TUTORING

AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES IN PUBLIC MULTIGRADE SCHOOLS (1997-2018)

APRENDER CON INTERÉS

REDES DE TUTORÍA

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Introduction

This publication, modest in appearance and extension, compared to those previously issued by our group –now known as Redes de Tutoría– is particularly relevant at the present moment in Mexico, in order to advance faster in the educational change that has already taken root among many teachers of small rural public schools. The publication vividly embodies, through recorded testimonials, the personal and social changes experienced and voiced by alumni, students, teachers and family members who taught and learned – all of them– in tutorial relationships. Their achievements are truly remarkable, because they occurred in ordinary, even supposedly adverse, settings, with the help of not particularly expert teachers, and without additional teaching technologies or materials. What was decisive was that the personal interest of each learner matched the care and knowledge of her/his tutor. The matching of interest and capacity ensured the success of the endeavor and, in addition, became the basic bond within communities of teachers and learners.

The driving force of what can be described as a movement has been the newly found professional autonomy of teachers, who traditionally find themselves limited by institutional distrust and the ensuing overregulation and control. The experience of being attended to in regular training sessions, and of being asked to decide by themselves the topic of study each one wants to pursue, engaging in dialogue with friendly and knowledgeable tutors, renewed in them the joy of teaching and learning in freedom. They each chose a particular aspect of the program, because it was of real interest to them, or because they had never really mastered it; they explored it at their

own pace, and in their own way as never before. All of this took place in constant dialogue with an interested, trusted and kind tutor. Moreover, the satisfaction of personal achievement increased as teachers reflected on the way they had learned. They then shared their experiences with others and--in order to affirm and prove the worth of what they had learned--became tutors of the same topics to other teachers- apprentices.

What teaching and learning in tutorial networks demonstrate is that the culture of school and the problem of change, as Seymour Sarason (2004) put it, is more related to ethical rather than to technical aspects. They are more about personal, honest and truthful relationships than about programs, teacher-student ratios, material resources or state-of-the-art technologies. Paradoxically, what prevents the normal encounter of interested learners with caring and honest tutors is the traditional structure of a system in which learning is made a function of programs, schedules and methods decided by an external authority, rather than by the learners themselves. In a learning community, by contrast, content, times and methods are transformed into functions of what the learner and the tutor need, and are capable of doing. Experience shows that this simple, common sense approach goes against the grain of accepted practice in most schools. Therefore, we feel obliged to explain and promote this practice, which is satisfactory for students, teachers, parents and, indeed, for society at large. The best, most productive way to disseminate the practice has been by contagion, by participation in a learning community, becoming apprentices and wholeheartedly experiencing the tutorial cycle. In this publication, we offer a second best: the vicarious experience of the transformative nature of teaching and learning in tutorial networks, in videos and recorded interviews of people who manifest and explain their deep personal, emotional and intellectual transformation through the practice.

Tutoring and learning communities in public multi-grade schools (1997-2018)

Tutoring and learning communities (redes de tutoría) in public schools began as an experiment, more than 20 years ago, in the small towns of Mexico, where the National Council for the Promotion of Education (CONAFE) opened Post-Primary centers (Cámara, 2003); a long overdue service, since only pre- and elementary school levels were usually offered in those places. Afterwards, tutorial practice continued with the support of the Under-Secretariat of Basic Education in incomplete tele-secondary schools (small middle schools, monitored by a single teacher, aided by satellite transmitted master classes) in several states. This system was later to expand massively, in the second half of the 2006-2012 federal administration, to the 9,000 elementary and secondary schools with the lowest grade point averages in the national standard achievement test. (Meixi, 2018; Rincón-Gallardo, 2016). At present, many teachers maintain the practice, even without official approval and support, both in incomplete (one teacher for all or several grades) and complete schools, because of the perceived improvement in their professional satisfaction, and in the academic and social achievements of their students. However, since the school year 2015-2016, CONAFE officially adopted tutorial practice under the model ABCD (Learning Based on Collaboration and Dialogue). Both in discourse and practice, the ABCD model has permeated the entire institution –directors, heads of programs, coordinators and trainers, down to the instructors in 32,000 small community schools.

Leading school researchers have written about the practice[1] and foreign educators who came to experience it have taken the model back to their countries: notably Thailand and Chile, the USA for a time, and most recently, Argentina[2]. In 2017 and 2018 the HundrEd Foundation of Finland included tutoring and learning communities among the 100 most promising educational innovations worldwide. At the beginning of 2018 the Inter-American Development Bank organized an international seminar to discuss tutoria in Mexico City and a second one October in Guadalajara.

Tutoria's basic *a priori* conviction is that teaching is a friendly encounter between equals, irrespective of the fact that one knows what the other wants to learn. Throughout the years we have developed an effective, accessible way, for any teacher of basic education to implement tutorial relations among her/his students. Tutoring becomes a simple, even minimal, intervention in schools, capable of producing extraordinary results and desirable educational outcomes. The efficacy of the practice does not depend on external factors-–buildings, equipment, educational materials, social conditions, etc.—though these are desirable and even legally enforceable. All it takes is for a teacher, with the approval of local authorities and the means to travel, to demonstrate the practice to a fellow teacher who knows about it and wants to try it out. What the first teacher delivers is, in effect, a very practical solution to two of the most urgent needs experienced by all teachers in multi-grade schools: the means to overcome the insecurity inherent in the demand to handle the different topics of a standard program, and the impossibility of being able to take care of each individual student so that no one is left out.

The tutor does the unexpected by asking the apprentice-teacher to choose among a variety of problems or topics which the tutor has mastered. The tutee is encouraged to select by himself/herself which of the topics or problems offered she/he wants and needs to learn in order to master them and overcome previous insecurities. In the tutorial dialogue, the apprentice uncovers what she/he already knows and connects it to what at the beginning seemed distant and/or inaccessible. The mastering of a problem or theme turns the apprentice-teacher into a professionally assured and satisfied tutor in a few but well mastered subjects. Quite an accomplishment, indeed, for a lonesome, overburdened and generally unmotivated teacher. The apprentice-teacher reflects on the tutorial process, effectively dispelling insecurities, reaffirming what was learned and thus discovers ways to effectively help each of his/her students in turn.

All this, a critic might say, is fine, but how can a single teacher provide personal tutoring to a large group of students? The answer is to stop thinking that only one person has the monopoly of teaching, and to recognize that all students are capable not only of learning, but also of teaching. Once a theme or topic has been mastered and reflected upon, the teacher-apprentice can

1 Richard Elmore, Michael Fullan, Santiago Rincón Gallardo, Dennis Shirley, Inés Aguerrondo.

2 Fundación 2020, Santiago, Chile; Fiftyfold, Singapur, Tailandia; Juvenile Court Community Schools, San Diego, California, EE.UU.; Ministerio de Educación, Baradero, Buenos Aires, Argentina.

become a tutor to whoever is interested in learning it. By doing so, the teacher not only deepens his or her own understanding of the particular theme, but also discovers different ways of approaching it, and most importantly, learns to appreciate different attitudes and dispositions among student-learners. From then on, the teacher's practice becomes more professional to the extent that she/he will be able to detect the students' inner needs and help them learn by themselves.

Over and above the approving nod of authorities, the availability of time and the resources for travel, the fundamental work of the teacher-tutor will depend on the energy of each person, which, in fact, is the best distributed resource in the world. It is this energy that allows anyone to learn with interest and for personal advantage, to expand understanding and create community. Being so valuable, it is nevertheless free, always at hand, available to all. The willingness and the ability to learn is what any public educational service, especially in multi-grade schools, can and should achieve.

The tutorial practice follows a general sequence, indicative but not prescriptive, so as to accommodate to varied situations and individuals, and open always to surprise.

1. The tutor offers the apprentice only themes that he/she knows well.
2. The apprentice chooses themes that truly interest and engage him/her.
3. The tutor provides context, specifies challenges, and suggests the expected gain of the learning effort.
4. The tutor tries to guess, through personal experience, the interior processes of the apprentice, in order to provide relevant information that might be missing, or to bring to the apprentice's attention what she/he knows, but is unable to relate to the challenge at hand.
5. Learning flows both ways, from a tutor that observes, diagnoses and supports different learning processes, and from apprentices that follow different paths through which they often arrive at alternative solutions that surprise and reward the tutor.
6. The criterion to judge achievement is the apprentice's satisfaction in front of her/his tutor.
7. The apprentice reflects on how he/she proceeded in order to learn the art of teaching in dialogue, affirm the capacity to proceed autonomously and be the judge of the truth, the goodness and the beauty of what was learned with interest.
8. The apprentice writes down his/her reflection about the learning process which he/she affirms and recreates in writing.
9. The apprentice presents in public what was learned, the kind of dialogue that enabled it, and exercises the ability to express and recreate it in front of an audience of peers, friends and family.
10. The apprentice demonstrates the usefulness of what was learned by moving forward and becoming a tutor to others willing to face and learn from the same problem or topic.
11. He/she registers the learning processes.
12. He/she discusses and deepens understanding within an open learning community.

Origin

As stated above, educational change took place in incomplete schools with few or only one teacher –at the margins of a public service which manages to reach the poorest communities, but where distance and poverty make compliance to normal school regulations difficult, and where both teachers and students face daily academic chores without the expectation, encouragement and social pressure of urban families. In conditions of bare subsistence, only a genuine interest to learn can attract and maintain a student's attention, and only a worthy academic offering can provide meaning to the teacher's effort. Interest becomes the indispensable and definitive factor to produce the desired change in teachers and students.

The basic intent of a service that reaches out to the poorest regions is to provide the younger generation with the means to be informed and capable of acting in the contemporary world. However, a recent study by the National Institute of Educational Evaluation, demonstrates that the service has generally been a failure, since two thirds of the students in the last year of high school cannot correctly answer a sufficient number of questions in a national standard test (SEP, 2017).

What Redes de Tutoria concludes is that the educational and human waste is due to the impersonal character of the service, which does not provide the time nor the attention necessary to follow the interests, conditions and dispositions of every teacher and student. It should be obvious that the orientation towards taking account of each person's interest comes from basic personal experience of what learning is, rather than from educational learning theories. The way we all learn to move, talk, walk, trust and live in the surroundings of family and society is a continuation, in its own scale, of the millennial drive to learn, moved by inner interest, exerting the inborn gift of language, through which culture is constantly inherited and re-created. The evolution and subsistence of the human family is irrefutable proof that, by communicating--most usually through the spoken word--all of us are capable of learning and teaching. There is no doubt that what we learn informally in our families, and in society at large, is generally worthwhile; doubts arise more frequently, however, about what is learned in formal institutions and contexts, whether public or private, even family operated.

This common-sense perspective allows us to see more clearly the source of the alienation that befalls scores of students. It is not because of their negligence or laziness, but because they are not getting the attention that their situations require and demand. All humans want to learn and to survive. Most students in traditional formal settings get used to impersonal, imposed relationships. Sometimes, however, those suffering alienation can be fortunate enough to uncover the obvious disfunction: like the child in Andersen's fable that cried out that the King was naked. The formal setting ceases being alienating the moment someone close to the student attends to her or his particular interests and respects the many ways that lead to learning. Educators must straighten out the formal settings –or turn them upside down— by responding to each student's particular interests and making sure that school content, times and modes of learning accommodate to the student, and not the other way around.

The origin of the approach to take advantage of the margins of the school system in order to try straightening it out, rests on the deep conviction of the promoters that attending to particular learning interests and fostering freedom and variety are paramount to provide an effective educational service in formal education settings. In time, the original approach became strengthened by contributions of well-known authors and critics of conventional schooling, echoed today by more recent authors who are convinced that content, times and mode of learning should always follow the interests of teachers and students, over against what has been--and still is now--the prevailing practice, in which learning is made a function of the content, time and mode defined by groups of experts and administrators, rather than by the interests of those needing and wanting to learn.

Important as it is to explain the origin of the practice, it is also convenient to explain the rationality of the sequence through which the practice has evolved and coalesced, so that its essentials can be understood and its diffusion can continue. The sequence is just a memory aid for those interested and actively engaged in the practice, not a conceptual shortcut by which one could dispense with the practice and hope to obtain the same results. The sequence has the merit of presenting schematically those central aspects that lay out and, in a way, ensure the power and variety of tutorial relationships.

The rationality of the sequence –its natural character, heeding the famous Latin induction to follow Nature as our guide—can be understood and accepted in reference to the judgment of well-known authors. In them we have found affinity, instruction and support, as we promote learning in tutorial relationships. Our major debt is to critics of contemporary educational systems in the second half of the 20th century: Paul Goodman, Ivan Illich, John Holt, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers. Not only in the Anglo-Saxon world, but also throughout the Spanish and Portuguese world their writings have been amply discussed by local thinkers and educators. In particular, the sequence profits from theoretical elaborations by David Hawkins, philosopher, Seymour Sarason, psychologist, and Richard Elmore, expert on processes of educational change.

Interest

Seymour Sarason, distinguished Yale researcher, repeatedly expressed, with scientific precision, the role interest plays in any learning situation:

> *Learning is a process that takes place in an interpersonal context, in which powerful factors like motivation, understanding, affection, reflection and the like, are always present. Of the many factors that intervene and modify the process, the strength of willing to learn may well be the most fateful.* (Sarason, 1996).

Elsewhere Sarason refers to interest as the quintessential, indispensable, element in any learning situation. Common experience tells us that of all we learned in formal institutions what remains alive is what was learned with interest. Otherwise, what remains, if at all, is a vague nominal memory.

Education from the point of view of equality, liberty and rationality; defining positive traits of human interaction[3].

To be congruent with the learning that started in infancy, any educational service should be personal, and therefore, a dialogue of equals. Tutoring, in which two engage in earnest dialogue must, indeed, be personal. The equality in a tutorial dialogue corresponds to the incommensurability of humans, individually different, but capable of reaching consensus –of identifying reality— at the margin of idiosyncrasies.

In a dialogue, any hierarchy due to the tutor's knowledge and the tutee's ignorance is but transitory, because the joy of the tutor will be to see knowledge realized in the learner. What deeply identifies tutor and tutee, willing to share knowledge in an honest meeting, is their openness and mutual respect, to the point of rendering irrelevant to their endeavor whatever differences may exist in terms of race, ethnicity, age, complexion or ideology[4].
The freedom to choose topics and themes, and defining the particular challenge within the apprentice's cultural realm, will allow him/her to direct the search and proceed autonomously. He/she will be the constant and definitive judge of the truth, beauty and goodness of what is being learned in dialogue with the tutor. Any apprentice is both a receptor of culture and a contributor to it; hence the need to respect choices, rhythms, doubts and deviations, knowing that to learn means being always ready for surprises.

Creativity, for the one who learns with genuine interest and proceeds autonomously, implies stretching human faculties. In the absence of clear guiding referents, the learner experiences an intelligible intuition and finds order in what at the beginning was a puzzling challenge. In this manner, the tutee recreates his or her cultural realm, though provisionally, always prepared to continue learning. The corollary of the above is for tutors not to facilitate direct answers to the puzzle the tutees face, otherwise the effort diminishes, and so will their achievement and satisfaction, which is the natural outcome of good learning.

The creativity with which the tutee finds order where before there was confusion springs from the power of

3 Hawkins, D. (2002), The Informed Vision, (in *Human Nature and the Scope of Education*, pp.202-242) Algora Publishing, N.Y.; Richard F. Elmore (2010), *Transformation of Learning in Rural México. A personal Reflection*, Graduate School of Education, Harvard University; Richard F. Elmore, (2016) *Reflections on the Role of Tutoría for the Future of Learning*, January 2016 (unpublished report).

4 "What is common to all true master-pupil relationships is the awareness both share that their relationship is literally priceless and in very different ways a privilege for both." Ivan Illich (1972) Deschooling Society, Boyards, N.Y., p.100. Richard Elmore (Reflections on the role of Tutoría…op.cit.) insists in the transformative power of "THE LOOK" that arises in the encounter between tutor and tutee, which is difficult to describe but also evident and powerful in its effects to learn and grow as a person.

the intuitive synthesis, the reflective judgement proper to the rational mind. The effort to see, remove obstacles, explore ways and choose paths will always depend on the learner's interests and commitment, but when the synthesis occurs, understanding becomes imperative, without the intervention of the person's will. This intuitive synthesis remains a mystery to neuroscientists. As the linguist Noam Chomsky has put it: "we know a lot about the puppet [neuroscience's findings], but nothing about the puppeteer [the intuitive synthesis]."

The process by which tutor and tutee assimilate as well as generate knowledge arises from the general culture within which both operate, and to which they also contribute. Besides, they add the cultural refinement of public expression in speech and in the written word. Finally, a cultural debt is paid every time apprentices become tutors and share with others the value of autonomous learning, mastered with sustained effort, reflectively analyzed and carefully prepared so as to be able to share it with professional accuracy. The educational cycle reaches completion when learning becomes habit and teaching is commonplace. Tutoring others not only affirms the reality, visibility and usefulness of what was learned, it also creates empathy and conviviality. Dialogue implies that two persons recognize one another as equals. Consequently, the implicit and most profound understanding that results from tutoring is the recognition that being human means sharing origins and destinies.

Alejandro D.

Trials of innovators

Trying to introduce an innovation in basic public and compulsory education faces a double challenge from the start: persuading the administrators of the service, of course; but more to the point, satisfying the felt needs of operators in the field: the teachers obviously, but also the students, even if their needs are not as manifest as those of the teachers. The two challenges run on two different negotiating tracks, given the vertical, rather authoritarian nature of public centralized services. Vis à vis the authorities, the promoters of the innovation cannot count only on the educational merits of their proposal, since policy decisions depend on other factors, notably public pressure and the expected political gains to functionaries and policy makers. As for teachers and students, used as they are to obeying decisions from above, a new practice will be truly innovative to the extent that they experience in themselves, independently of its official character, the transformative nature of what is imposed on them. In sum, the promoters address their proposal to students, through the mediation of their teachers, assuming the approving nod of the administrators, the gatekeepers. The promoters must have tested their innovation formally or informally, with or without official approval, and be thoroughly convinced of its merits, but they have to dialogue with gatekeepers on unequal rational grounds. Given, for the sake of argument, that the right political, social and financial conditions obtain, the decision makers would more often than not decide on an innovation by what they personally know of the technical competence and moral standards of its proponents, rather than by an independent and objective examination. The personal is political, as they say.

The first large-scale introduction of teaching and learning in tutorial networks took place 22 years ago in the National Council for the Promotion of Education (CONAFE for its capitals in Spanish). This institution provides preschool and elementary services in thousands of remote, small rural communities, but not middle school which by then had become an integral part, by law, of public basic education. The need to provide middle school services in small communities led the then director of CONAFE, Edmundo Salas, to harken back to a previous innovation designed to ensure--bypassing the regular system--the graduation of elementary school drop-outs. The rather unorthodox approach of that program happened to be germane in spirit and outlook to that of the CONAFE director. The new experiment, called Rural Post-Primary, greatly benefited from having such a gatekeeper. Then, the challenge centered on making attractive the Post-Primary to elementary school graduates, recent and not-so-recent, who had to choose either to take up full time subsistence activities or to continue engaged, though part time, in school work. Since prospective students of Post-Primary in small communities do not enjoy the social, economic and family support to go to school that their urban counterparts take for granted, the

core of the innovation was to ensure that the service accommodate in content and mode to students' learning interests and idiosyncrasies: anything but forcing them to accommodate to the regular program and mode of middle urban schools. This basic postulate became operative by allowing students to choose from the offerings of the instructor what was of interest to them, assuming that the instructor would find, in tutorial dialogue, the particular way to help each student learn and achieve mastery of the elected subject matter. The counterpart to the freedom to choose study subjects was that instructors should offer only what they knew well, even if the official program indicated otherwise. This radical departure from standard practices demonstrated the centrality--in any learning situation--of the premise that the interest of the apprentice match the capacity and commitment of the tutor. However, having passed the gate and made the service responsive to individual interests, the Post-Primary had to demonstrate its right to modify established practices. The obvious criterion to evaluate an innovation is to see if the proposed objective was indeed achieved. In the case of the Post-Primary, it very soon became obvious that students were actively engaged, learning, demonstrating and sharing with others what they had freely chosen and learned in dialogue with the tutor. This common sense test should have been enough, no matter how incipient, to prove the worth of the innovation, assuming that interest and engagement in dialogue is what education is all about; but for the larger school system the innovation had to pass the regular tests, mostly standard ones. The Post-Primary did fairly well in those tests, even if students had not followed the weekly dosages of the official program, proving the motto that "less is more": fewer subjects but fully explored and assimilated. Since it was supported as part of a World Bank loan, the Post-Primary passed an additional qualitative evaluation by an outsider, David Turner, who suggested improvements but thoroughly applauded and recommended the innovation (Cámara, 2003). Alas, just when the Post-Primary had passed conventional tests with fairly flying colors (according to the World Bank it was "perhaps the most successful pilot of the program"), the arrival of new gatekeepers in CONAFE, with different policy priorities and impervious to rational argument, abruptly put an end to the innovation that by then had reached 470 community centers in 31 states.

The short lived Post-Primary innovation, now enriched with bitter-sweet CONAFE experiences, soon found a place where to migrate: the subsystem of middle schools in Mexico called telesecundarias. The subsystem was designed to reach communities with very few students where having one teacher for each of the major academic areas was, according to accepted political economy, not feasible. In most telesecundarias there is one teacher per grade, but not infrequently, in places with fewer students, two and even just one teacher have to take care of all grades. To make up for the service's structural deficiency, master classes on all academic subjects of the official curriculum are broadcast from headquarters, rigorously scheduled to appear daily on the TV set in every classroom. Incomplete telesecundarias,

those with just two or one teacher, became the ideal place to renew the innovation recently suppressed in CONAFE. Teaching and learning in tutorial relationships would rescue vexed teachers, unable to master all topics and also profit from broadcast lectures. The basic demand of tutorial relationships deftly solved the predicament of these teachers, as they would offer their students only themes they felt comfortable with, and each student would choose according to his or her interest. Teachers would become tutors and engage in dialogue with each student. Progressively, each student would also become a tutor and tutors themselves become apprentices of freely chosen challenging subjects--assuming that all tutors had mastered well a few subjects. A research grant from the Educational Reform in Latin America Program (PREAL) made it possible to introduce the innovation in eight incomplete telesecundarias of two states, Zacatecas and Chihuahua (Cámara et al., 2006). Contrary to CONAFE practice, where the Post-Primary innovation was solely decided by the gatekeeper, in Zacatecas and Chihuahua the teaching and learning in tutorial relationships had, first, to be negotiated with an array of local authorities and then freely offered to interested teachers. Incomplete telesecundarias were so far behind academically, and so out of sync with the rest of the schools, that concerned authorities easily allowed what seemed to be a limited innovation; more so, since the promoters' credentials were acceptable and their financing came from abroad. Demonstrative workshops were offered to prospective teachers, and those who signed up received intensive training sessions in tutorial relationships. The core tenet of the training was to eliminate the separation between trainers and implementers, so as to organize from the beginning ongoing learning communities. Trainers had to demonstrate the same competency that was expected from the teachers. In turn, the teachers had to be models for their students. The themes offered in the workshop were the same ones teachers would later offer their students, and most crucially, the manner of learning had to be personal, face to face, in dialogue between tutor and tutee–just as it had been during the training sessions. What ensued proved the efficacy and accessibility of the innovation to turn awkward educational places into vibrant learning communities. The visible success in the first telesecundarias attracted other teachers in Zacatecas and in a neighboring state. The news reached the National Undersecretary of Education who made a special trip to visit a telesecundaria run by a single teacher, Sara Morán. Impressed by the manifest transformation of teacher and students where one least expected to find educational excellence, the Undersecretary decided, as great gatekeeper, to invite all telesecundaria departments to a national workshop conducted by teachers and students of Zacatecas and San Luís Potosí. The practice thus became dependent on the decision of state gatekeepers, on the one hand, and on the perceived personal and academic benefits of the tutorial practice. Soon the Undersecretary accelerated the expansion of the practice by deciding that the over nine thousand basic education schools in the country, which in 2009 had scored the lowest point averages in the national standard test, should be trained and helped to improve by means of tutorial relationships. Even if participation for those schools was compulsory, the very

nature of tutoring ensured free participation in the core unit of any learning process: the themes had to be freely accepted by the learner. The efficacy of the innovation was demonstrated by its acceptance by most teachers and students, despite the quasi-punitive character of the program. Moreover, outside educators came to see the practice, became apprentices to students and, convinced of the value of the innovation, took it back to their own places. As for external evaluation, the national standard test that is applied to all schools showed remarkable differences in those schools that had received regular technical support in tutorial relationships. The most dramatic changes occurred in telesecundarias that moved from the lowest point average among all categories of middle schools in the country, to the level of the highest ranking: the point average of private schools attended by students of affluent families (Azuma A., 2016; Meixi, 2018; Rincón-Gallardo, 2016).

