a third year student in the urban education program here at the Graduate Center, and I broadly study the intersection between the criminal justice system and education. And so what I wanted to do for this class was kind of explore something that I never really considered before, which was restorative justice. So often schools claim they have restorative justice programs, and it's
kind of like the silver bullet to many of the behavioral problems that plague urban schools. And so what I wanted to do was be really critical of it.

So I'm taking this class to really dive into literature, but also public perception of restorative justice. And so what I'm doing from my program specifically this class is I want to interview teachers and get their perceptions of restorative justice practices in the classroom and kind of really seeing if it works from a teacher perspective. So I'm interviewing teachers, I'm talking to administrators, interviewing practitioners, and also students to kind of build what I would hope to be is a nice article in support of, but really critical of restorative practices as they are implemented and practiced in schools.

Tanya Domi:
That's interesting. It's interesting to me because I'm actually a human rights professor, and so the whole concept of restorative justice is one that animates my work, obviously. Do you know how teachers are trained in restorative justice if they are using this philosophy and the way it's leveraged in a classroom? How are they trained on restorative justice? Have you done any research on that yet?

Michael Alston:
I haven't. So I'm actually a teacher myself, so I know it from a practical experience. And it's interesting because restorative justice was that is the program in which we're trying to get away from the criminal justice system, but the criminal justice system also has its own version of restorative practices. And so what I will say to answer your question directly is from my experience, teachers are not trained well enough, which is my major critique between lesson planning and professional development sessions that happen within the school and other concerns and professional obligations. There's really not enough time to train teachers. And so the training that we get as teachers is very minimal and doesn't last long enough. And so often what you see is you see the deficiencies within our training when we're trying to implement those restorative practices. And so yeah, that's the major critique of mine that we don't have enough training.

Tanya Domi:
That's interesting. Okay. Well, you'll have to learn about that and talk about it in maybe a podcast. So Veronica, you've been obviously thinking about working on this topic about working with immigrant teachers, which is really interesting. This is New York City, one of the biggest immigrant populations in the United States. One of the things I love about the city, my grandmother came through Ellis Island to this country. So I'm the granddaughter of an immigrant, but particular in black, Latinx population, which is pretty significant in New York as well and has been for a long, long time. So how are you accessing these teachers and how are you reaching out to them and
meeting them and being able to have these conversations?

Veronica Paredes:
Yeah, so I started reaching out to, I was a teacher for six years and I started sort of reaching out to teacher friends of mine as well that I've known for those years, and put together a flyer casting for an affinity group of Latinx immigrant origin teachers to come together to co-create the podcast episode because I didn't want to kind of go in with an agenda. I kind of want the affinity group to serve as the thinking tank, if you will, if that's going to drive the podcast and content. Out of the three people that are joining me on this adventure, one of them is I take a class with her as well, and she's a teacher, so she was really excited once I kind of shared and spread the word. So it's mostly been through word of mouth.

Tanya Domi:
Word of mouth. So you're going to develop that into a podcast series that we hope you'll be able to blast it out, somehow get it out. Do you intend to leverage this into a potential dissertation?

Veronica Paredes:
I feel like the way I am connecting it, I'm using the podcast, this class as an opportunity to kickstart it, to see if I like it, if I enjoy the process and what comes of it. But I am interested in also continuing it to see what else comes up that will in turn inform my dissertation. I know there's a lot of common experiences that as immigrant origin teachers, we encounter, and I don't think that there's enough spaces for us to make sense of our margin legislation in a way that's empowering, and that has a lot to do with how siloed sometimes we are in just the everyday life of a teacher and also as an academic student too. We're also very siloed. So bringing people together is something that will generate really is what's the forefront of my thinking when I'm thinking about my dissertation, is really using as a platform to sort of elevate this space and highlight these voices.

Tanya Domi:
That sounds worthwhile. I want to thank both Veronica and Mike for being here today as our guests. Thanks for tuning into The Thought Project, and thanks to our guests, Veronica and Mike, who are students in Professor David Bloomfield's class who is of Brooklyn College and the CUNY Graduate Center, a great friend of The Thought Project. Thanks for tuning in and check us out next week.