As proof of the fact that innovation in public schools crucially depends on the wisdom and political context of gatekeepers, the administrators that arrived with the new government in 2012, found tutoring inadmissible, not so much for its educational merits as for having been promoted by an adversary administration whose every trace had to be erased. Yet, what happened in the following years became the most egregious evaluation of the transformative power of tutorial relations in schools, because many teachers and students continued the practice as independent professionals, without resources or administrative support, some even facing bureaucratic opposition. This fact allows for a radical new perspective with regard to the power of gatekeepers to determine what tutors and tutees should learn and how they should proceed.

The most recent experience (2016-2018) of introducing tutorial networks in public schools happened again in CONAFE, their place of origin. The views of the newly arrived gatekeeper in 2015 were congenial with tutorial practice, mainly because it had by then gained sufficient credibility among functionaries and educators. Actually, as a former state secretary of education in the state of Hidalgo, the new director had had the chance to meet in a small community a student who spontaneously told him about what she had learned and enjoyed as the apprentice of a fellow student. It was not difficult for the director to call experienced practitioners of tutoría and entrust them, not just to help with a particularly vulnerable group, but take responsibility for a whole educational institution in charge of 32,000 community schools in the country. Except for the short-lived Post-Primary experience many years before, the educational model of CONAFE had been traditionally designed by outside experts, to be executed according to scripted guides that young high school graduates, enabled as "instructors," strictly followed in their very small communities. This highly unorthodox educational arrangement was accepted, because full fledged teachers would rarely accept living in remote places to teach a handful of children. Acting on the innermost core of learning, tutoring turned on its head the role of CONAFE trainers and instructors, from being followers of scripted guides to becoming teachers of the particular subject matter each one of them had learned and about which he or she was able to engage in creative dialogue with students. Learning became alive and visible; subject matter was reinvented in every encounter; intellectual achievement was manifest; and, in a community of learners, service

and affection progressively became the norm. The process experienced ebbs and flows during the two school periods it took to be fully implemented, mostly because of the accommodations CONAFE was asked to make in order to satisfy national demands about content and grading. The accommodation to traditional school practice that most interfered with tutoring was the "need" to cover standard programs in specific periods of time. Another major obstacle was just the immensity of the enterprise: 32,000 communities of pre-, elementary and middle schools, with over 40,000 temporary instructors. The young instructors served for only one or two school terms, after which they received scholarships to pursue their personal careers. Their training took place in a long summer course, but the most difficult part proved to be the follow-up, scattered as the instructors were in remote rural communities. Yet, many of them managed to radically improve learning in their communities. Within CONAFE, both at the central and state offices, a new pattern of relations began to take place. Indeed, from deputy directors, down to lower rank members, teaching and learning had to be practiced on an equal footing, thereby democratizing the group, while maintaining the line of authority in administrative matters.

The extent and visibility of the innovation in CONAFE, markedly different from the educational reform being enacted simultaneously at the national level, has provoked both praise and criticism. The debate continues. Critics balance the praise that some experts have manifested after seeing the innovation up close, with the somewhat average performance of students in the most recent national standard test. Notwithstanding the short time span of the innovation, the number and difficult geography of the community centers, and the natural deep point in the first stage of any innovation, objections still weigh heavily in the minds of some administrators. At this point, and keeping in mind the many teachers in regular schools that continue on their own practicing tutoria, we though it convenient to make better known to present and future gatekeepers of the system the depth and magnitude of the personal and academic changes that the elemental practice of tutoria produces, independently of place or social context. This is the origin and intent of making accessible the recorded video interviews of satisfied teachers, students and their families.

Testimonials from people who experienced tutoría

Our task has been the relentless promotion of a different type of relationship between teachers and students in basic public schools. Tutoring is different from the standard classroom where one teacher is in charge of a large group of students, all bound to learn under his/her direction what a national program has decided. The common experience of the way learning takes place in a family, from early infancy and later in convivial settings, tells us that we succeed in learning what is of real interest to us, provided we receive help from knowledgeable and loving persons. It was to promote this type of learning in regular schools, that we conceived of and developed tutorial practices. We were convinced that many of the shortcomings that people criticize in our educational system are due to the lack of attention given to the particular interests of teachers and students. Considering the disaffection, the low academic achievement and frustration in the case of those students who drop out, we can conclude that their school experience must have been one of loneliness and intellectual estrangement. It is an intolerable waste that capable students should miss the opportunity to learn, but it is even more wasteful that, while in school, they also missed the opportunity to know, respect and support one another. Tutoring takes place in classrooms not only between teachers and students, but also between students who have learned something and their fellow students willing to learn the same topic. Learning communities are networks of learners and teachers, that interact according to each person's interest and/or capacity.

The academic and social achievements of tutoría can be demonstrated in several ways, not only in the increases in point averages on standard tests, but more so by the communality and solidarity students practice in school, in their families and in the educational institutions in which many continue studying. The extension of tutorial practices to other schools, even to other countries, and the recognition expressed by experts and international groups attest to the advantages of teaching and learning in a community of equals. Recently we began recording interviews with students, teachers and members of their families who, either had experienced tutoría at some point, or were actively practicing tutoría in the present. In doing the interviews, our intent was to provide an opportunity for those not yet acquainted with the practice to experience it as vividly as possible, like those who have received tutoría, not from a teacher but from one of the students.

The video recordings reveal how simple and accessible to all, old or young, is the practice of tutoría, but they also reveal its power, as evident in the persuasion and enthusiasm with which the interviewed discuss and recommend it. It is quite extraordinary that the same positive educational narrative about the practice appears in the testimonials of students of incomplete middle-schools in the state of Zacatecas as well as in the reactions of promoters and trainers of the National Council for the Promotion of Education, who are responsible for education in most of the remote and impoverished small Mexican communities. It is also

worth noting that what the tutoría practitioners have undoubtedly accomplished is just what the national public service expects for every student under its care.

The context of the study

In order to obtain a rich qualitative description of the impact of tutoría in school communities, we conducted interviews with teachers, teacher coaches, students, alumni and parents who had experienced this learning relationship in some way. The participants come from two settings: telesecundarias --rural middle schools-- from the state of Zacatecas in northern Mexico, and rural schools of the National Council for the Promotion of Education (in Spanish Consejo Nacional de Fomento Educativo, CONAFE) in four states of central and southern Mexico.

In the case of the middle schools in Zacatecas, the interviewees include teachers who have practiced tutoría in their school as well as students, alumni, and parents who, in the teachers' view, have benefitted from their participation in tutoría. Altogether, the analysis includes 15 interviews to students, 30 to alumni, 12 to teachers and teacher coaches, and 6 to parents. The participants come from 11 communities of the state of Zacatecas[1]. The teachers had worked with tutoría between less than a year and over ten years and varied in gender, work experience, and intensity of their tutoría practice. Some used it on a daily basis, as the main learning modality; others as a complement to conventional classes. The majority of students and alumni ranged between two months and three years of experience with tutoría. Four of the interviewees were professors or students from the Teachers College of the State of Zacatecas who had interned at tutoría-practicing secondary schools.

In the case of CONAFE, the analysis comprises interviews with 3 teacher and teacher coaches from the state of Puebla, 3 from the state of Hidalgo, one from the state of Tlaxcala and one from the state of Veracruz. All interviewees had first-hand experience as either teachers or participant observers in CONAFE's rural schools. These interviewees had between two and three years of experience as tutoría practitioners.

Methodology

The interviews were conducted by members of the promoting team of Redes de Tutoría[2] in three moments: September 2017 and April-May 2018 in the case of Zacatecas, and June 2018 in the case of CONAFE. The interview format was unstructured to ensure a range of personal and academic situations could be captured. The theme of the interviews

1 El Cargadero, El Fuerte, Felipe Ángeles, La Villita, Laguna del Carretero, Los Reales, Malpaso, Presa de Maravillas, Salazares, Santa Rosa,Teocaltiche.

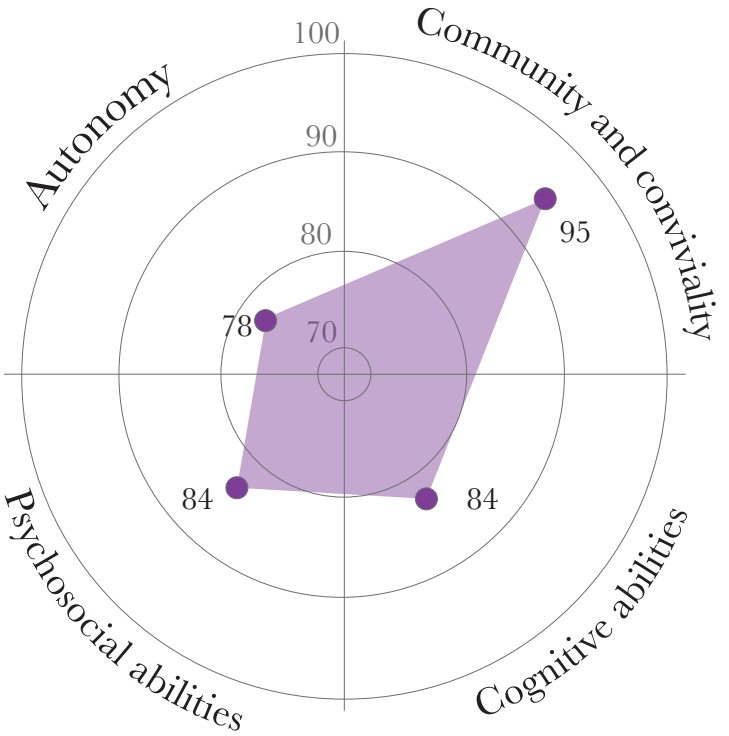
2 Meixi Ng, Brandon Fischer, and Anna Paula Herrera Kivinen collaborated during the interviewing process.

was the impact of tutoría --both at an academic and personal level-- as perceived by the participants. They were encouraged to share their experiences and to support their claims with details and examples.

In a first stage of analysis, the interviews were transcribed and analyzed for evidence of personal and academic change as a consequence of the respondents' involvement with tutoría. After analyzing a first batch of ten interviews, the team agreed on the following general areas of impact: autonomy, conviviality and community participation, cognitive abilities and psicosocial abilities. Each of these categories was further broken down into subcategories to allow for a finer analysis. At the next stage, all interviews were coded for these categories and subcategories, and frequencies were obtained. Finally, some interview excerpts were selected and arranged for this chapter.

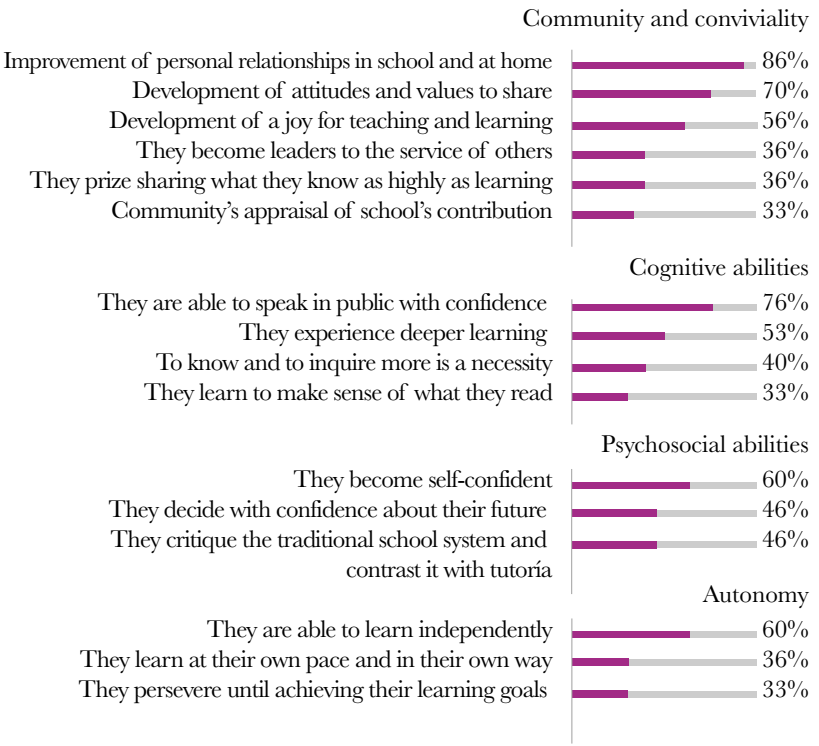
Overview of results

Each of the four main categories -community and conviviality, autonomy, psychosocial abilities, and cognitive abilities- appeared in at least 55 out of the 71 coded interviews -which represents a 78.87%.

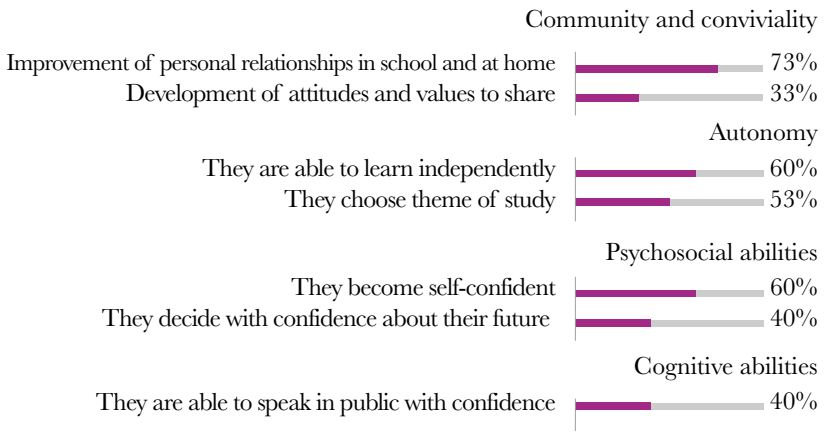


For each set of interviewees -alumni, students, teachers, parents, CONAFE-, we now present the categories and subcategories with the highest frequency of occurrence in the coded interviews.

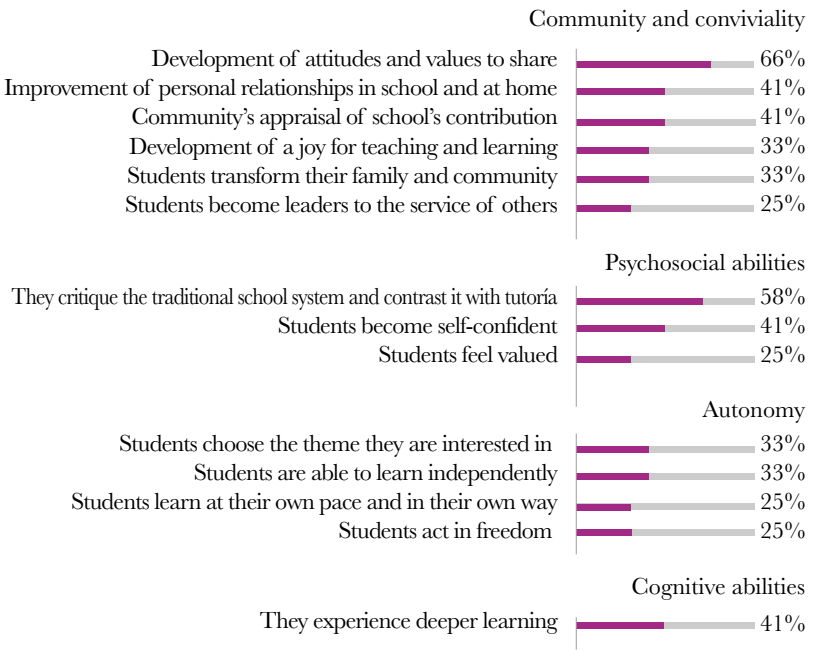
Frequencies for the 30 interviews with tutoría alumni from Zacatecas



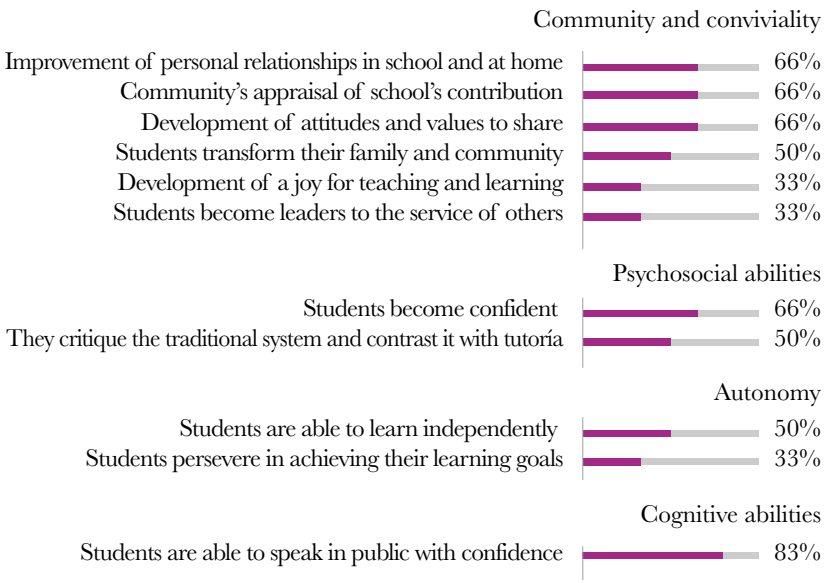
Frequencies for the 15 interviews with tutoría students from Zacatecas



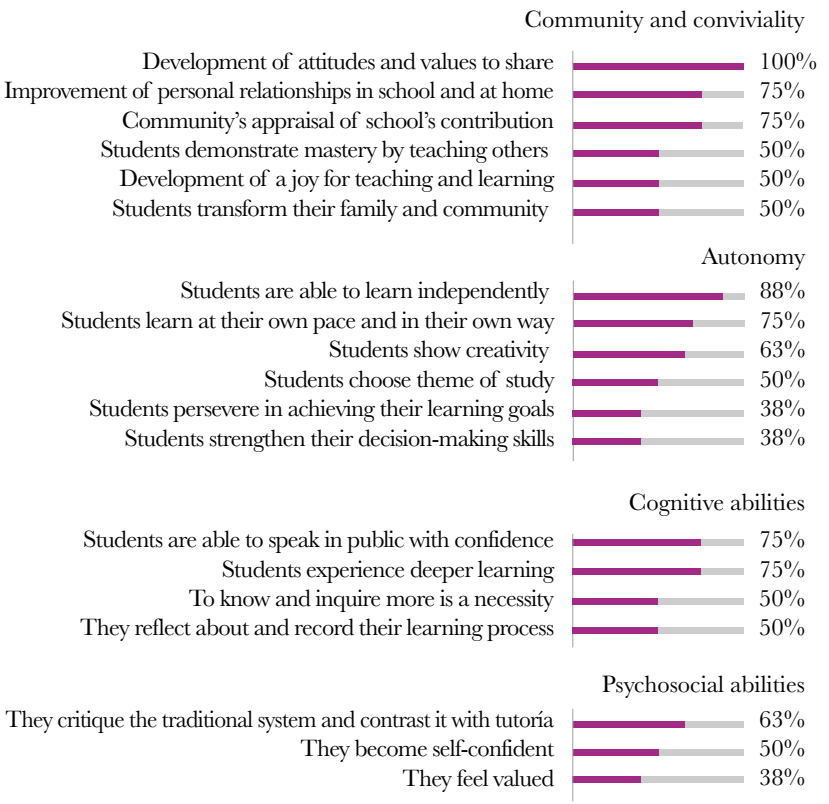
Frequencies for the 15 interviews with tutoría teachers from Zacatecas



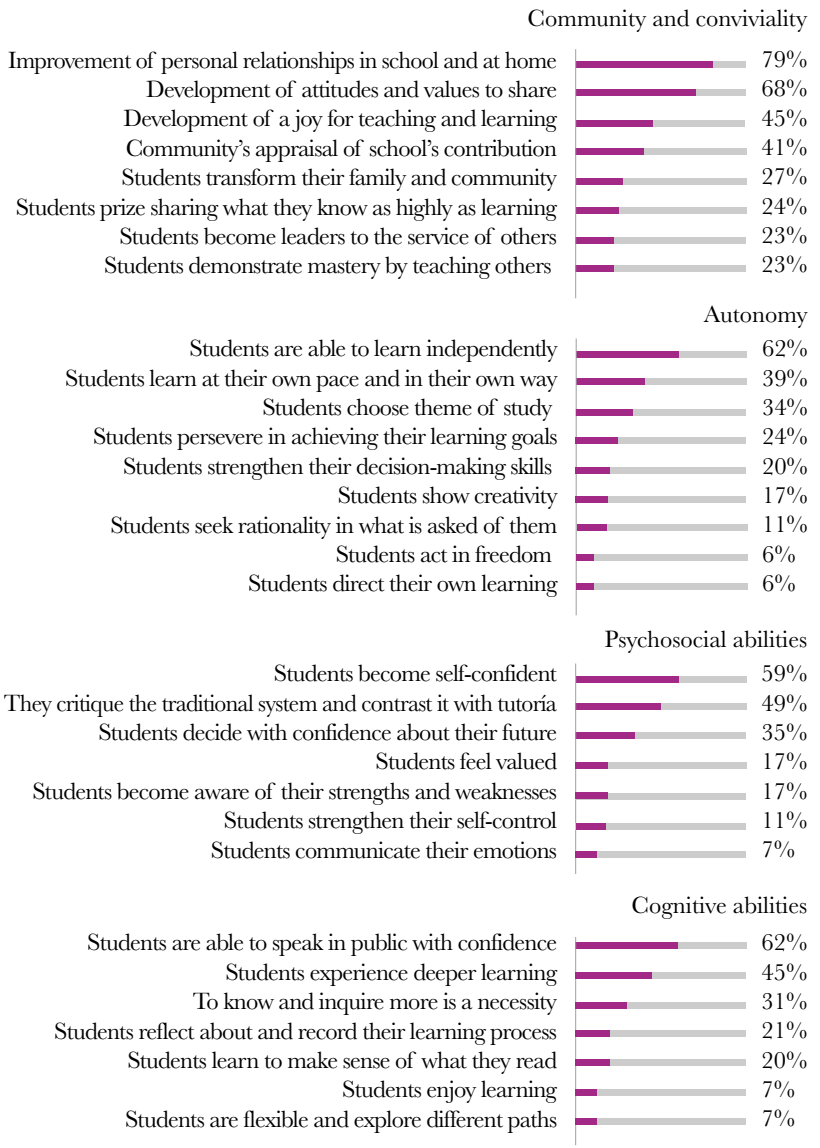
Frequencies for the 6 interviews with parents from Zacatecas



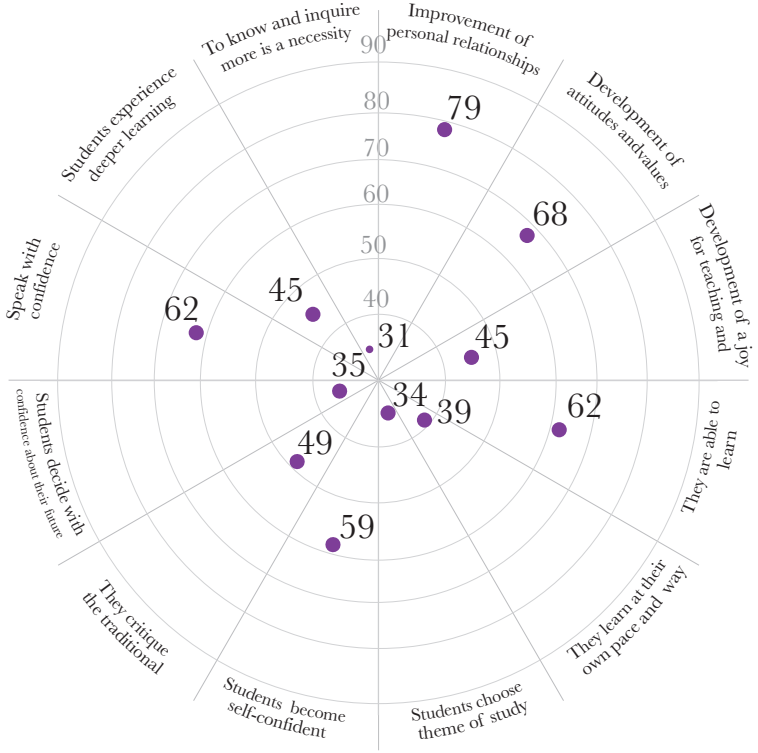
Frequencies for the interviews with 8 teachers or teacher coaches from CONAFE



As an overview of the results, we now show the entire set of categories and subcategories coded, in descending order of occurrence.



Frequency radar with the top three subcategories for each of the four main categories



Notably, the improvement in the relationships between teacher and students, among students, and between students and parents show the highest frequency in the study. The strength of the cultural transformation embodied by the horizontal relationships to learn and share comes from the freedom, the respect to personal differences and the will to understand others. This, in turn, promotes the value of solidarity and reconstructs social relationships inside and outside the classroom.

Conviviality in the tutoría school community and beyond

The institution of school represents the most important medium in the formation of a community's most valuable resource: its children and young people. In fact, a challenge has been planted at a global level to promote autonomy, the development of thinking and action, to learn to live with others harmoniously, and collaborative work as a way to improve the quality of learning that is meaningful and consequential. Towards these ends, experts have developed theories, programs, and curricular reforms from different angles that intend to make the ancient apparatus of school work. Nevertheless, the educational reality is evidence that these efforts are insufficient to improve the quality of education.

The shortcomings of the current school system are deeply troubling. They affect not only the students' academic performance, but also the quality of the human relationships they experience. The social structure that pervades school is characterized by dehumanizing competition and rivalry (García, 2012) which undermine respect and conviviality. This, in turn, ends up contributing to the breakdown of relationships in society at large.

According to the Second Comparative and Explanatory Study of educational quality in Latin America and the Caribbean (in Spanish Segundo Estudio Comparativo y Explicativo, SERCE), school conviviality is an important factor influencing academic achievement (UNESCO, no date). The rising evidence of violence in schools has brought forth a debate to turn social, emotional, and ethical education into human rights. There is consensus that a positive affective and emotional school climate plays a favorable role in learning (Blanco, 2005; Cohen, 2006; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Thus, school needs to provide students with a space where they can learn to identify and regulate their emotions, as well as to live together in a democratic manner, so as to become participants of more just societies (UNESCO, 2013). From a national perspective, The Mexican Ministry of Education acknowledges this fact as it describes the expected profile of its graduates, defining under the category "Conviviality and Citizenship" that students must develop "an identity as a person. To know, respect, and exercise their rights and obligations. To favor dialogue, to contribute to peaceful conviviality and to reject any sort of discrimination and violence." (SEP, 2017).

Therefore, there is consensus as to what the end result of social-emotional education in school should be. The means to achieve it, however, is the subject of an ongoing debate. What are the best ways to generate a positive affective environment in classrooms and schools? What are the best ways to decrease --and possibly eradicate-- school violence? What are the

best ways to ensure inclusion and respect for diversity?

We consider the following excerpts from the interviews to provide a plausible solution to this conundrum. As tutoría students, alumni, and teachers claim, the environment created by tutoría afforded a regeneration of the social fabric inside and outside the classroom. Inés Aguerrondo, an expert in educational and social policies, has said that tutoría is a means to create inclusive schools. She points that, in today's educational discourse, it is common to mistake for inclusion the mere enrollment in school of a child with different abilities. True inclusion, according to Aguerrondo, means that these children enjoy full participation in the school community. And she continues: "tutoría generates inclusion for everyone; it closes the gap and overcomes segmentation, for it empowers, gives voice, and provides opportunities for abstract thinking for everyone." (Redes de Tutoría, 2018).

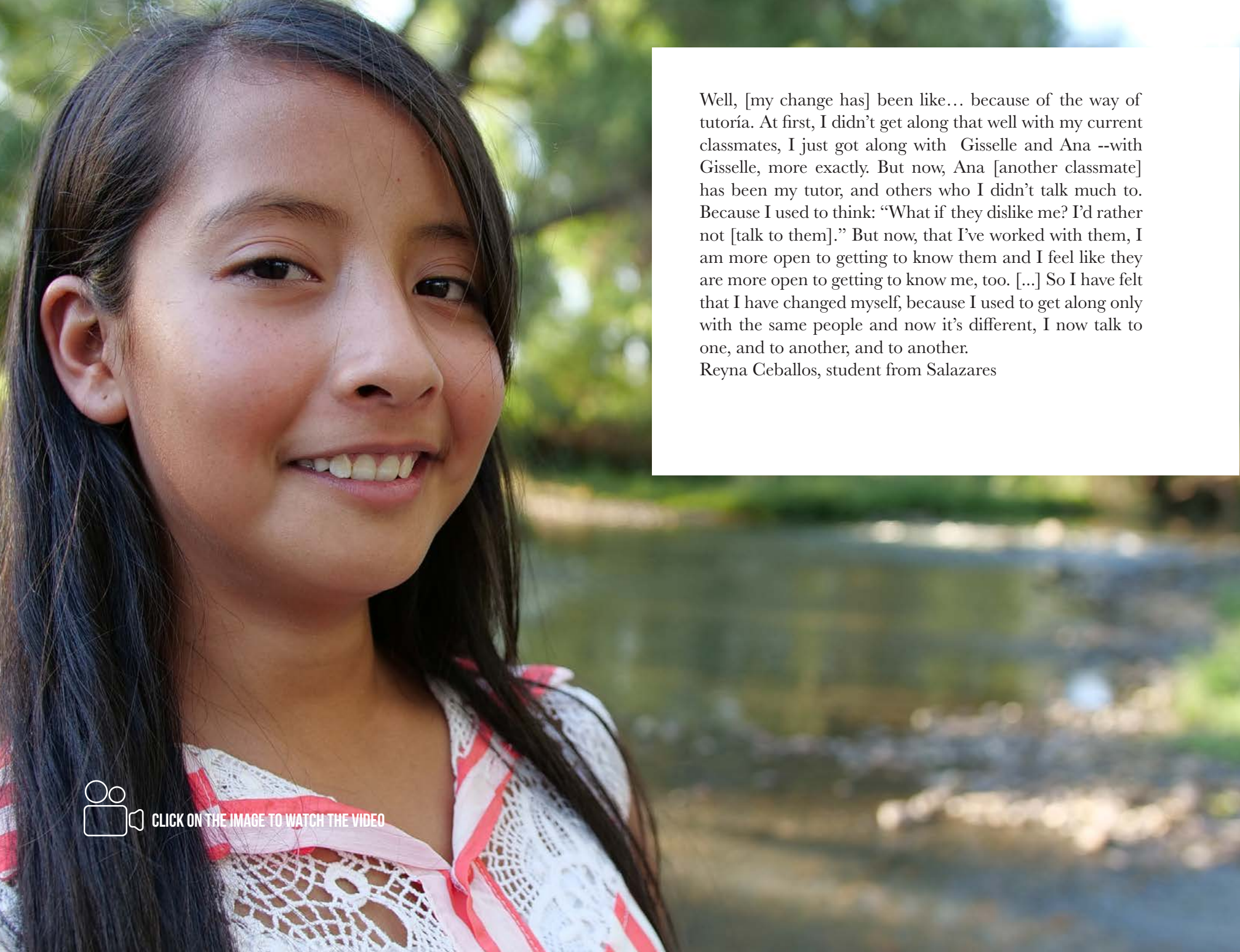
The testimonials that follow provide a glimpse of how students, teachers, and parents who lived tutoría relationships were able to improve their conviviality and citizenship. Through the transformation of the school microcosm, they were able to overcome segmentation and opened up possibilities for real learning for everyone.

Findings of the study

Under this category, we included testimonials about the improvement of interpersonal relationships in school and at home; about how the interviewees developed attitudes and values for sharing; about how the community prized the contribution of school to everyone's education; about how students came to enjoy teaching and learning; about how they contributed to transform their family and community; about how they become leaders to the service of others; about how they demonstrated mastery through teaching; and how they valued sharing what they know as much as learning itself.

Student- student relationship

In contrast to conventional school organization, the tutoría classroom has one-on-one dialogic interactions as its building block. This results in a dynamic environment where students have a lot more opportunities to interact with each other than in traditional classrooms. This, in turn, allows them to get to know each other's thinking on a deep level, to break free from prejudices, and to build friendships.



Well, [my change has] been like… because of the way of tutoría. At first, I didn't get along that well with my current classmates, I just got along with Gisselle and Ana --with Gisselle, more exactly. But now, Ana [another classmate] has been my tutor, and others who I didn't talk much to. Because I used to think: "What if they dislike me? I'd rather not [talk to them]." But now, that I've worked with them, I am more open to getting to know them and I feel like they are more open to getting to know me, too. [...] So I have felt that I have changed myself, because I used to get along only with the same people and now it's different, I now talk to one, and to another, and to another.
Reyna Ceballos, student from Salazares

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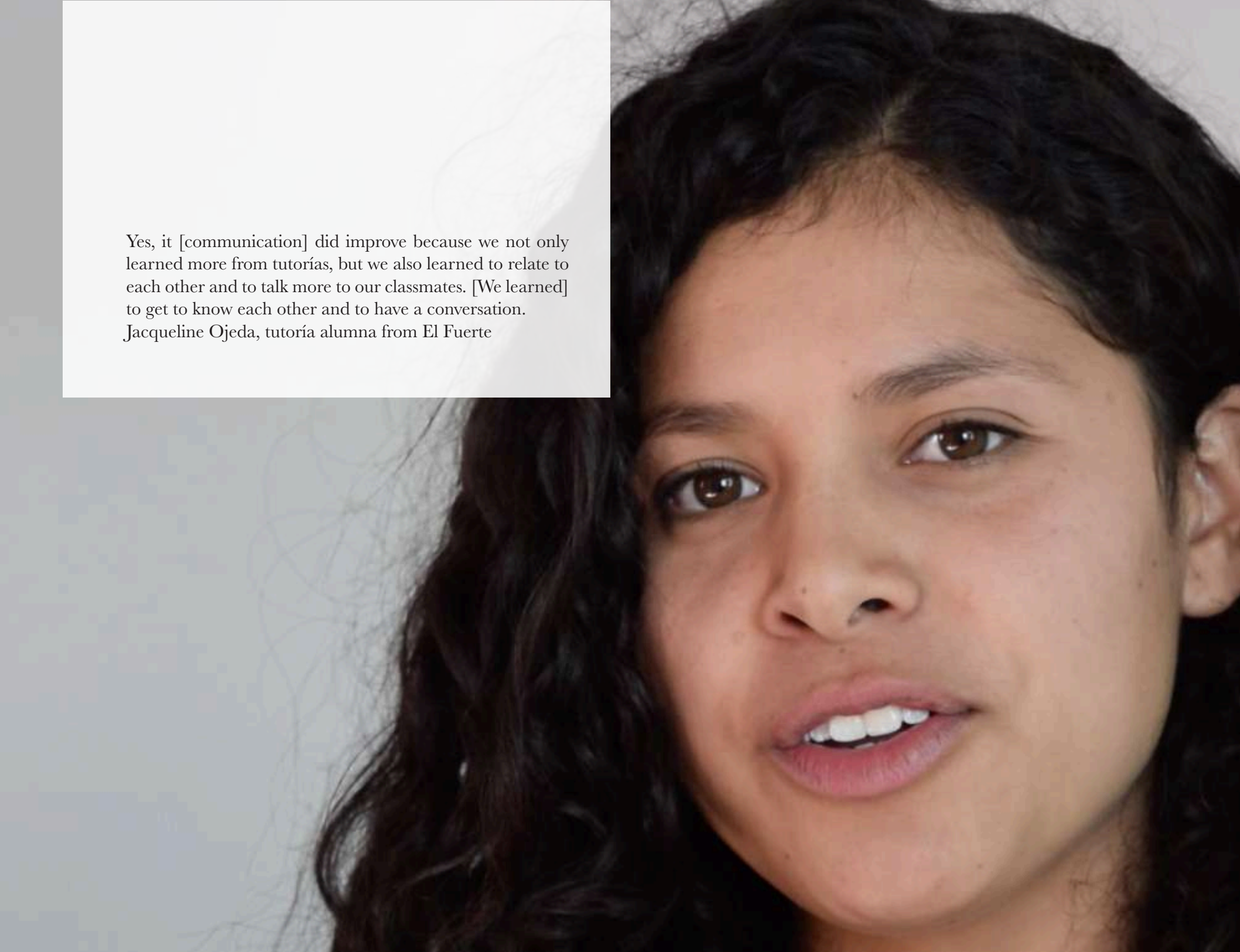
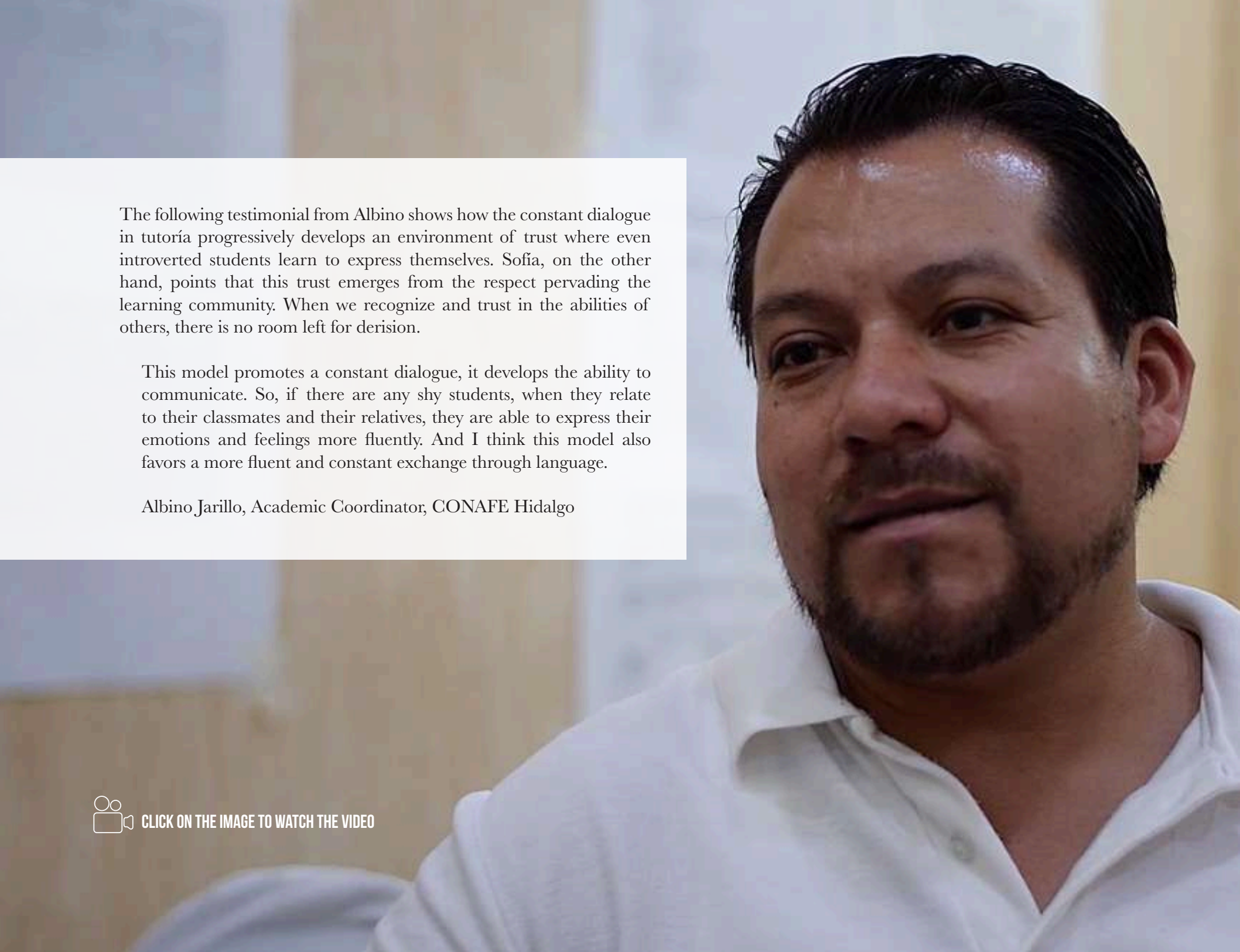
Dulce: [A]t first I felt kinda weird, but later I began to feel at ease, so I felt better.
Interviewer: And how did you begin to feel at ease with your teacher and your classmates?
Dulce: Well, everyone offered me their friendship, so I took advantage of this and began to make friends.
Dulce Muñetón, student from Teocaltiche

Yes, it [communication] did improve because we not only learned more from tutorías, but we also learned to relate to each other and to talk more to our classmates. [We learned] to get to know each other and to have a conversation.
Jacqueline Ojeda, tutoría alumna from El Fuerte



The following testimonial from Albino shows how the constant dialogue in tutoría progressively develops an environment of trust where even introverted students learn to express themselves. Sofía, on the other hand, points that this trust emerges from the respect pervading the learning community. When we recognize and trust in the abilities of others, there is no room left for derision.

> This model promotes a constant dialogue, it develops the ability to communicate. So, if there are any shy students, when they relate to their classmates and their relatives, they are able to express their emotions and feelings more fluently. And I think this model also favors a more fluent and constant exchange through language.
>
> Albino Jarillo, Academic Coordinator, CONAFE Hidalgo



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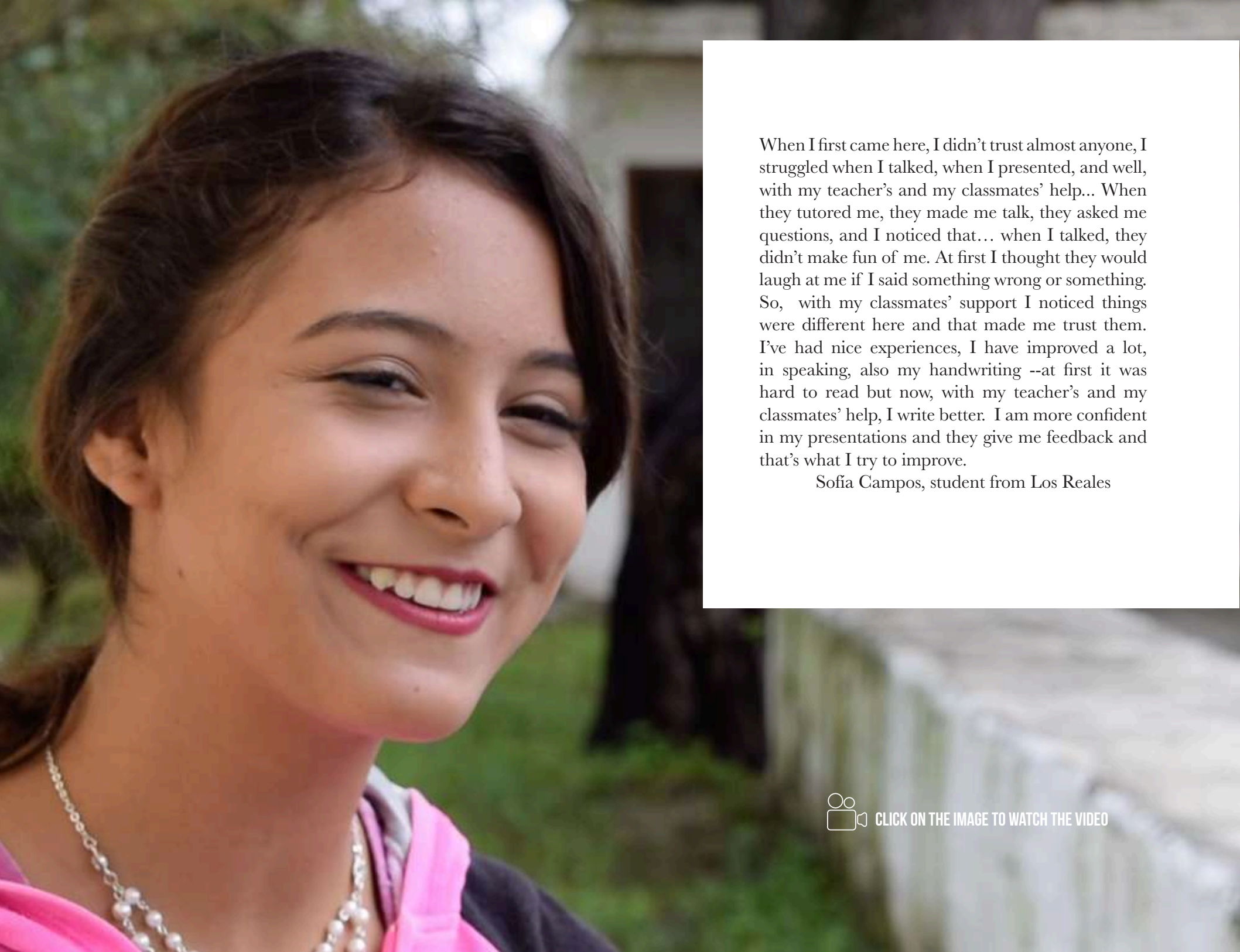

When I first came here, I didn't trust almost anyone, I struggled when I talked, when I presented, and well, with my teacher's and my classmates' help... When they tutored me, they made me talk, they asked me questions, and I noticed that… when I talked, they didn't make fun of me. At first I thought they would laugh at me if I said something wrong or something. So, with my classmates' support I noticed things were different here and that made me trust them. I've had nice experiences, I have improved a lot, in speaking, also my handwriting --at first it was hard to read but now, with my teacher's and my classmates' help, I write better. I am more confident in my presentations and they give me feedback and that's what I try to improve.

Sofia Campos, student from Los Reales

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Teacher-student relationship

Tutoría transforms the teacher's role from the owner of all knowledge into a participant in the learning community. Students are now on equal footing with their teachers and thus, a new, more humane social structure emerges in the classroom. The teacher- student relationship is based on trust and respect. The teacher pays attention to his student's personal interests and difficulties, and, ultimately, comes to find a new meaning to his/her professional work.

Well, with [the teachers in high school], you can ask them questions and so on, but [her teacher in tutoría --middle school] would really get to know you, [...] and he makes you trust him more. I felt like I could really trust him, tell him everything and so on, ask him questions, make mistakes and so on. And, by the end, I really got along with him.

Rosa Álvarez, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas

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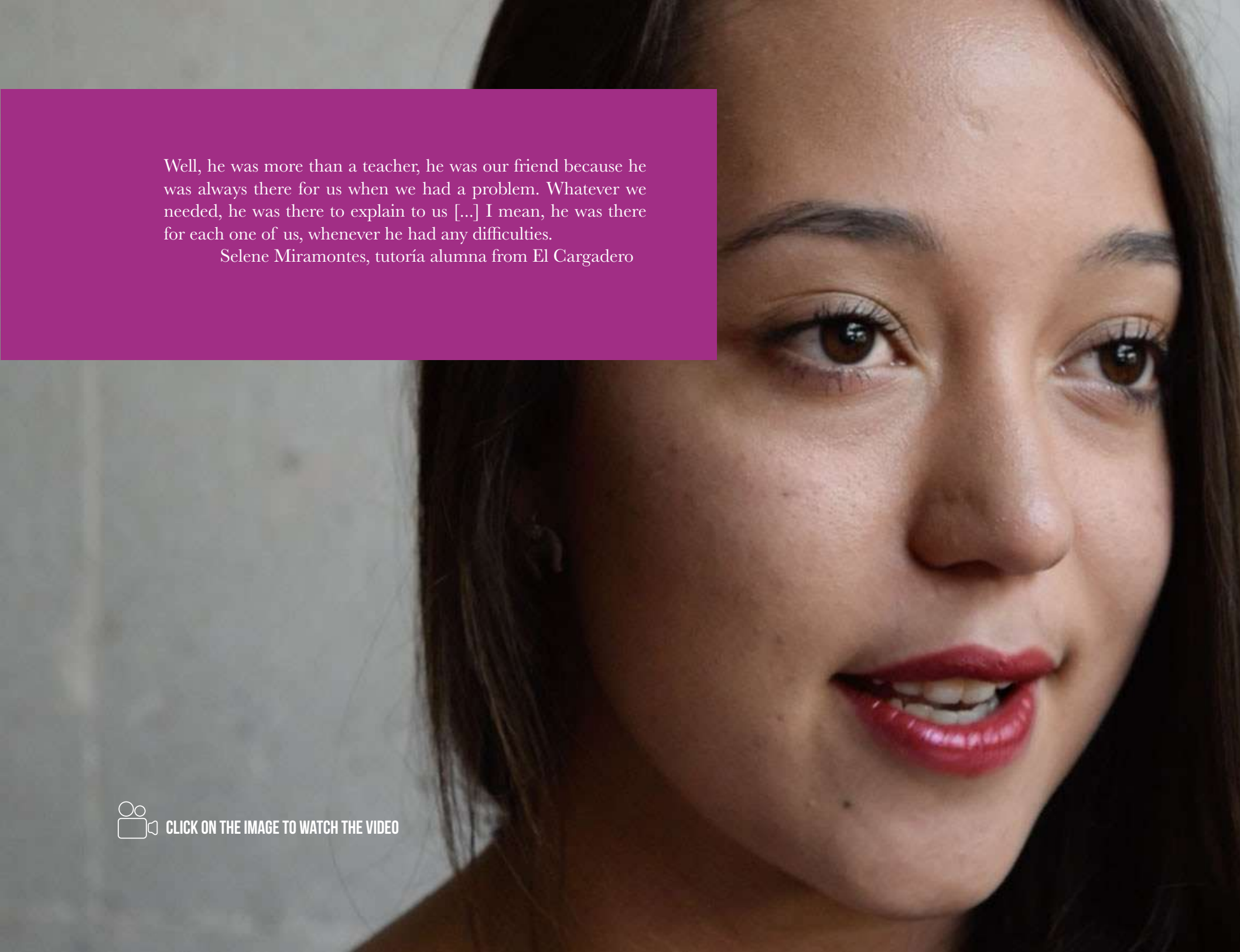
Well, he was more than a teacher, he was our friend because he was always there for us when we had a problem. Whatever we needed, he was there to explain to us [...] I mean, he was there for each one of us, whenever he had any difficulties.

Selene Miramontes, tutoría alumna from El Cargadero



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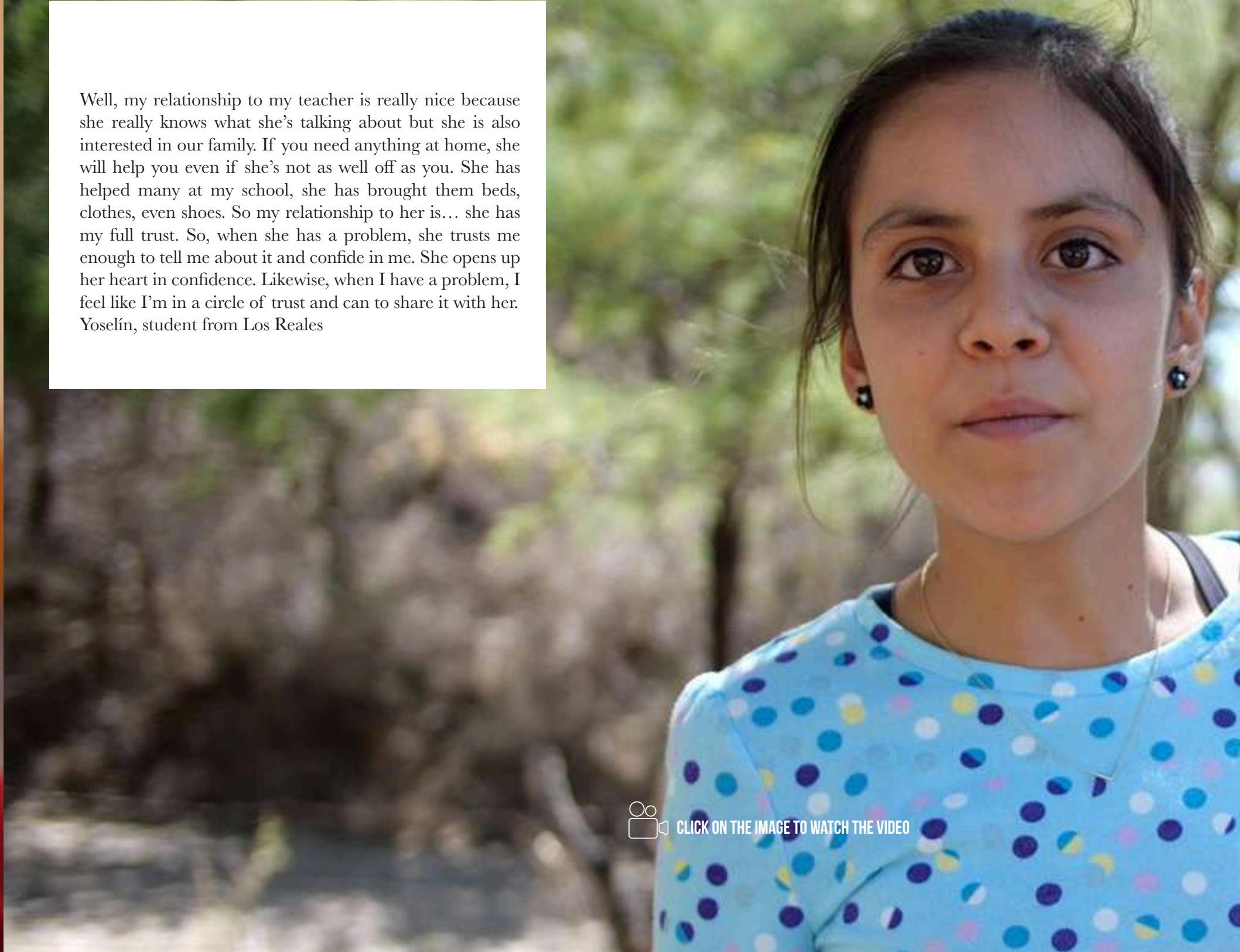
I noticed, thanks to working with tutoría, that the teacher supports you as can your classmates or parents. In the classroom, we broke the rigorous relation between teacher and student, classes stopped being boring because it was no longer the same lecture for everyone, the teacher no longer had this authority. We could challenge, voice our opinion, there was room for that. So the teacher ceased to be this hard authority and became a supporter, a facilitator, and so I realized that the teacher is a promoter of the interest for learning.
Edgar Longoria, tutoría alumnus from Salazares.

Well, my relationship to my teacher is really nice because she really knows what she's talking about but she is also interested in our family. If you need anything at home, she will help you even if she's not as well off as you. She has helped many at my school, she has brought them beds, clothes, even shoes. So my relationship to her is… she has my full trust. So, when she has a problem, she trusts me enough to tell me about it and confide in me. She opens up her heart in confidence. Likewise, when I have a problem, I feel like I'm in a circle of trust and can to share it with her.
Yoselín, student from Los Reales



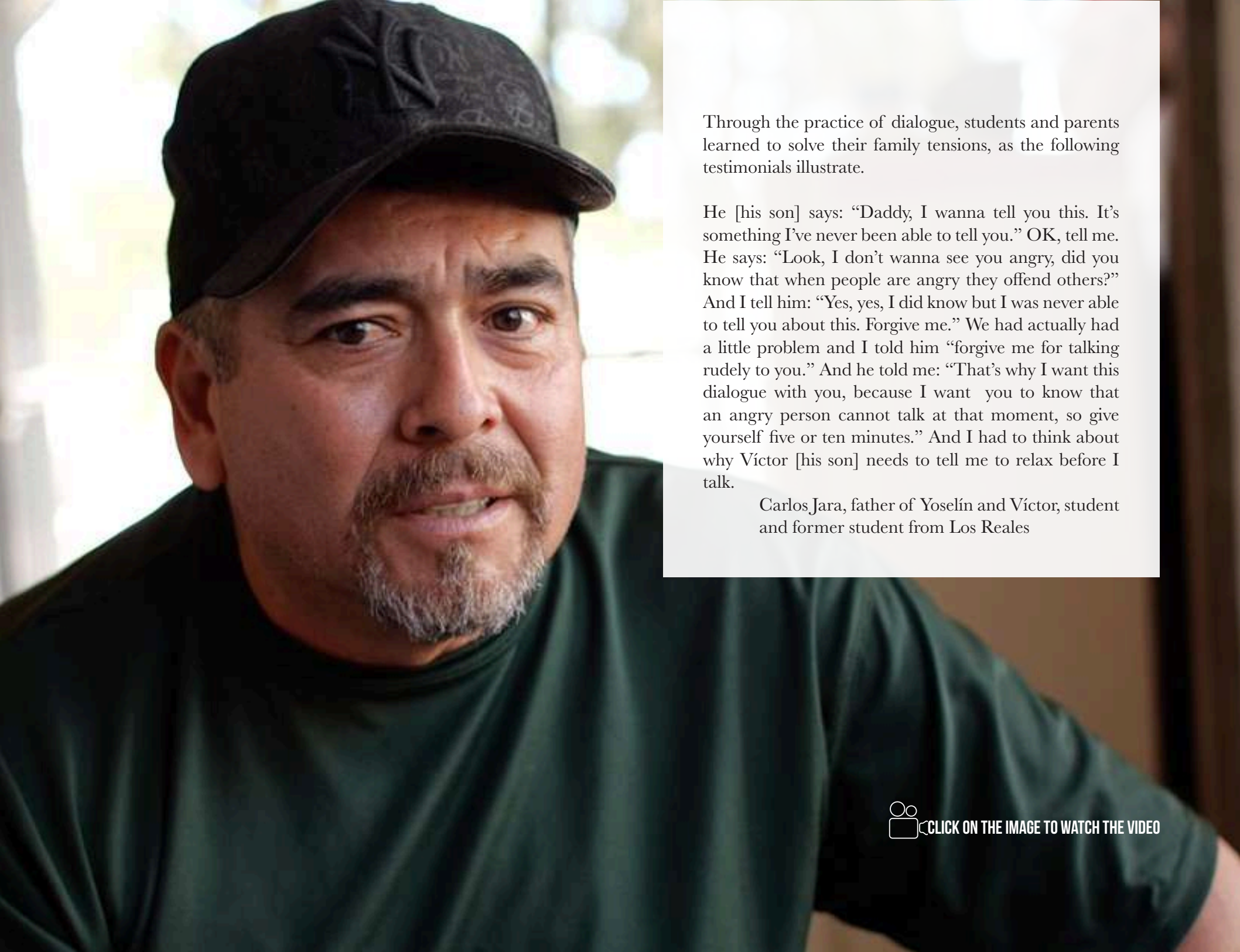
The bonds between school and the community

During public presentations, parents witness their children's learning and thus, recognize the value of school.

I have noticed changes and there are even moments of more interaction between parents and students, because they're becoming more involved with the classroom due to tutoría.
Nora Romero, Academic Coordinator, CONAFE Veracruz

[W]hen I entered [middle school], it was a big change. [In elementary school] I wasn't very close to my family, I didn't like to invite them to school activities or that kind of thing. And when I entered middle school, it was all very different. My mom would attend --I live with my mom and my sister, and they attended public presentations very often. I was always finding out new things, and when they came I would sit at the table to talk to them and tell them what I had found out and so on. So I feel like the communication at home improved a lot.

Rubí García, tutoría alumna from Salazares



Through the practice of dialogue, students and parents learned to solve their family tensions, as the following testimonials illustrate.

He [his son] says: "Daddy, I wanna tell you this. It's something I've never been able to tell you." OK, tell me. He says: "Look, I don't wanna see you angry, did you know that when people are angry they offend others?" And I tell him: "Yes, yes, I did know but I was never able to tell you about this. Forgive me." We had actually had a little problem and I told him "forgive me for talking rudely to you." And he told me: "That's why I want this dialogue with you, because I want you to know that an angry person cannot talk at that moment, so give yourself five or ten minutes." And I had to think about why Víctor [his son] needs to tell me to relax before I talk.

Carlos Jara, father of Yoselín and Víctor, student and former student from Los Reales

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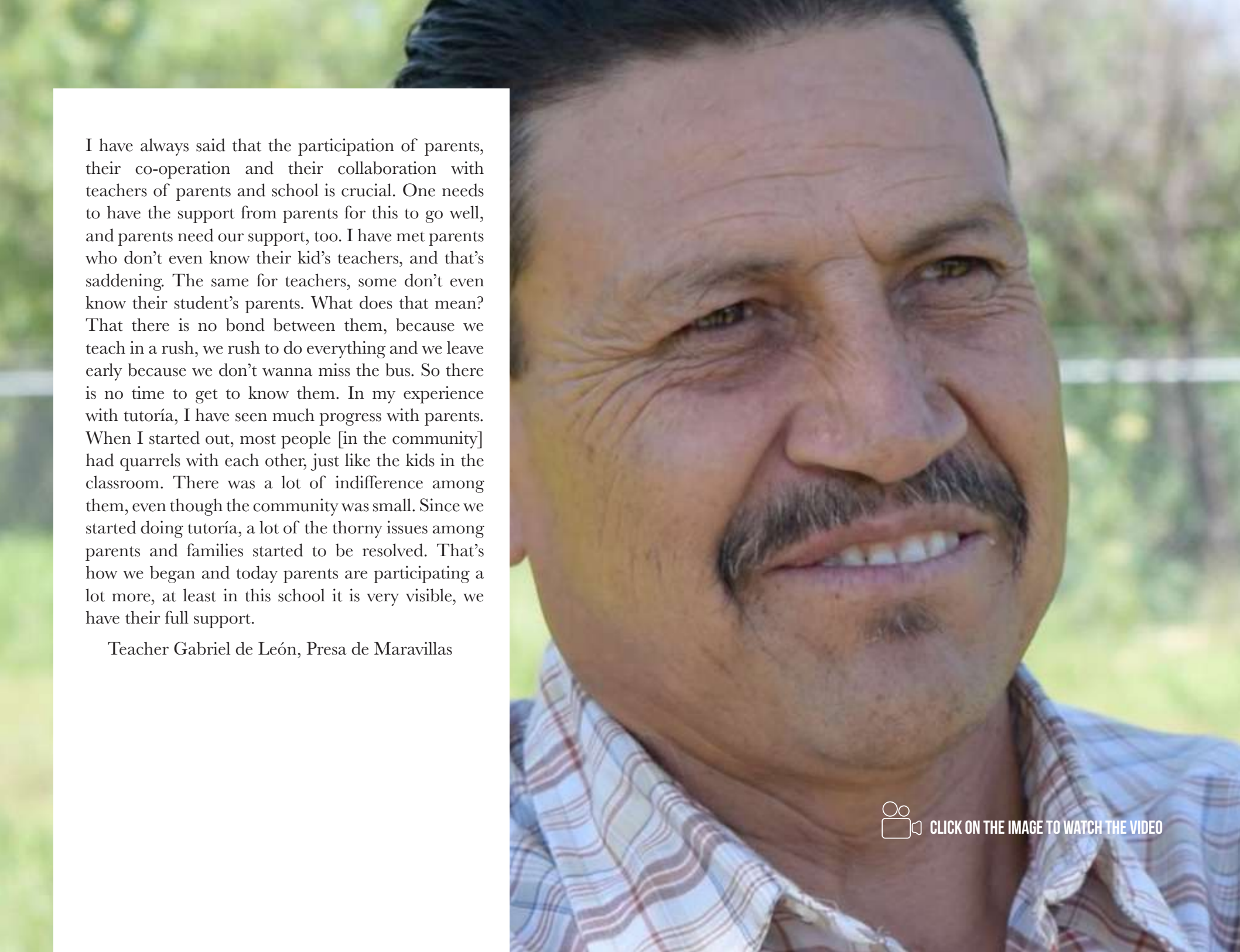
I have always said that the participation of parents, their co-operation and their collaboration with teachers of parents and school is crucial. One needs to have the support from parents for this to go well, and parents need our support, too. I have met parents who don't even know their kid's teachers, and that's saddening. The same for teachers, some don't even know their student's parents. What does that mean? That there is no bond between them, because we teach in a rush, we rush to do everything and we leave early because we don't wanna miss the bus. So there is no time to get to know them. In my experience with tutoría, I have seen much progress with parents. When I started out, most people [in the community] had quarrels with each other, just like the kids in the classroom. There was a lot of indifference among them, even though the community was small. Since we started doing tutoría, a lot of the thorny issues among parents and families started to be resolved. That's how we began and today parents are participating a lot more, at least in this school it is very visible, we have their full support.

Teacher Gabriel de León, Presa de Maravillas

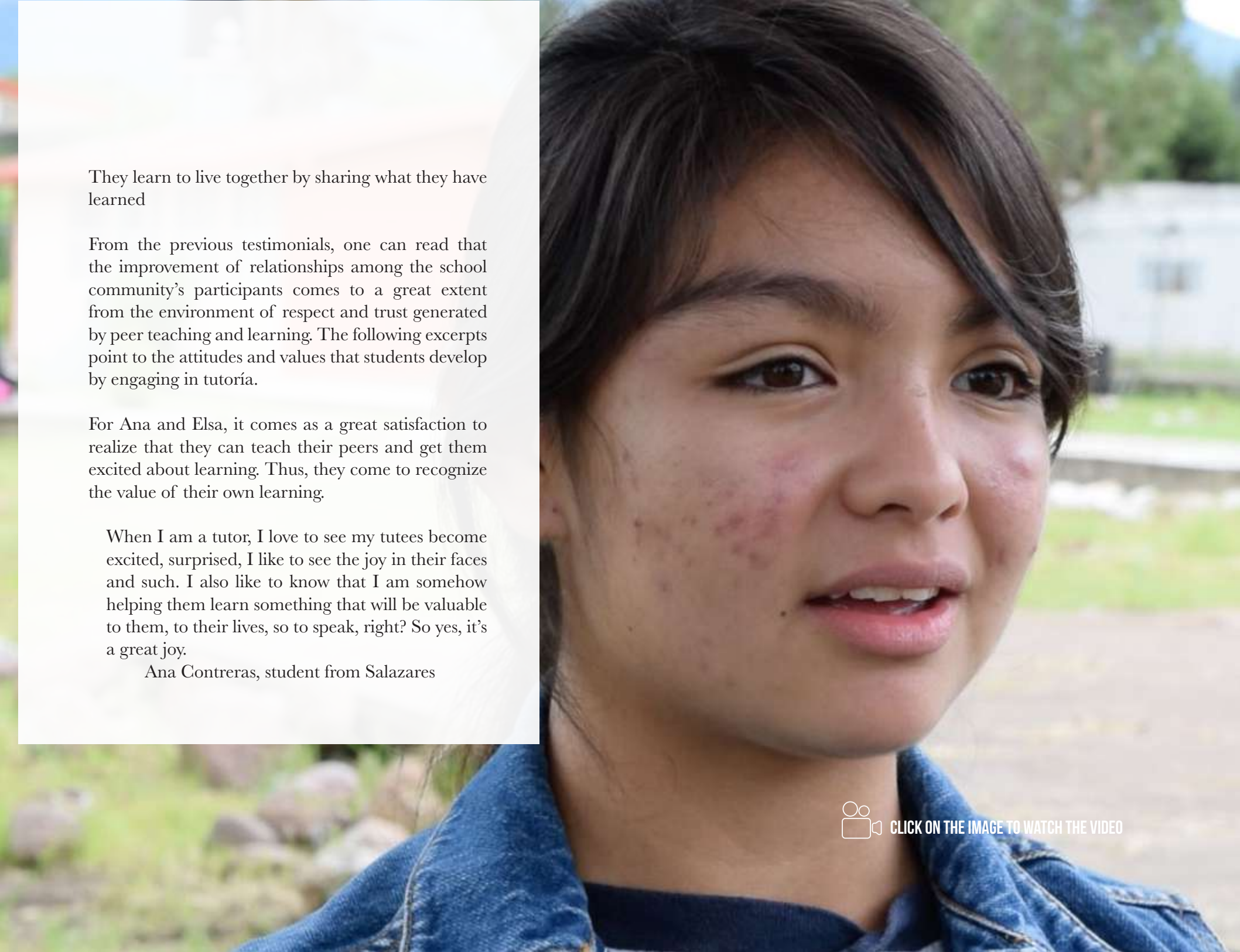


They learn to live together by sharing what they have learned

From the previous testimonials, one can read that the improvement of relationships among the school community's participants comes to a great extent from the environment of respect and trust generated by peer teaching and learning. The following excerpts point to the attitudes and values that students develop by engaging in tutoría.

For Ana and Elsa, it comes as a great satisfaction to realize that they can teach their peers and get them excited about learning. Thus, they come to recognize the value of their own learning.

> When I am a tutor, I love to see my tutees become excited, surprised, I like to see the joy in their faces and such. I also like to know that I am somehow helping them learn something that will be valuable to them, to their lives, so to speak, right? So yes, it's a great joy.
>
> Ana Contreras, student from Salazares

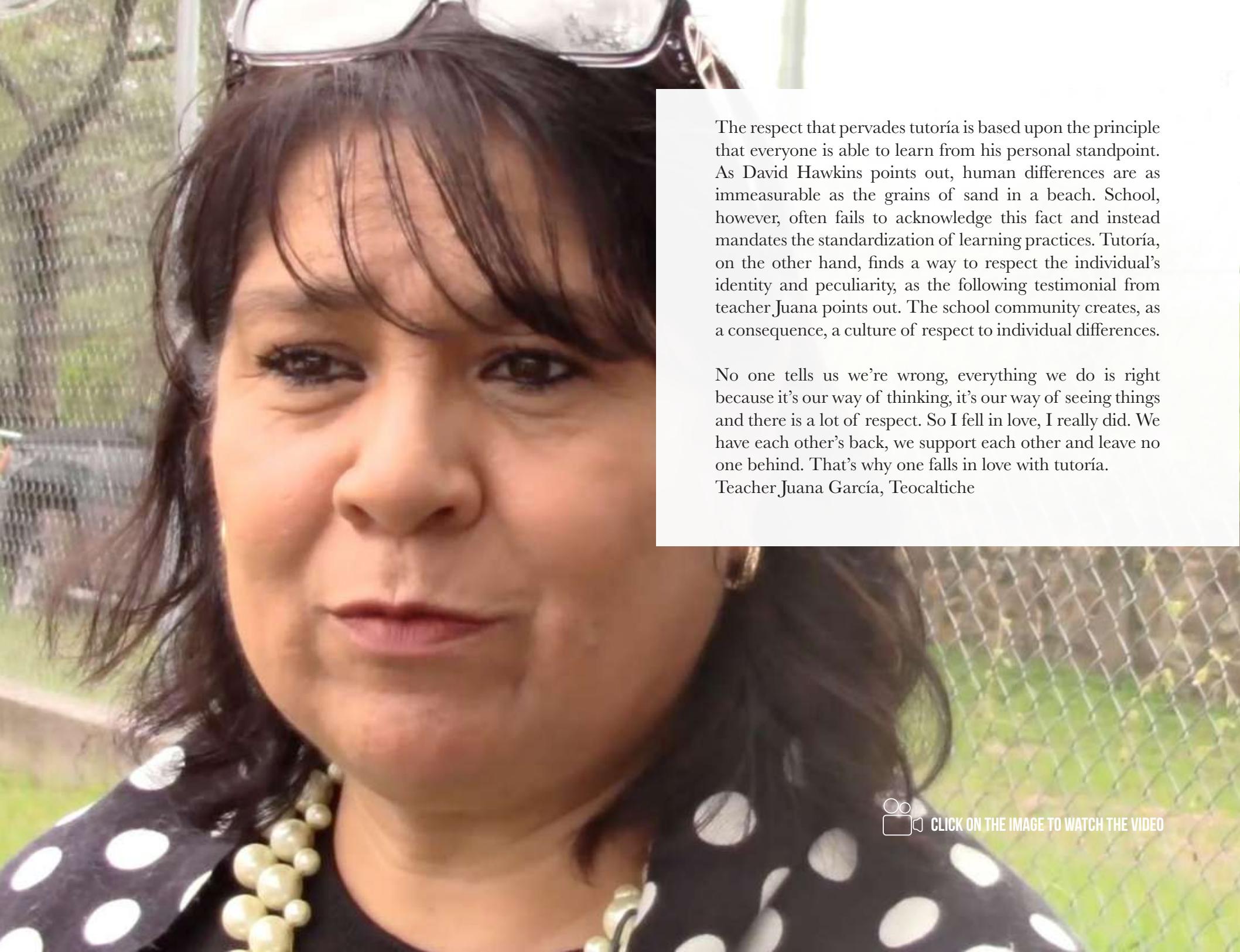


I feel like I can help others learn and feel better.
Elsa Escobedo, student from Teocaltiche

All three of them [tutoría alumni] have a built-in chip for peer tutoring, they find the opportunity whether the teacher asks them or not, they set their minds to help their classmates, it comes naturally to them. So yes, we [teachers] must admit that they help us with our students, they help us bridge our language and their peers' language. They are really helpful, these kids.

Alejandra Rosales y Antonio Solín, high school teachers who work with tutoría alumni

Tutoría has a set of principles that materialize during dialogue, so when from the start I feel trust to enter dialogue with a person about the topic we are going to learn, that sets the stage to tackle difficulties about the topic. And once you come across those difficulties, there are ways the tutor can help you to solve them.
Nora Romero, Academic Coordinator, CONAFE Veracruz



The respect that pervades tutoría is based upon the principle that everyone is able to learn from his personal standpoint. As David Hawkins points out, human differences are as immeasurable as the grains of sand in a beach. School, however, often fails to acknowledge this fact and instead mandates the standardization of learning practices. Tutoría, on the other hand, finds a way to respect the individual's identity and peculiarity, as the following testimonial from teacher Juana points out. The school community creates, as a consequence, a culture of respect to individual differences.

No one tells us we're wrong, everything we do is right because it's our way of thinking, it's our way of seeing things and there is a lot of respect. So I fell in love, I really did. We have each other's back, we support each other and leave no one behind. That's why one falls in love with tutoría.
Teacher Juana García, Teocaltiche

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In tutoría there are two peers [...] and one needs to help the other [...] I love being a tutor because I love getting someone to learn what I've already learned and even more. So I would like to keep on doing this, keep helping other people.
Giselle Salazar, student from Salazares

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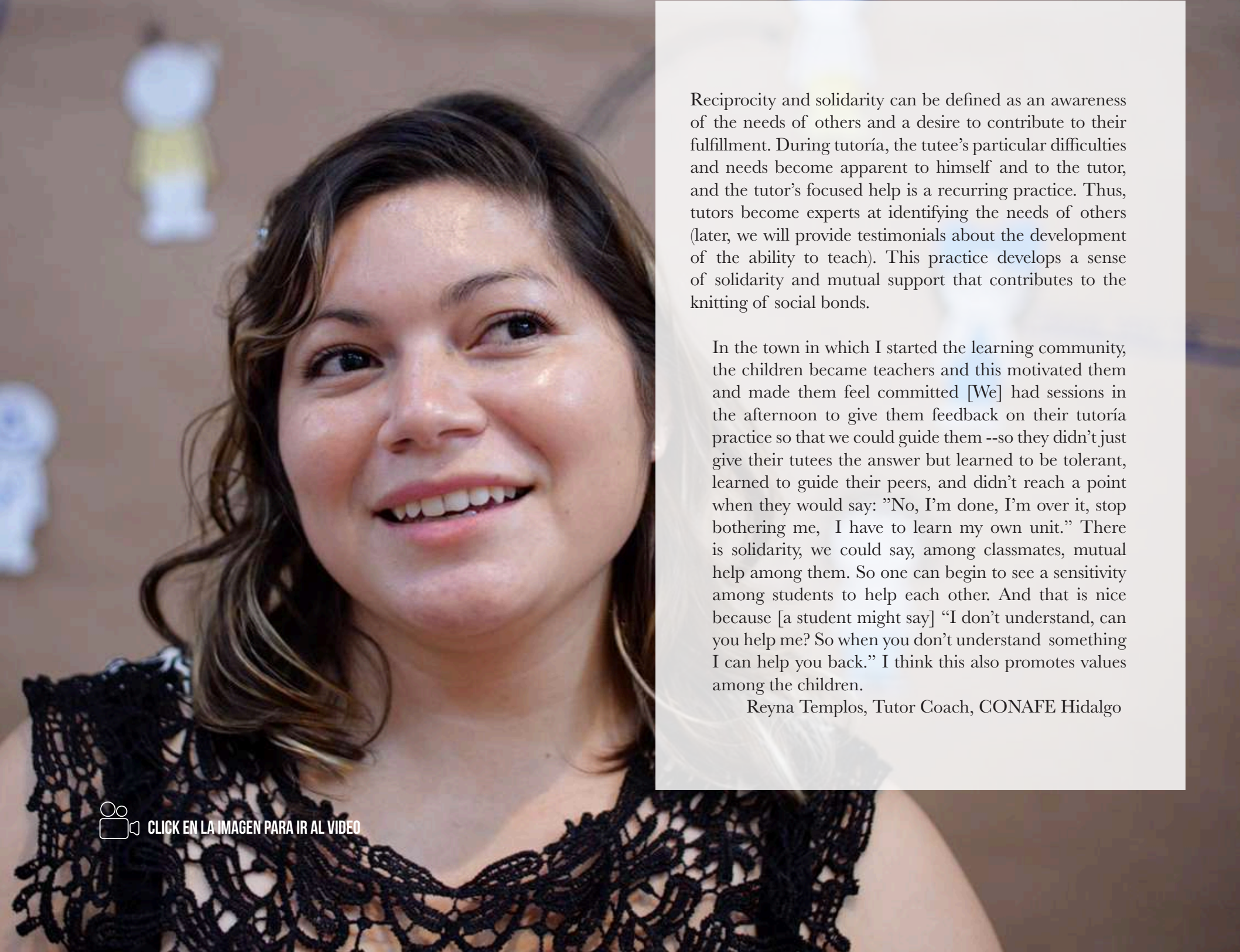
The personal quality of tutoría allows for individual attention to students and allows everyone to learn.

> I think tutoría can be used for children with special needs because it is tailored to each person, it is completely personalized. You do have to use the proper means, though. If you are dealing with a deaf child, for instance, you can do tutoría if you use the signs language. So the model's methodology can be very useful [...] but we have to be aware that we need to use the tools that allow us to help children in a more focused way.
> Guadalupe Domínguez, Leader for Community Education, CONAFE Puebla



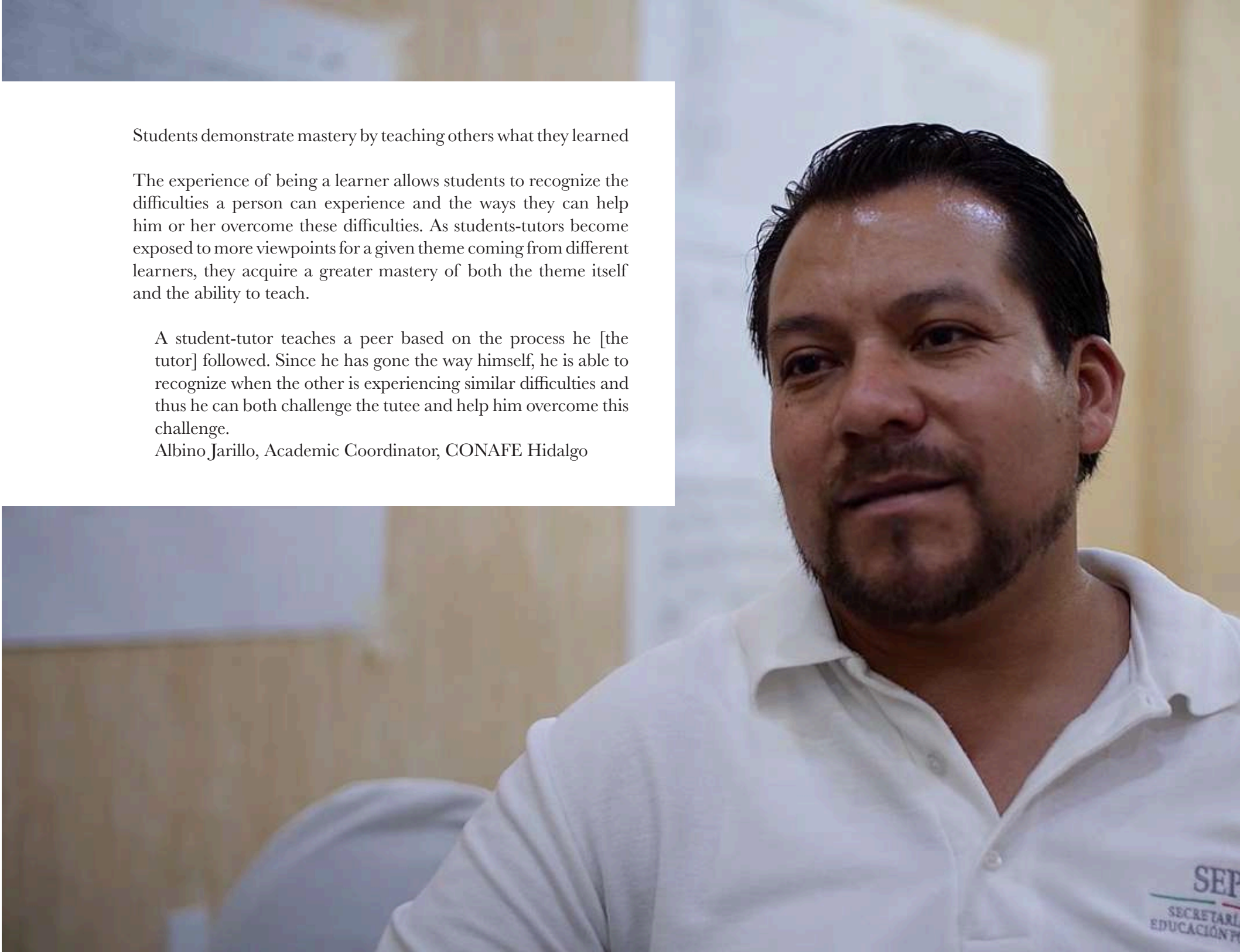
Reciprocity and solidarity can be defined as an awareness of the needs of others and a desire to contribute to their fulfillment. During tutoría, the tutee's particular difficulties and needs become apparent to himself and to the tutor, and the tutor's focused help is a recurring practice. Thus, tutors become experts at identifying the needs of others (later, we will provide testimonials about the development of the ability to teach). This practice develops a sense of solidarity and mutual support that contributes to the knitting of social bonds.

> In the town in which I started the learning community, the children became teachers and this motivated them and made them feel committed [We] had sessions in the afternoon to give them feedback on their tutoría practice so that we could guide them --so they didn't just give their tutees the answer but learned to be tolerant, learned to guide their peers, and didn't reach a point when they would say: "No, I'm done, I'm over it, stop bothering me, I have to learn my own unit." There is solidarity, we could say, among classmates, mutual help among them. So one can begin to see a sensitivity among students to help each other. And that is nice because [a student might say] "I don't understand, can you help me? So when you don't understand something I can help you back." I think this also promotes values among the children.
>
> Reyna Templos, Tutor Coach, CONAFE Hidalgo

Students demonstrate mastery by teaching others what they learned

The experience of being a learner allows students to recognize the difficulties a person can experience and the ways they can help him or her overcome these difficulties. As students-tutors become exposed to more viewpoints for a given theme coming from different learners, they acquire a greater mastery of both the theme itself and the ability to teach.

> A student-tutor teaches a peer based on the process he [the tutor] followed. Since he has gone the way himself, he is able to recognize when the other is experiencing similar difficulties and thus he can both challenge the tutee and help him overcome this challenge.
> Albino Jarillo, Academic Coordinator, CONAFE Hidalgo



It was difficult at first because I didn't know how to explain to them so they would understand, how to express what I knew and wanted them to learn, too. Later it became easier because, with practice, it became easier and I was able to explain better.
Jaqueline Ojeda, tutoría alumna from El Fuerte

Sharing what they know is as important as learning

For both students and teachers, sharing what they had learned meant learning twice. Otherness became a source of value, and through dialogue, they came to acknowledge and understand the other. In this process, they became acquainted with multiple opinions and worldviews. Thus, they not only learned academic content, but also harmonic and tolerant conviviality.

> Actually, when you are a tutor, it's not just your tutee who is learning from you, but you are also learning from him. Because they think different from you, everyone thinks differently, each person is a world. So as [the other person says] "I think this is more like this" and I [answer] "it actually can be that way too because it's just a different way to say it." He understands it that way and I understand it a different way but you learn to understand him. And actually, this has helped me tremendously in college. Because in my major you deal a lot with people and you learn that not all people understand the same.
>
> Jasmín Castro, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas

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What's the use of knowing so many things if we are not going to teach them to others? It is really important [because] if someone comes to you and tells you "hey, can you help me?," I do it gladly.
Esmeralda Ramos, tutoría alumna from Malpaso

You learn a lot, especially since you teach others what you learned and both people learn, your tutee is teaching you and you are teaching your tutee. So when I was told I would tutor others, even teachers, I said: "Oh! I'm going to teach a teacher? But they are supposed to teach me, they are the ones who know!" So it did surprise me. I was nervous because I thought: "What if I don't know?" And, well, he is the teacher, and if I tell him something wrong he will tell me: "you're just making that up." But it was totally different, they would tell me: "It's great, we did know this but we knew it differently," or "we enjoyed learning with you," or "we learned a lot, we learned from each other."

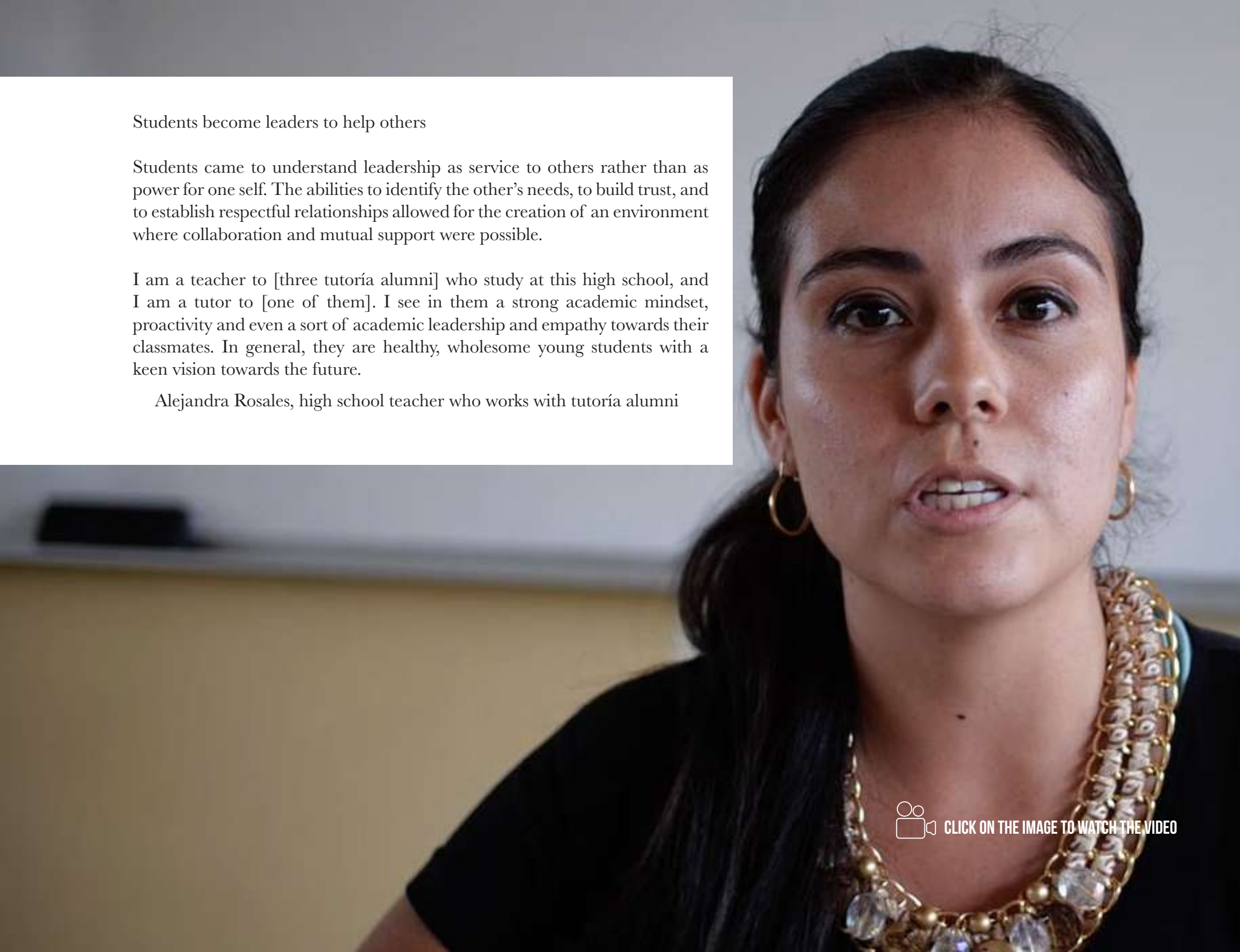
Blanca Albino, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas

Students become leaders to help others

Students came to understand leadership as service to others rather than as power for one self. The abilities to identify the other's needs, to build trust, and to establish respectful relationships allowed for the creation of an environment where collaboration and mutual support were possible.

I am a teacher to [three tutoría alumni] who study at this high school, and I am a tutor to [one of them]. I see in them a strong academic mindset, proactivity and even a sort of academic leadership and empathy towards their classmates. In general, they are healthy, wholesome young students with a keen vision towards the future.

Alejandra Rosales, high school teacher who works with tutoría alumni



When a friend has a problem or doesn't understand something in class, I tell them we can stay after class and try and explain to them what they don't understand, and thus we help each other.
Jaqueline Ojeda, tutoría alumna from El Fuerte

[In high school] I am still a tutor, in a way. Because it has happened that some classmates approach me and ask me if I understood. And then I don't just give them the answer as they may be used to, but try to explain to them why you get that result and so on. So I feel like I'm still a tutor, even though they don't call me that.
Rubí García, tutoría alumna from Salazares

Learning autonomy or "learning to learn" in the tutoría classroom and beyond

Learning autonomy or "learning to learn" entails the ability to "learn how to think; to inquire about diverse phenomena, their causes and consequences; to control one's personal learning processes; to assess learning together with others; and to develop an interest and motivation for lifelong learning." (SEP, 2017, p.62). This competency is sometimes also called "lifelong learning" or "lifewide learning" to emphasize that it enables one to learn for life, across a variety of different contexts, with or without the direct support of a teacher (City, Elmore & Lynch, 2012).

Carl Rogers, founder of the person-centered approach, claims that the experience of significant learning differs from that of ordinary school learning in several regards. While school learning typically occurs "from the neck up", is coaxed by external authority, and is rapidly forgotten, significant learning is self-initiated and self-assessed, involves the learner's whole person, and has a transformative quality (Rogers, 1969). According to Rogers, facilitating this kind of learning requires that the teacher- student relationship exhibit certain qualities, not the least of which is trust in the learner's ability to articulate and pursue his interests. A learner in such an environment becomes free to learn and ultimately free to be, an experience described by Rogers as a process of "becoming a more autonomous, more spontaneous, more confident person, of becoming free to be one's self." (Rogers, 1980, p. 47).

In resonance with Rogers' classic findings, Mehta and Fine (2015) claim that deeper learning involves not just an understanding of content and the structure of knowledge in the academic disciplines, but also a transformation of personal identity characterized by a greater autonomy, ability to make decisions, and awareness of one's strengths and limitations. On a similar note, Rincón- Gallardo (2018b) states --drawing from current research on the nature of human learning and motivation-- that learning is an essentially liberating act. And, beyond its impact in the individual sphere, liberating learning relates to the development of an ability to live together harmoniously and democratically in a diverse world (Delors, 1994; Rincón- Gallardo, 2018b).

Tutoría, with its foundation in dialogue, explicitly purports to awaken autonomy in learners. Practices like the individual choosing of the theme of study, the horizontal learning dialogue, and the reflection about one's learning process all point to the development of the ability of learning how to learn. The following testimonials account for the academic and personal changes that students experience in the tutoría environment.

Findings of the study

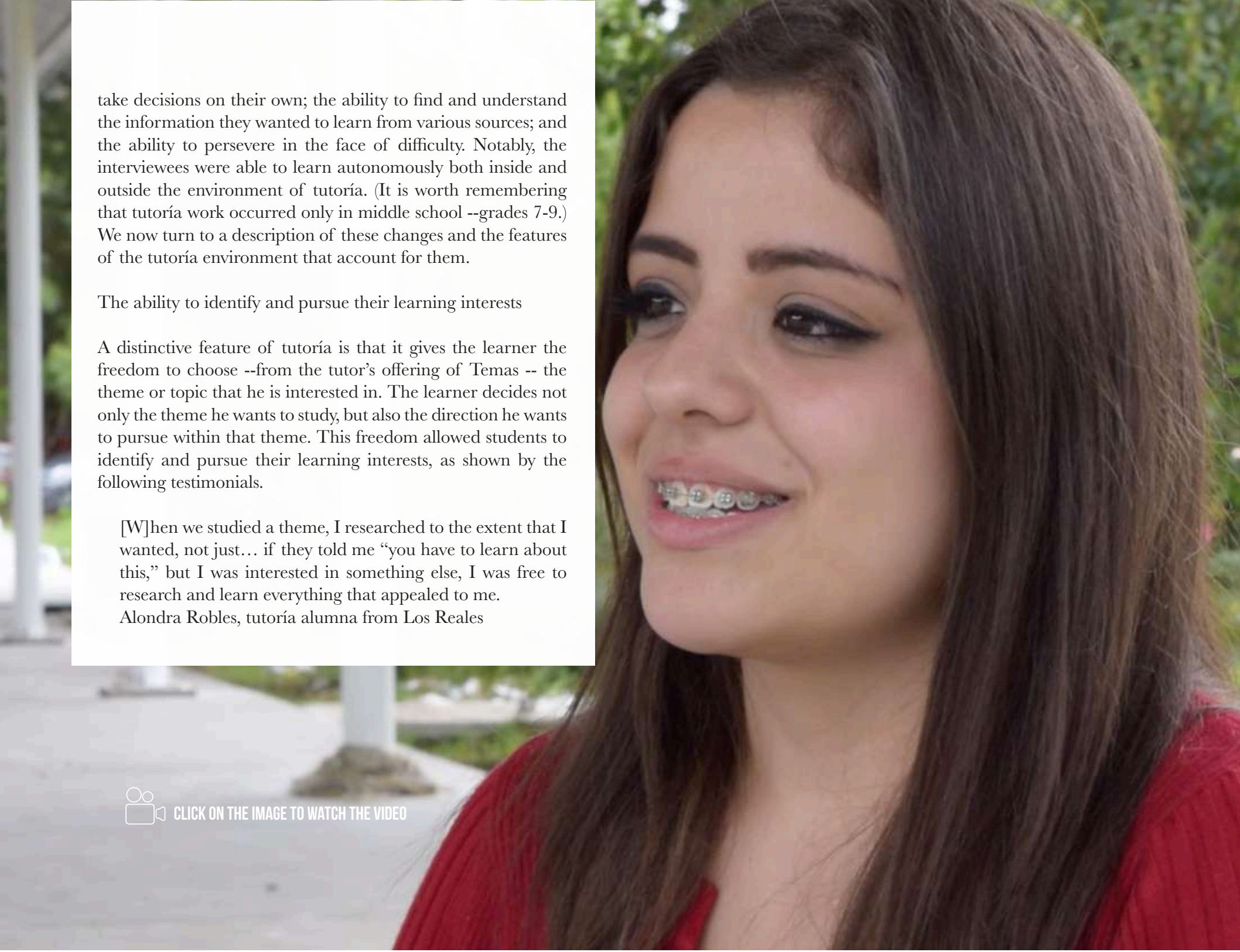
Students account for the following changes in their ability for autonomous learning: the ability to identify and pursue their learning interests; the discovery of the joy and intrinsic motivation for learning; the experience of becoming free to express themselves and

take decisions on their own; the ability to find and understand the information they wanted to learn from various sources; and the ability to persevere in the face of difficulty. Notably, the interviewees were able to learn autonomously both inside and outside the environment of tutoría. (It is worth remembering that tutoría work occurred only in middle school --grades 7-9.) We now turn to a description of these changes and the features of the tutoría environment that account for them.

The ability to identify and pursue their learning interests

A distinctive feature of tutoría is that it gives the learner the freedom to choose --from the tutor's offering of Temas -- the theme or topic that he is interested in. The learner decides not only the theme he wants to study, but also the direction he wants to pursue within that theme. This freedom allowed students to identify and pursue their learning interests, as shown by the following testimonials.

> [W]hen we studied a theme, I researched to the extent that I wanted, not just… if they told me "you have to learn about this," but I was interested in something else, I was free to research and learn everything that appealed to me.
> Alondra Robles, tutoría alumna from Los Reales



[Tutoría] is different because you don't have to follow a program, you don't have to follow what the teacher tells you to but what you want to learn. Your teacher is but a guide, not the commander, and he won't limit your learning. You learn what you want, the field is free for you, but you have a guide next to you.
Maricruz Ramírez, tutoría alumna from Santa Rosa

The discovery of the joy of learning

A common testimonial among students, alumni, and parents is the discovery of the joy and intrinsic motivation for reading and learning, even among students who used to resist these activities.

> We have seen Benjamín [their child] evolve here, we no longer need to rush him or yell at him to get him to do his homework. We don't really know what his teacher has done but we have obviously seen him evolve because it used to be like: "get up now," "do your homework," "do this," "do this," "do this," and now he just does his homework, does research... We have seen him become interested in reading, which he didn't want to do before.
> Benjamín's (student from Salazares) parents.

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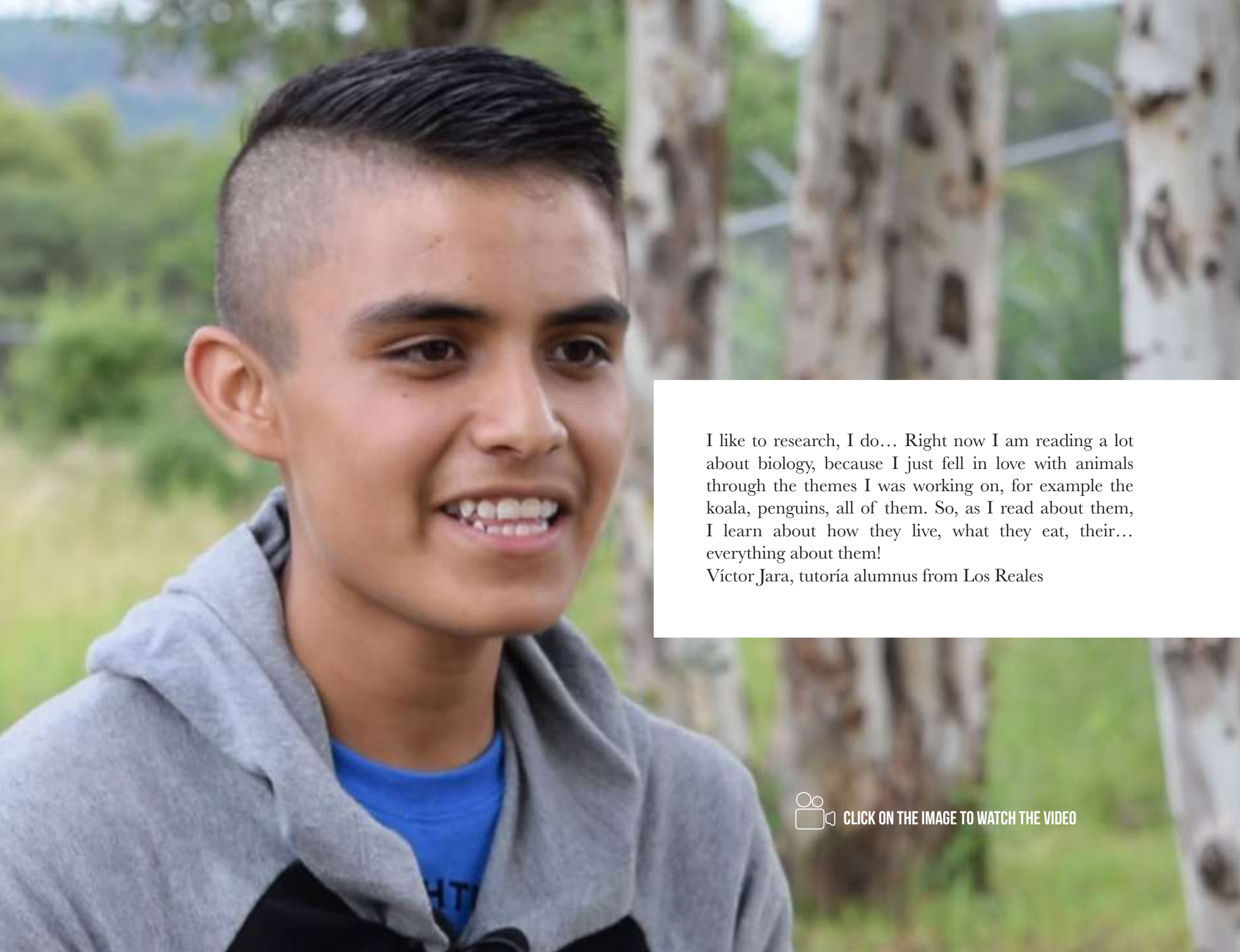

I like to research, I do… Right now I am reading a lot about biology, because I just fell in love with animals through the themes I was working on, for example the koala, penguins, all of them. So, as I read about them, I learn about how they live, what they eat, their… everything about them!
Víctor Jara, tutoría alumnus from Los Reales

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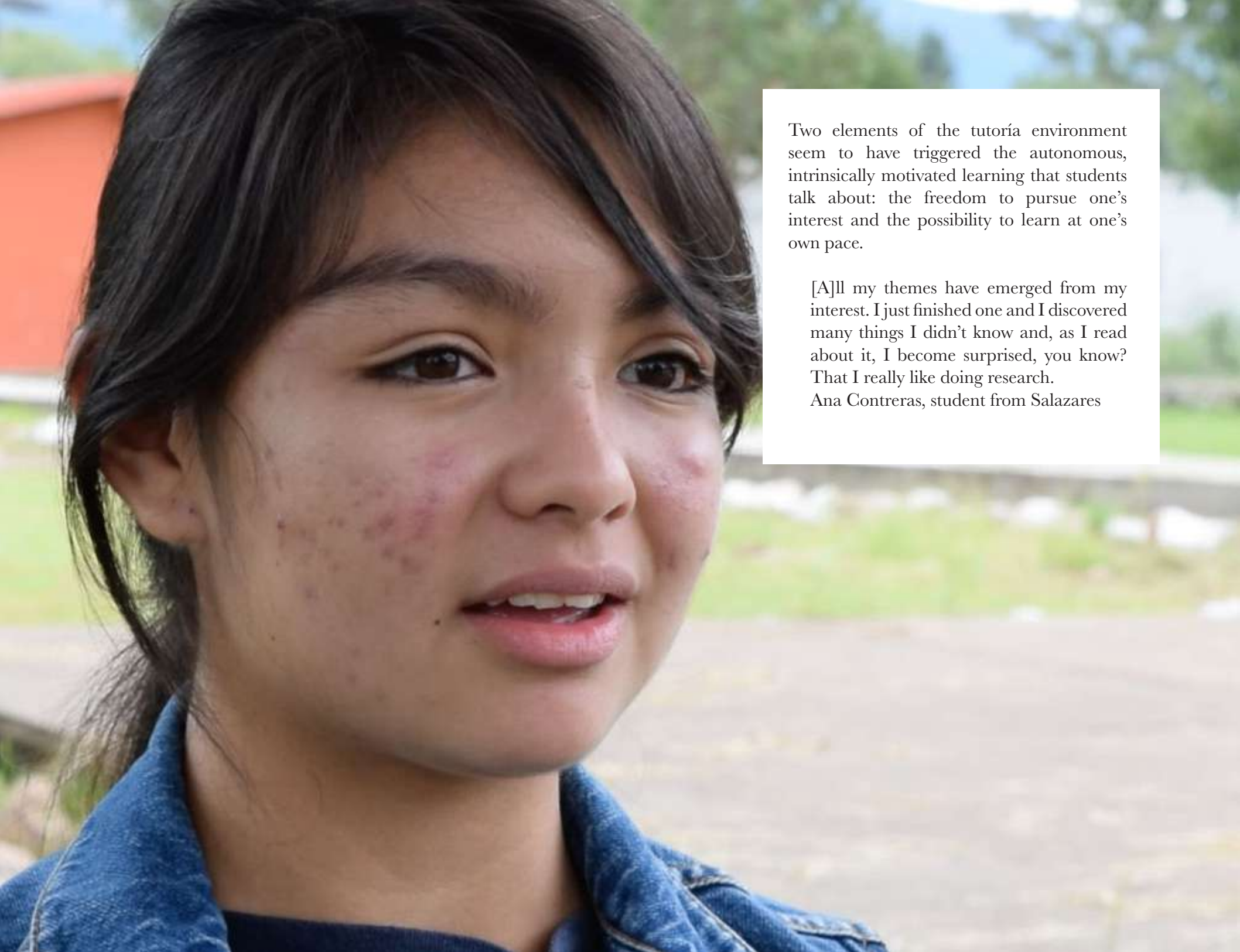
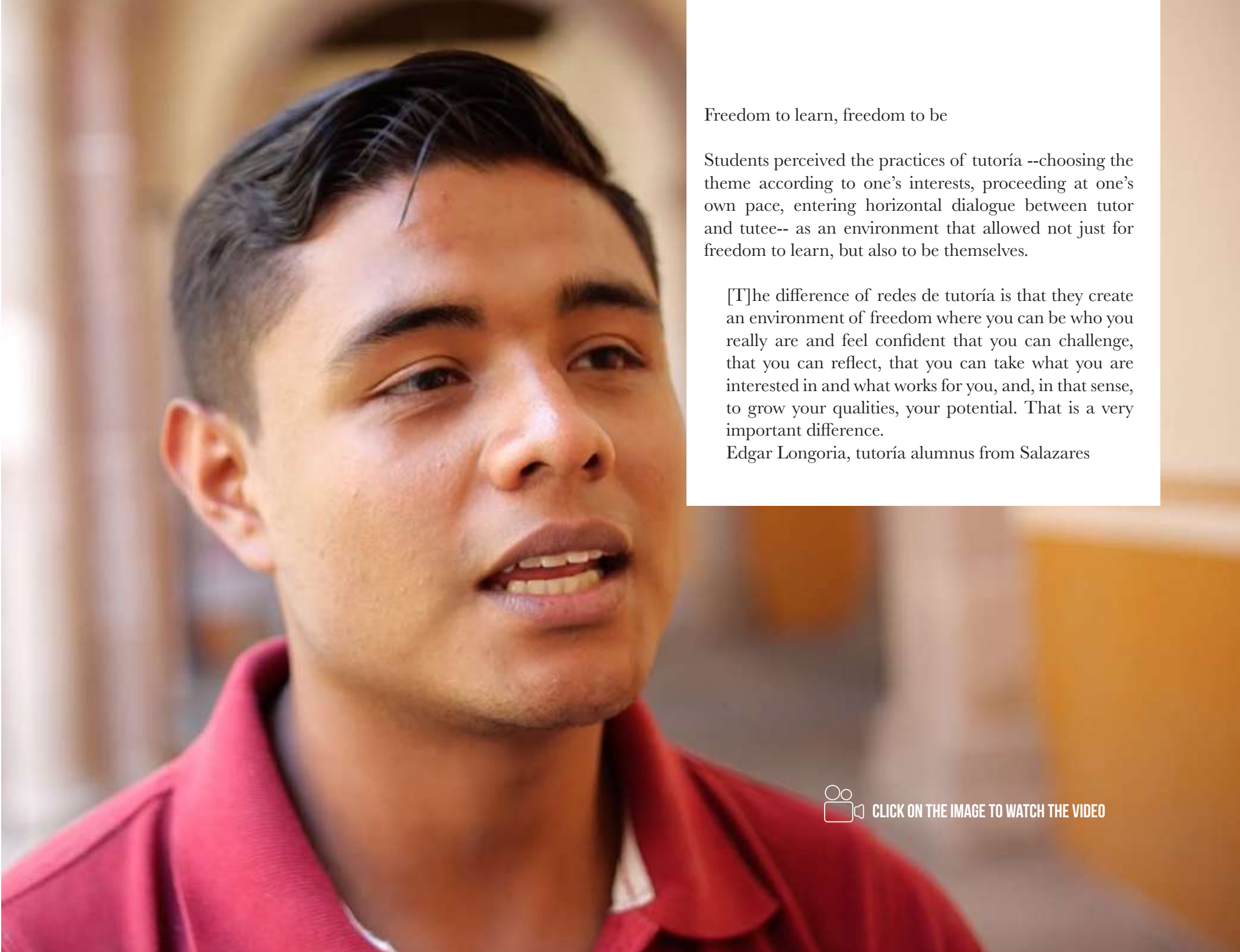


Two elements of the tutoría environment seem to have triggered the autonomous, intrinsically motivated learning that students talk about: the freedom to pursue one's interest and the possibility to learn at one's own pace.

> [A]ll my themes have emerged from my interest. I just finished one and I discovered many things I didn't know and, as I read about it, I become surprised, you know? That I really like doing research.
> Ana Contreras, student from Salazares

For me, studying there [in his middle school] was something wonderful because we were given freedom to learn about what we wanted, so there was no pressure to finish a theme in half an hour, or a page in fifteen minutes, or a book, or whatever.
Víctor Jara, tutoría alumnus from Los Reales



Freedom to learn, freedom to be

Students perceived the practices of tutoría --choosing the theme according to one's interests, proceeding at one's own pace, entering horizontal dialogue between tutor and tutee-- as an environment that allowed not just for freedom to learn, but also to be themselves.

> [T]he difference of redes de tutoría is that they create an environment of freedom where you can be who you really are and feel confident that you can challenge, that you can reflect, that you can take what you are interested in and what works for you, and, in that sense, to grow your qualities, your potential. That is a very important difference.
> Edgar Longoria, tutoría alumnus from Salazares

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[The difference of tutoría] is that you are free to express yourself, I mean, you don't have someone telling you "do this, follow that." No, I mean, we don't have that in tutoría. Tutoría sets you on a track so that you can continue for a very long run. And that is, I think, the main thing that helps people.
Juliana Estrada, tutoría alumna from Salazares

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[I]n tutoría you are free to work to your maximum potential and intensity, and you can break through your limits because of your motivation to study and to learn.

Sandra Espinoza, tutoría alumna from Salazares

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In the above testimonials, it becomes clear that students experienced a freedom beyond the merely academic. In a deeper sense, they became able to be "who they really are" and to "express themselves." Evidently, students are trying to put into words a complex and profoundly transformative process that led them to "grow their qualities and potential", as well as to "break through their limits." Several interviewees, while recalling the earlier stages of this process, pinpointed the dialogue with their teacher as the initial source of confidence in their ability to move forward:

> [A]t first, one barely has any idea [how to create an original text] because in elementary school it's all "copy this text as it stands" or "read that story" or something, but everything is given, you just have to read it and copy it in a template to check your spelling and such. Here it was something you had to come up with, you had to imagine a text from the title alone, and come up with a story. So, at first, I made them, well, with difficulty, I had never invented anything beyond three or four lines, and the teacher would tell us: "no, set your imagination free, you may make it longer than a page, you may turn it into three." And so later, it was no longer three to four lines, they were much longer, and you no longer struggled to come up with a story, you had many ideas.
> Blanca Albino, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas

Lifelong and lifewide learning

A constant in the testimonials is the contrast that interviewees perceive between the tutoría learning practices and those in the traditional system. As is implicit in Juliana's above statement ("Tutoría sets you on the track to continue for the long run"), the ability to learn autonomously -to find and make sense of the information they wanted- remained with students and allowed them to keep learning once they re-entered the traditional school system after middle school.

> [I]f there's something you don't know, you won't limit yourself that you don't know it and only the teacher knows, but you have [...] many things to learn at your disposal, right? So that's what I did [in high school], as the teacher lectured, I wrote my notes down; if anything was unclear to me, I would ask the teacher; if he didn't want to answer, I would look it up at home.
> Maximiliano Alfaro, tutoría alumnus from San Ramón

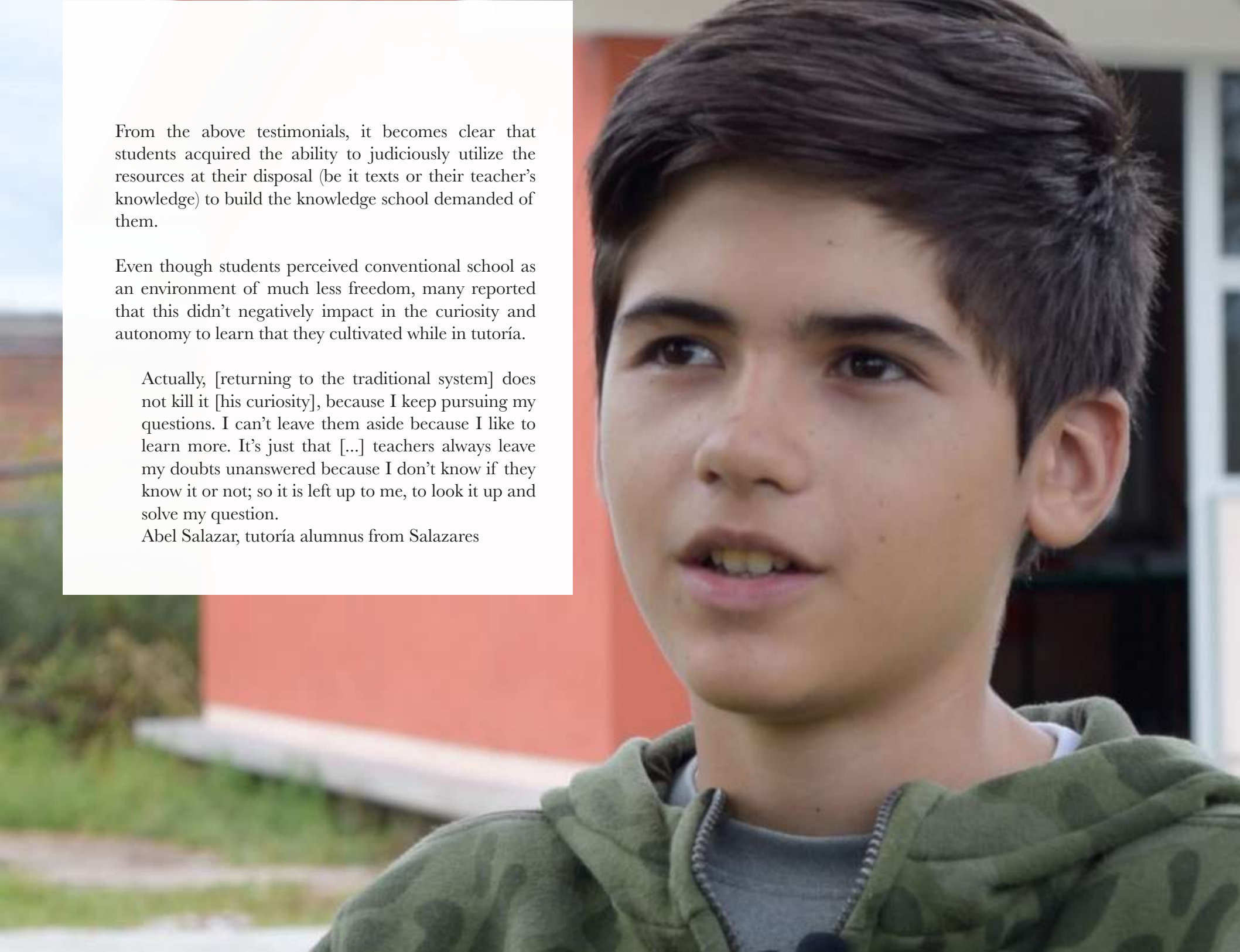
Right now, I am in the first semester of psychology and [tutoría] has helped me to develop myself. Because, well, psychology is a lot about reading, doing research, all of that. So, this has helped me, it has opened doors for me and allowed me to know what and where to look up what I need.

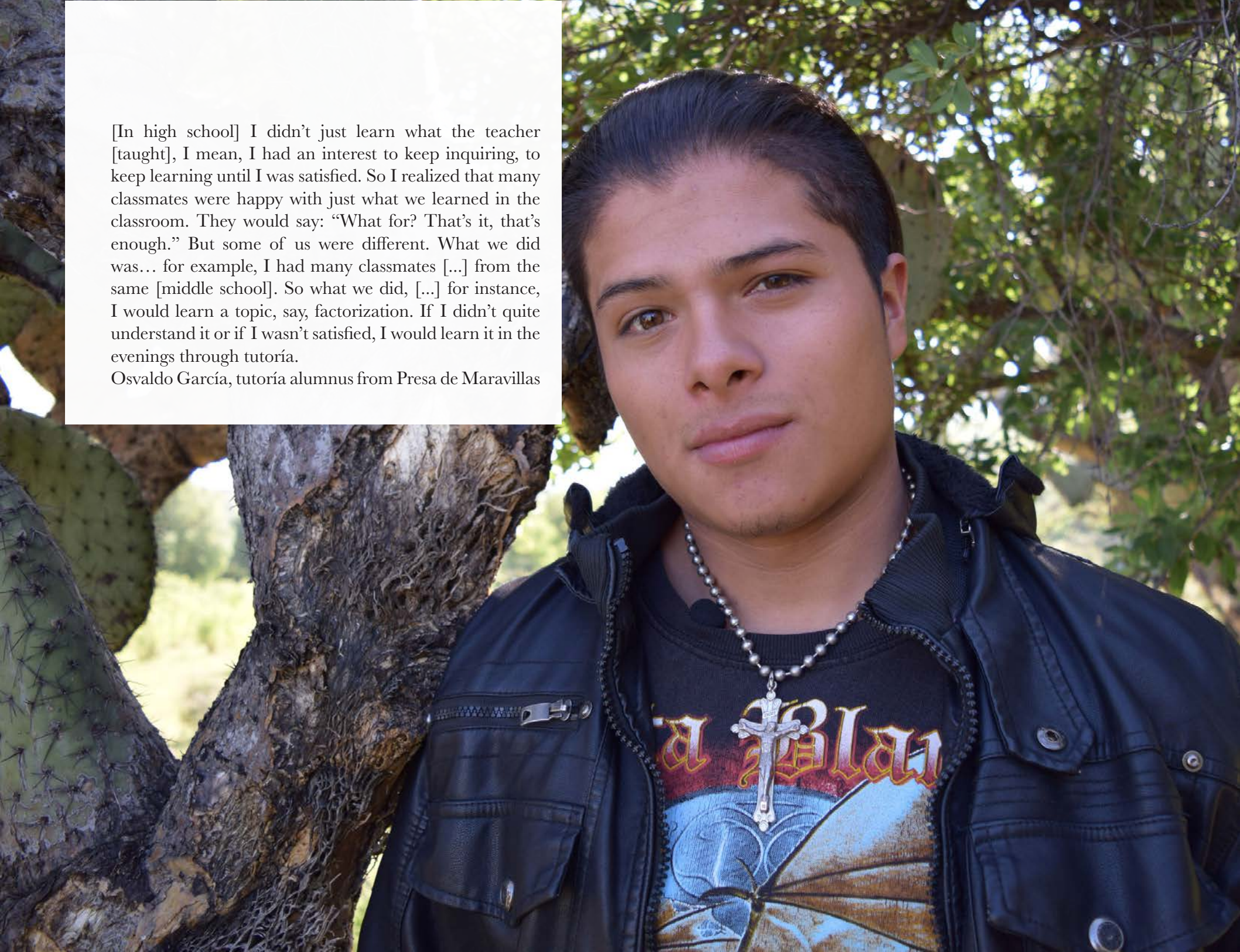
Karina Barrios, tutoría alumna from El Cargadero

From the above testimonials, it becomes clear that students acquired the ability to judiciously utilize the resources at their disposal (be it texts or their teacher's knowledge) to build the knowledge school demanded of them.

Even though students perceived conventional school as an environment of much less freedom, many reported that this didn't negatively impact in the curiosity and autonomy to learn that they cultivated while in tutoría.

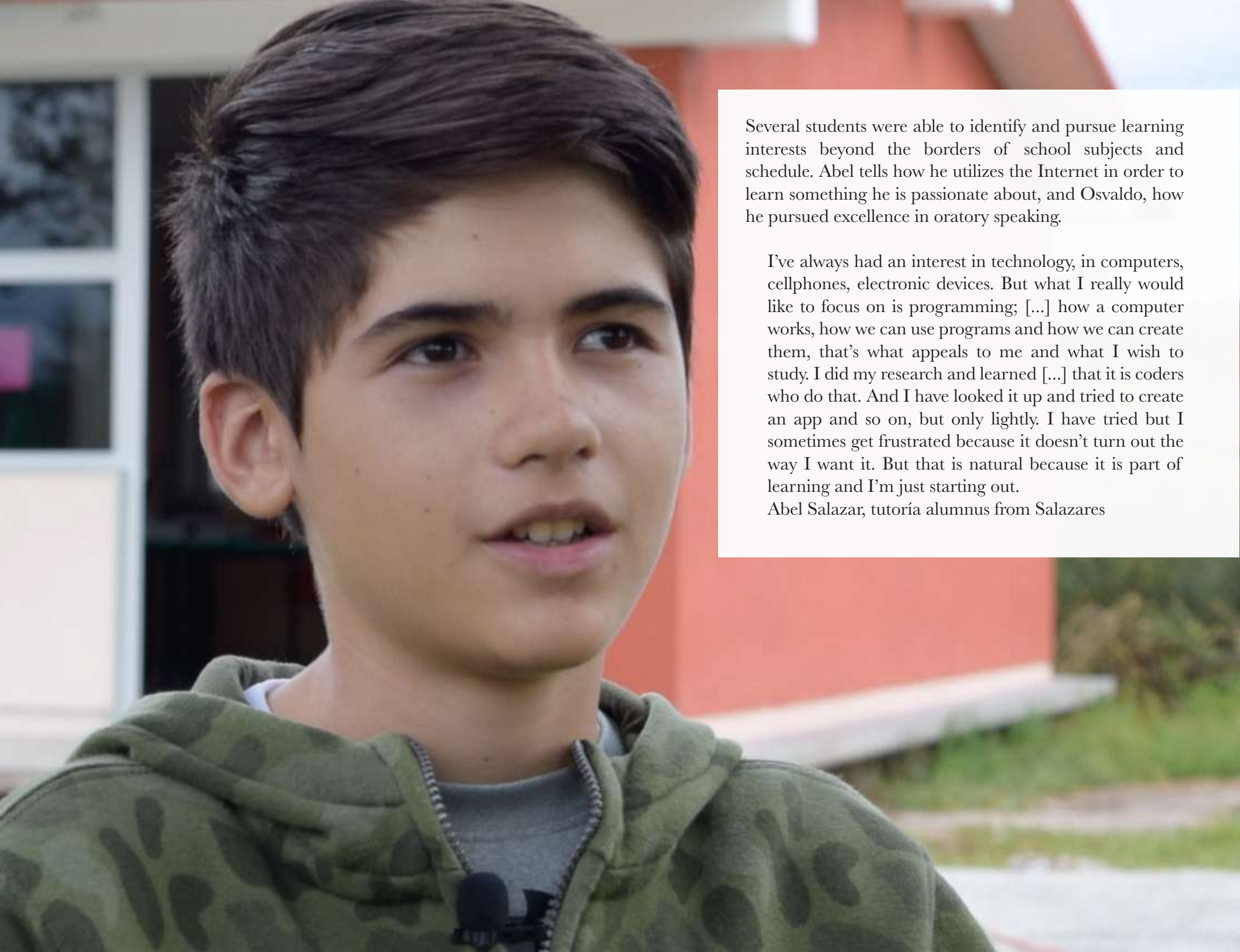
> Actually, [returning to the traditional system] does not kill it [his curiosity], because I keep pursuing my questions. I can't leave them aside because I like to learn more. It's just that [...] teachers always leave my doubts unanswered because I don't know if they know it or not; so it is left up to me, to look it up and solve my question.
> Abel Salazar, tutoría alumnus from Salazares





[In high school] I didn't just learn what the teacher [taught], I mean, I had an interest to keep inquiring, to keep learning until I was satisfied. So I realized that many classmates were happy with just what we learned in the classroom. They would say: "What for? That's it, that's enough." But some of us were different. What we did was… for example, I had many classmates [...] from the same [middle school]. So what we did, [...] for instance, I would learn a topic, say, factorization. If I didn't quite understand it or if I wasn't satisfied, I would learn it in the evenings through tutoría.

Osvaldo García, tutoría alumnus from Presa de Maravillas



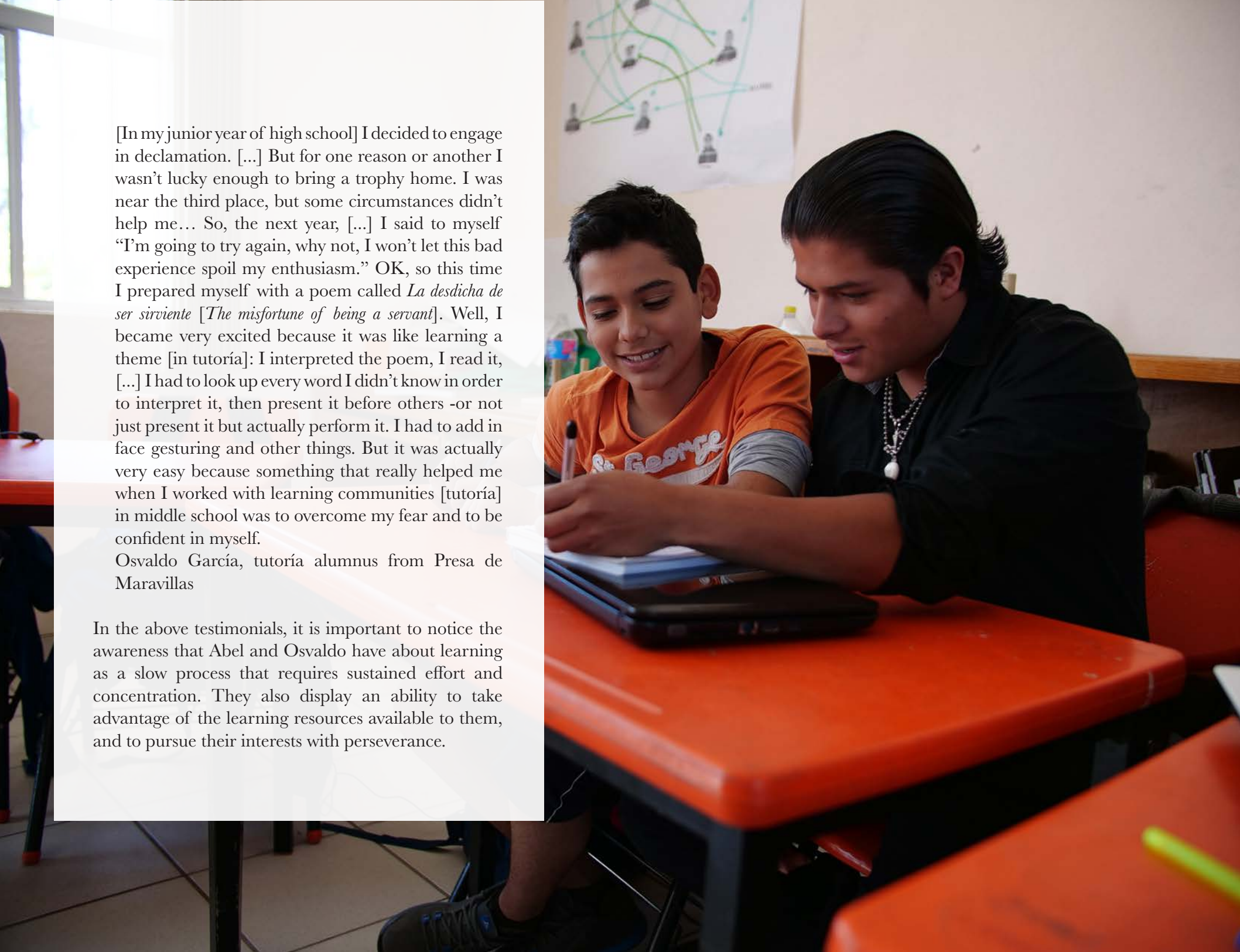
Several students were able to identify and pursue learning interests beyond the borders of school subjects and schedule. Abel tells how he utilizes the Internet in order to learn something he is passionate about, and Osvaldo, how he pursued excellence in oratory speaking.

> I've always had an interest in technology, in computers, cellphones, electronic devices. But what I really would like to focus on is programming; [...] how a computer works, how we can use programs and how we can create them, that's what appeals to me and what I wish to study. I did my research and learned [...] that it is coders who do that. And I have looked it up and tried to create an app and so on, but only lightly. I have tried but I sometimes get frustrated because it doesn't turn out the way I want it. But that is natural because it is part of learning and I'm just starting out.
> Abel Salazar, tutoría alumnus from Salazares

[In my junior year of high school] I decided to engage in declamation. [...] But for one reason or another I wasn't lucky enough to bring a trophy home. I was near the third place, but some circumstances didn't help me… So, the next year, [...] I said to myself "I'm going to try again, why not, I won't let this bad experience spoil my enthusiasm." OK, so this time I prepared myself with a poem called *La desdicha de ser sirviente* [*The misfortune of being a servant*]. Well, I became very excited because it was like learning a theme [in tutoría]: I interpreted the poem, I read it, [...] I had to look up every word I didn't know in order to interpret it, then present it before others -or not just present it but actually perform it. I had to add in face gesturing and other things. But it was actually very easy because something that really helped me when I worked with learning communities [tutoría] in middle school was to overcome my fear and to be confident in myself.

Osvaldo García, tutoría alumnus from Presa de Maravillas

In the above testimonials, it is important to notice the awareness that Abel and Osvaldo have about learning as a slow process that requires sustained effort and concentration. They also display an ability to take advantage of the learning resources available to them, and to pursue their interests with perseverance.



Psychosocial abilities in tutoría

The majority of interviewees live in rural communities that have been plagued by poverty and weak social structures. Families are often affected by the migration of one or both parents, leaving children under the care of their grandparents, uncles and aunts, or godparents. In these circumstances, aggression, difficulties in relating to others, and communication problems often arise. It is also common for students to feel pressured to leave school in order to work and support the family's finances. As García (2016) points out, this generates personal frustration and the giving up of personal goals --an environment where people survive rather than thrive.

We understand psychosocial abilities as protective factors that can help individuals face everyday challenges and demands and thrive in the face of such difficulties (García, 2016). Schools also cannot close an eye to the situations in which their students live. Although it is not and should not be in just the school's hands to resolve these issues, schools hold a multitude of possibilities for enabling students to experience, reflect, and develop skills to face and resolve challenges over their lifespan.

Gardner (1994) points out that these abilities can be learned through the right kind of environment, and strengthened over an individual's' development-- with school being the privileged institution for this purpose. Tutoría relationships are sustained by the conviction that no one can offer what they do not have, that we can learn from anyone, and that the best way to teach is by allowing students freedom to choose and decide. This creates the conditions of learning where students can decide and commit to themselves and to each other as a way to sustain interest in learning.

Findings of the study

Seven psychosocial abilities were coded for in the interviews. Three were made explicit in more than 33% of cases: students become more self-confident, they critique the traditional school system and contrast it with tutoría, they make confident decisions about their future. Two were present in 15% to 33% of interviews: students are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, they feel valued. Two more were found in less than 15% of interviews: students express their emotions, they strengthen their self-control.

We now present selected testimonials for the top five categories. Tutoría promotes relationships based upon respect and trust, where students learn to relate to others both inside and outside school, as the following testimonials attest to.

> It [tutoría] is a way of interacting more with people, according to what they like, because you get to know them. With a single topic you get to know what the other person likes. So, you learn to socialize more. Because I used to be very shy, I didn't talk. [...] I would get asked something and be like "no, I don't know." I did know, but I would say "no, I don't know, don't know, don't know, don't know." I was very shy. I still have classmates who get asked something and because they don't trust themselves they say "no, I don't know, don't know." And later, when someone else --who is confident-- answers, they go "I was gonna say that." Why did you not say it? Because of fear. Because they haven't had the experience of getting rid of fear and learning to trust themselves.
>
> Jasmín Castro, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas

I think it's just about trusting one's self, one's ability. If we set our minds to it we can accomplish great things. But some people don't buy into their ability. The thing is, you have to believe it. Though you know, you might not do it --you have to believe you can and then you could make many other things happen too.
Yoselín Jara, student from Los Reales

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Parents and teachers confirm students' development and ability to carry themselves with confidence both inside and outside school.
She [her daughter] can easily relate to everyone, everyone, from adults, kids, young people… she has an ability to relate… pretty cool! [laughs] It's like tutoría has given her [...] a confidence that it's OK, that she can talk and relate to people and get along with more people. One usually just talks to the people who are close to us, right? Well, she doesn't, she relates to everyone, everyone. Some people who like to joke, they tease her and she plays along. And then there are others [whom we might prejudge because of their appearance] but she doesn't. She's more… more open and, more than anything, confident.
Dolores Ceballos, Reyna's (student from Salazares) mother

What I find very moving is the freedom students have to express themselves. Here with my students, many were shy, didn't like to talk much, they were afraid, if they ever came to the board to do a presentation, they felt fear. They felt like they would never be alright, so that's what I liked [about tutoría], that we came to express ourselves more freely in our own mind.
María Juana García, teacher from Teocaltiche

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Students, teachers and parents also reflect on their experience in tutoría and how it differs --positively or negatively-- from conventional education. The moments of transition (such as entering or graduating middle school) provide opportunities for this reflection, as the following testimonials show.

> We enter a classroom where you sit and the teacher lectures you on what you have to do, but in his terms or the terms of the educational system. It affects you personally because you don't get to develop the abilities that each person has. Because no two people are the same, we really are… well, we think differently, and our abilities are also different -some have a talent for math, others for science… And honestly, that's what the educational system misses because you have to learn everything because you are told to, and that's like saying we all think the same. And that's not really what matters, but to create people who can develop their own abilities to the fullest and take advantage of them, and that's really what tutoría is about --developing your personal abilities --and not just abilities, but also to become fulfilled and really create everything you set your mind to. That it won't just be served to you, as it is in the current educational system, that it's all just there and that's all, but that there are a thousand different ways. And, well, the main lesson you get from tutoría that really helps you for life is that you will have to find your own way. And to become a truly independent person, and find your own knowledge, and get to learn what you want. And that's really what helps people get ahead.
> Diego Serrano, tutoría alumnus from Salazares

I mean… What's the use of learning a topic all alone? I mean… It's about socializing with our classmates, right? Because sometimes in class, the teacher is just talking and talking and they don't let us do anything --sometimes not even move. Right now, in high school, I have a teacher who tells us: "Speak up, answer to me when I ask you a question," and when we talk she gets angry. The other day I told her: "No, Miss Concepción… Look, the point is… that if you are going to ask us to say something, well then, let us express ourselves." Because if she asks "OK, who is this person?" Or "Which is the management school that proposed..." -because I am majoring in management. And some [students] are even afraid to raise their hand and say, "Well, it was this person." Because we are afraid that the teacher will tell us, "Actually, no, it wasn't that person."
Esmeralda Ramos, tutoría alumna from Malpaso

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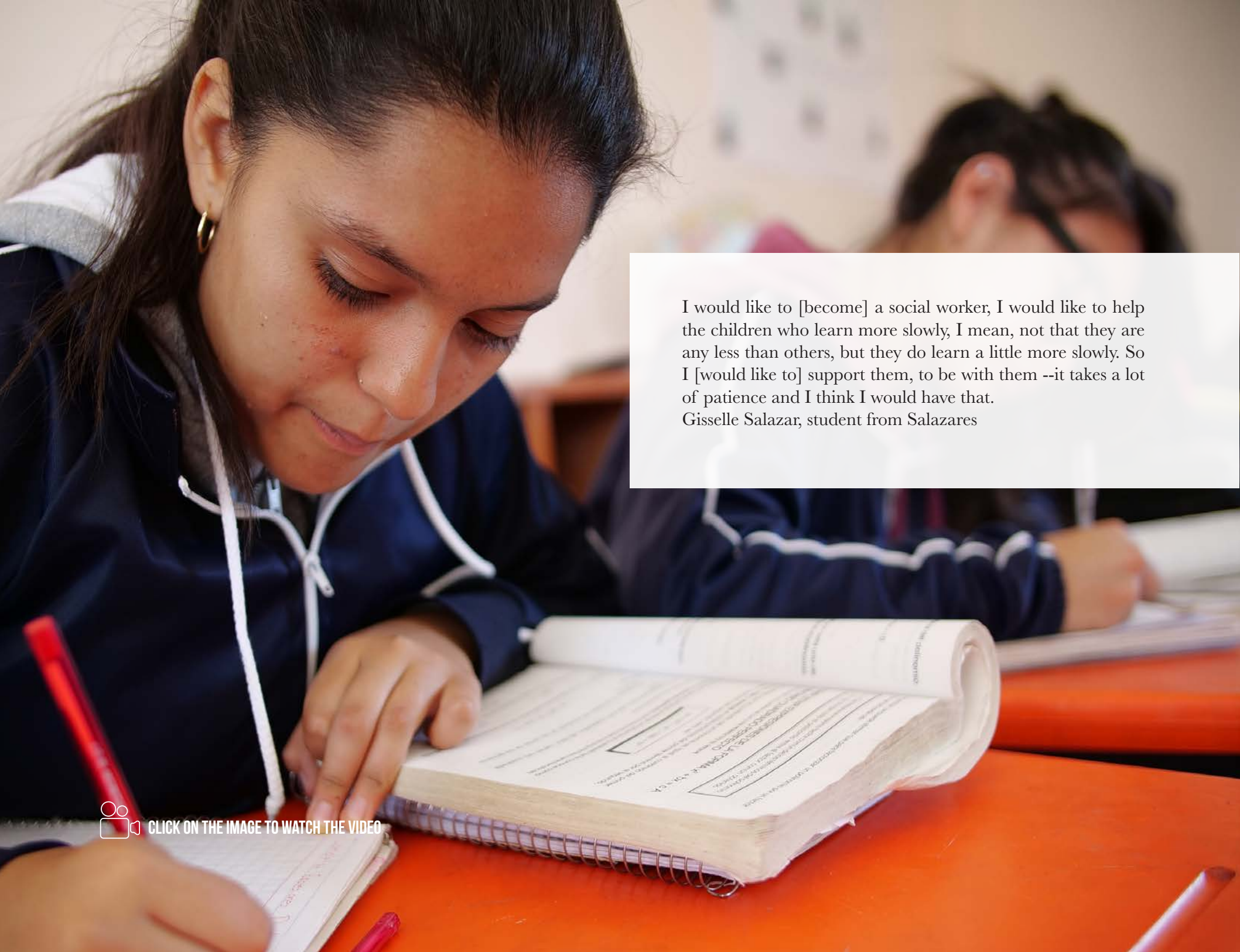
Okay [in the current educational debate] we talk about transformation, but as you say, we also have to talk about adaptations, we have to think about a more dynamic classroom. If we talk about learning environments that are more conducive to learning, we would have to think of many things -- time schedules, for starters. Traditionally, we have gotten used to coming in at 8, taking a break at 11, [...] and it seems like it's the schedule that dictates [activities], rather than the learning -which is the crux of the matter. In the time that the teachers and students are in school, we have to focus on learning rather than the covering of schedules. So, what changes have I made in my own practice? We come in at 8, but we are not just waiting for 11 to hit so we can take our break, it's actually very common that [in our classroom] we work until 11:10 or 11:15, because the learning environment keeps us engaged in constructing our learning. When no learning is occurring, we are just waiting for class to be over, in some cases we've worked the whole day, up to 2:10 or 2:15 and sometimes we don't even notice the time or that it's time to go home. We have to think that schedule doesn't dictate learning, we are here to generate learning and time does not need to constrict us. That's for one thing. We would also have to break classroom schemes. It is still very common to keep students rigidly aligned, to assign each student a permanent seat. We have to allow for mobility, for students to find the place where they feel comfortable. What can one find in our classroom? That some students are learning while sitting on the floor. We can also find students exchanging tutoría under a tree. Others follow up on their work in the media classroom. We have to break the rigidity of the classroom. We must be clear that a teacher won't just receive training from heaven, we have to think that to generate a transformation of the instructional core we have to dedicate time to training ourselves so that we stay up to date. Speaking of tutoría, we have to be aware that we have to constantly generate new material because students demand it. He who is genuinely doing tutoría will realize that students are always demanding new material, so we have to invest time into our personal and collective education. This is a type of challenge because if we give a student autonomy, he will certainly become autonomous, but he will also ask for more. And we have to rise to this challenge. What other adjustments do we have to do? We would have to change the school curriculum. There is an institutional press [to cover] topics. We would have to adjust [...] the content and even exclude some topics --if I know that a general topic will lead to particular topics, then let's start with the general topic, that we may see all other contents, but not one topic after another because this dilutes [learning]. So it's best to start with a general topic that leads me to the topics students are interested in -and I am positive that what a student wants is actually in the textbooks, what's different is the way we learn them through the elements we have been mentioning: freedom, autonomy, interest, depth, mastery.

Rito Longoria, teacher from Salazares

When I entered the teachers' college, it was like a shock because I was used to doing things and working in a different way. So the methodology they propose is what they've always been doing--with different names, but it's what they've always been doing: the teacher explains, we listen, we carry out the instructions and we're done. At the end you get a grade, but who can tell you this grade reflects your true learning, your true knowledge? Well, no one, right? So eh, what I did [as a teacher in training] was to design worksheets with guiding questions --either cognitive or metacognitive-- so that students could build their own knowledge. Instead of telling them "OK, guys, this is called 'general formula', this is the Pythagorean theorem, this is how it works," instead, what I wanted was for them to understand where it came from, I wanted them to be able to explain it. That's why I designed classes that were a little different. I was always practicing, I tried to organize students into teams, yes, and sometimes I encouraged discussions and talks among the groups so that they could let go of the tension, right? Because sometimes that also plays a big role. So that's what I did, and I tried to always ask: "What are you doing? Why are you doing that? Do you think you will get the same result if..." So that's what a true reflection must lead them to, not just "a squared plus b squared equals c squared, that's the Pythagorean theorem," but, well, what's that? Where does it come from? That's true learning, to know what is behind so that you can understand what is to come. So yes, that's what I did.
Maximiliano Alfaro, tutoría alumnus from San Ramón

Deep engagement with a variety of topics allows students to identify the areas they feel more comfortable with and interested in --which, in turn, helps them decide with confidence the career path they would like to pursue.

> Well, I would like to go to college to study architecture because, I don't know, I like it. When I first came here I didn't know, I was like "I'll just finish middle school, and that's it." But once I was in, I started to really like math. Because I really liked how my teacher explained it, and the examples he used. He explained to me [how] to solve them, he related them to my everyday, showing me that there are some problems you have to tackle a certain way and so on. So, I began to really like it and since I liked math, I figured, well, I want to study architecture.
> Rosa Álvarez, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas



I would like to [become] a social worker, I would like to help the children who learn more slowly, I mean, not that they are any less than others, but they do learn a little more slowly. So I [would like to] support them, to be with them --it takes a lot of patience and I think I would have that.
Gisselle Salazar, student from Salazares

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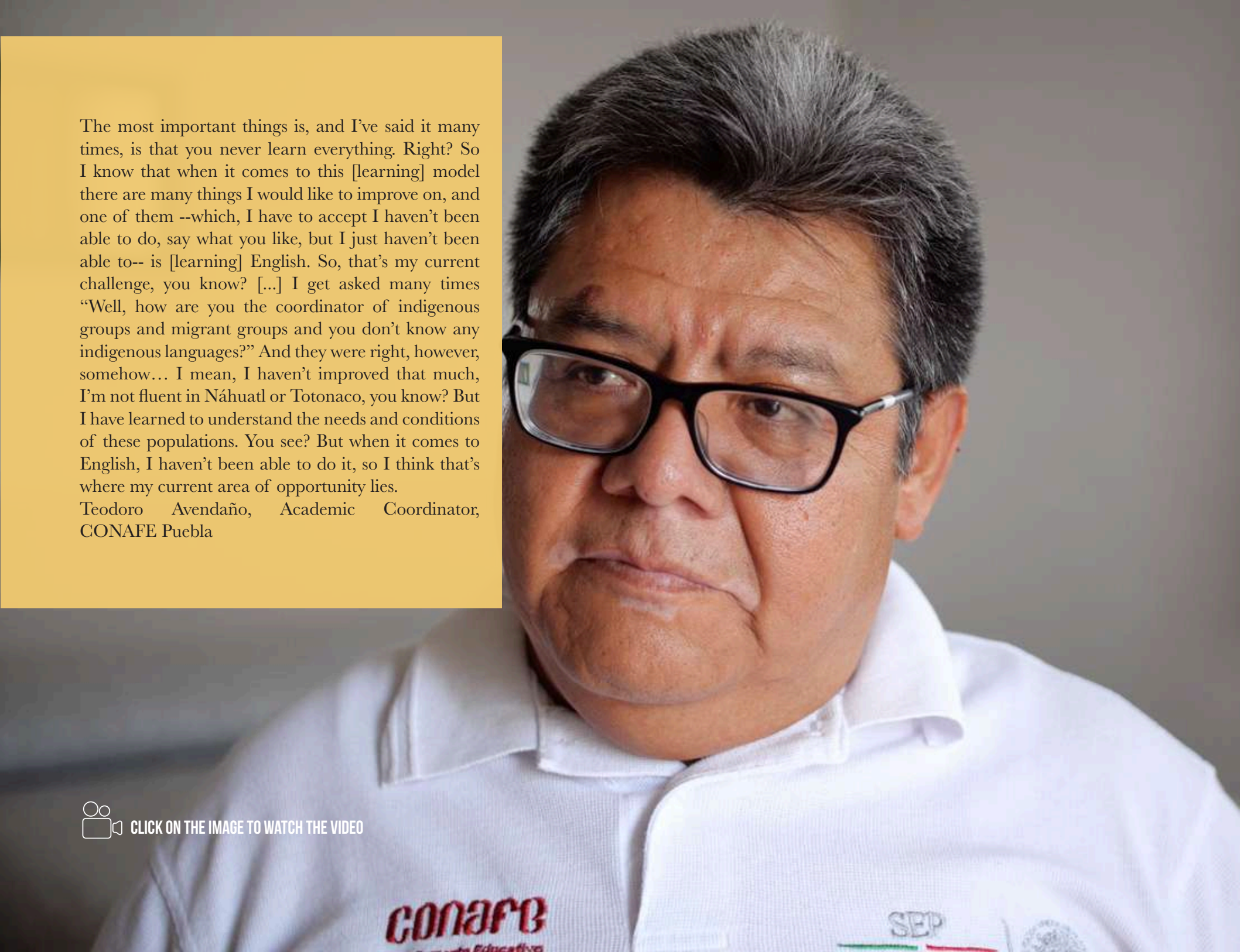
In each tutoría learning experience there are moments of metacognitive reflection which allow students to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses at the personal, academic, and social level.

> Within the [tutoría] model there is what's known as the reflection about the learning process, which is like capturing, saving, recording everything that impresses you, everything you learn. You don't forget about it because you are writing it down and when you read it you realize that "Wow! I was able to do all this, I went through many challenges, I encountered many things I didn't know, and I made it." So when I experienced that today, getting to the answer by myself, I mean it's exciting [smiles]. I really felt it because I said "I did it!" You see? I found an answer even though I didn't know it before. I might have had some knowledge, but you think "Wow! I did it, I went through all this, I got tangled up in it, I got confused but finally I could make clear sense of it and I arrived at the result. I think this is such a beautiful feeling and almost "Wow! I did it" You want to shout, you want to jump, you want to do many things, right? [laughs] Well you can't express it that openly but really, I felt good when I said, "Wow, I did it. I could do this, I built it, me, myself. Right? They guided me, and I could do it."
> Reyna Templos, Tutor-Coach, CONAFE Hidalgo

Interviewer: Do you feel there was anything lacking in your middle school education?
David: No. Honestly, middle school was when I advanced a lot, maybe if middle school had lasted longer I would have been able to develop my abilities more. You know? For example, the subject that I find pretty easy is Biology, but the other subjects are harder for me. I have to push hard in those subjects, but biology comes easy to me, it's where I have like, the most understanding.
David Longoria, tutoría alumnus from Salazares

The most important things is, and I've said it many times, is that you never learn everything. Right? So I know that when it comes to this [learning] model there are many things I would like to improve on, and one of them --which, I have to accept I haven't been able to do, say what you like, but I just haven't been able to-- is [learning] English. So, that's my current challenge, you know? [...] I get asked many times "Well, how are you the coordinator of indigenous groups and migrant groups and you don't know any indigenous languages?" And they were right, however, somehow… I mean, I haven't improved that much, I'm not fluent in Náhuatl or Totonaco, you know? But I have learned to understand the needs and conditions of these populations. You see? But when it comes to English, I haven't been able to do it, so I think that's where my current area of opportunity lies.

Teodoro Avendaño, Academic Coordinator, CONAFE Puebla



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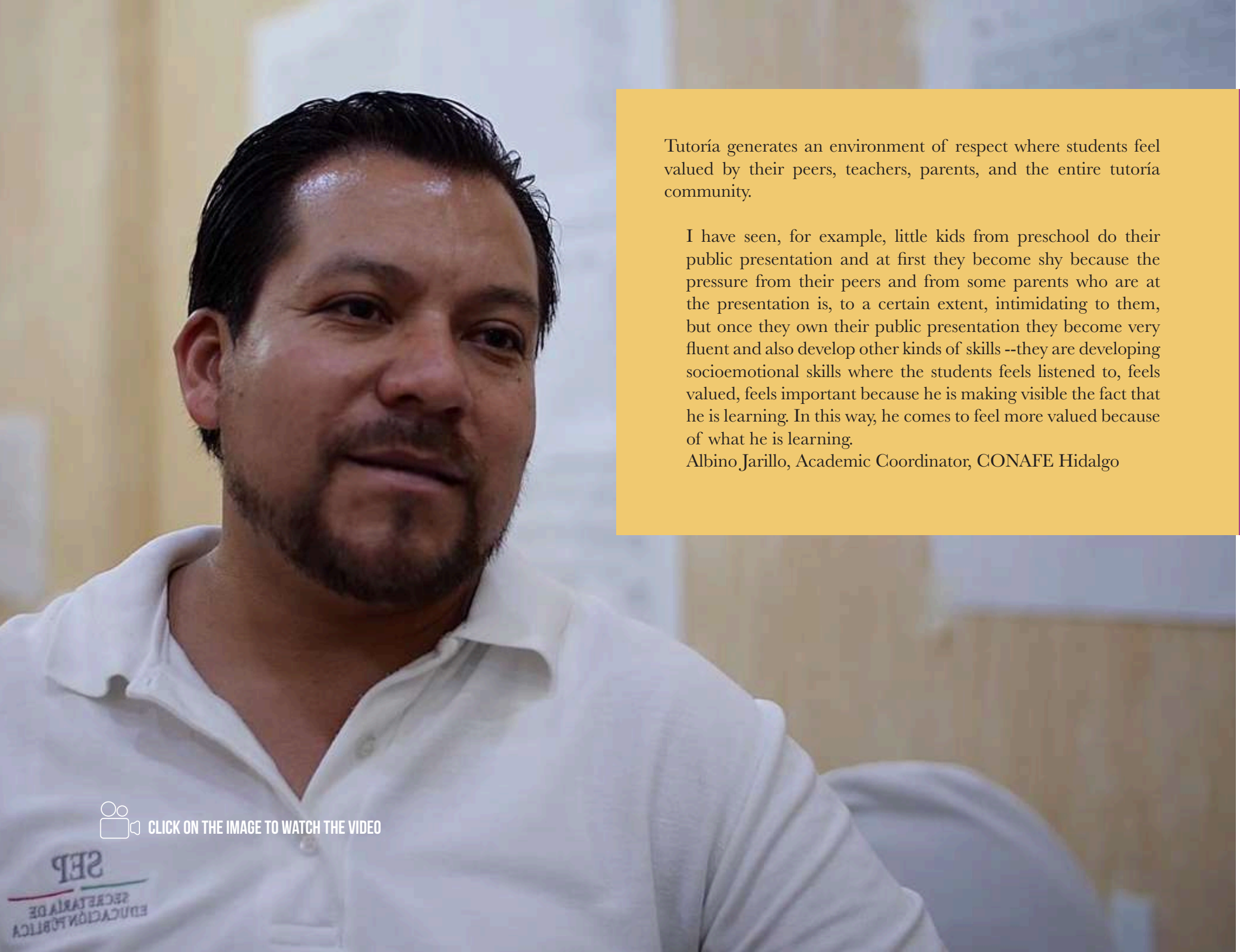

Tutoría generates an environment of respect where students feel valued by their peers, teachers, parents, and the entire tutoría community.

> I have seen, for example, little kids from preschool do their public presentation and at first they become shy because the pressure from their peers and from some parents who are at the presentation is, to a certain extent, intimidating to them, but once they own their public presentation they become very fluent and also develop other kinds of skills --they are developing socioemotional skills where the students feels listened to, feels valued, feels important because he is making visible the fact that he is learning. In this way, he comes to feel more valued because of what he is learning.
> Albino Jarillo, Academic Coordinator, CONAFE Hidalgo

Another very noteworthy satisfaction was when students came to realize they were actually taken into account [...] and then they start to leave their community and visit other communities, they start to leave their municipality and visit other municipalities, they start to leave their State and visit other States. And then, they start having another kind of knowledge and come to realize what they need to learn based on these new experiences [...] I suppose it's like they left the pond and reached the ocean. [...] That's another experience that brings me fond memories. Why? Because I watched these students care about learning because what they wanted was to continue to grow.
Antonio Félix, teacher from Jerez

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Cognitive abilities in tutoría

Each one of us constructs learning from our interactions with the outside world and with ourselves; learning is the product of inner reflection --conscious or unconscious-- that creates and strengthens so-called synaptic pathways. Neuroscience points out the role emotions play in learning --students who experience trust, safeness, and joy have a greater chance of building lasting learning than those deprived of such feelings (Willis, 2014). Every tutoría teacher strives to create a relationship with her students where she can cognitively challenge them and also welcome their feelings of puzzlement, frustration, and satisfaction that occur along the learning process. As Dalila López has said, tutoría dialogue brings challenge and pleasure together in a way that almost no other pedagogy can --they both become visible and palpable to the tutor, the tutee, and observers. The affective aspect has been dealt with in the previous section, and we now turn to the academic rigor students experience in tutoría.

Richard Elmore writes: "The essence of the tutorial relationship is to give as much control as possible to the learner over the choice of what to learn and to structure the tutorial relationship around the learner's discovery, through a dialectical process with the tutor, of how a body of knowledge works—not just what knowledge is, but how and why it takes the form it does." (Elmore, 2016, p.3, emphasis original). Such learning experience corresponds to what Mehta and Fine (2015) define as "mastery" --deep engagement with disciplinary knowledge and with the ways in which such knowledge is structured--one of the three dimensions of deeper learning.

Deeper learning is a topic of current importance and debate. Besides Mehta and Fine, other researchers like John Hattie (2009) and Santiago Rincón-Gallardo (2018a) have looked into it and essentially agreed on its characteristics: "it is lasting learning, it requires a sustained concentration, it produces and is produced by intrinsic motivation (a desire to explore things that matter to the person or his family and community), it recruits higher cognitive abilities and metacognition, involves both intellectual and affective aspects, as well as the transference of what one learns to other contexts." (Rincón- Gallardo, 2018a). The most common question about deeper learning is how to realize it in classrooms, and we believe our interviewee's testimonials offer a tentative answer.

Learning in tutoría starts when the student chooses a theme he is interested in. The tutor offers the tutee a concrete challenge and commits to help him in its solution. They then enter a horizontal dialogue with the purpose of making sense of the material they purport to learn --be it a story, an essay, a problem, or whatever else. The tutor encourages reflection about the learning process all along, and the tutee puts this reflection in writing. Later, the tutee presents his learning process before the entire learning community. Finally, he becomes a tutor to another person who shows interest in the theme.

How effective can these practices be to trigger of

deeper learning in students? Hattie's research (2012) provides a hint. He made a meta-analysis (a study of studies) to determine which teacher interventions, from a pool of 150, contributed most to student learning. Among the interventions with the higher impact (between first and 34th in the ranking) we find:

- taking students' expectations (including their learning interests) into account,
- problem- based teaching,
- personalized feedback (which are present during tutoría dialogue),
- encouraging students to verbalize and challenge their own thinking (which occurs during dialogue and public presentation),
- peer tutoring (the "final step" of the tutoría cycle).

However, the truest impact --as we have emphasized along this book-- is that which students perceive and assess themselves. We now turn to their testimonials in search for such impact.

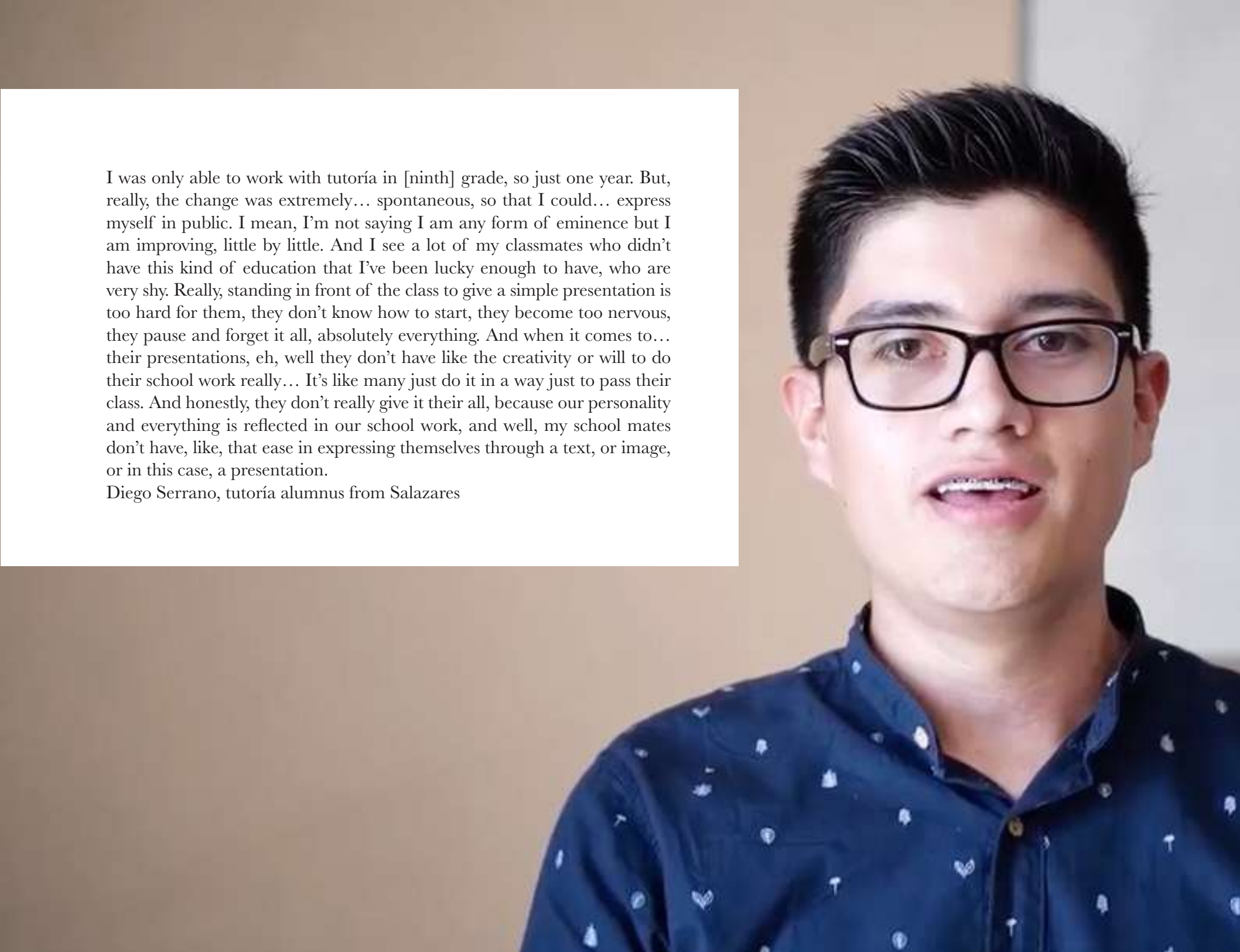
Findings of the study

We broke down the general category "cognitive abilities" into seven traits that occured in the interviewees' testimonials. These traits make evident students' development of the ability to integrate knowledge and interpret the world around them.

The trait that occurred most often was "students are able to speak in public with confidence." Besides these explicit references, however, we can take the students' confident tone in the interviews as evidence of this ability. It is worth pointing that these result was invariant to the students' socioeconomic background.

I was only able to work with tutoría in [ninth] grade, so just one year. But, really, the change was extremely… spontaneous, so that I could… express myself in public. I mean, I'm not saying I am any form of eminence but I am improving, little by little. And I see a lot of my classmates who didn't have this kind of education that I've been lucky enough to have, who are very shy. Really, standing in front of the class to give a simple presentation is too hard for them, they don't know how to start, they become too nervous, they pause and forget it all, absolutely everything. And when it comes to… their presentations, eh, well they don't have like the creativity or will to do their school work really… It's like many just do it in a way just to pass their class. And honestly, they don't really give it their all, because our personality and everything is reflected in our school work, and well, my school mates don't have, like, that ease in expressing themselves through a text, or image, or in this case, a presentation.

Diego Serrano, tutoría alumnus from Salazares



One aspect that students identify as a source of their confidence to speak publicly is the fact that they have mastered the theme they will talk about, as we read in Rosa's and Blanca's testimonials:

> At first [I felt] nervous because it was my first presentation. But [later] I felt confident of what I said because I had done my research and knew what I was talking about and, well, I liked the subject and I said the things that I was sure of and yes, I think I did a good job. Because you look up several concepts, [you research] a theme thoroughly, and you build from there, with concepts and so on, and you come to master it. And then you're asked to explain the problems [before your classmates] and you do it with confidence because you understand them. You have worked them, understood them, if they ask you something, you are certain of how it goes.
> Rosa Álvarez, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas

Well, it [tutoría] was very different, I did struggle to adapt to it, especially when we had to present, because I did become nervous that I might do it wrong, that I might forget things or that I… Well, I was nervous, right? But I did gain confidence little by little, at first just among my classmates, later with other people, but I did become more confident. I still became nervous now and then, but it was different. You became more confident, more sure of yourself, you knew what you were going to say --whether it was right or wrong, but you were sure that that's how you had understood it, you were aware that's what you had learned about that theme, that math problem. And that, if they [the school community] asked you questions, you would answer what you knew and they would listen and tell you their opinion right away --saying that it was right but one could see it this other way, or tell you this other way was better. And from that you learned and you had something to enrich your knowledge a little bit so you could then teach that to the next person you tutored.

Blanca Albino, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas

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Besides their mastery of the theme, interviewees recognized the constant practice of dialogue as a means through which they acquired confidence to speak in public.

> So, I think there are changes, in the attitudes, in the way you express yourself, because through public presentations you develop in several respects: you learn to express yourself orally, in writing, in a more fluent way, because, well, when you stand in front of a group and tell them, "this is what I know, this is what I don't know," it's like you gain a certain confidence and I feel that you can use that confidence in your daily life.
> Perla, Academic Coordinator, CONAFE Puebla

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In 31 of the 71 the interviews (44%), we find various evidences of deeper learning, such as a pursuit of understanding over rote learning and an attempt to transfer learning to everyday life.

> [H]ere [in high school] you listen, but in tutoría you not only listen but try to understand what he [the tutor] tells you. Furthermore, it's not just about listening but also understanding, because, from what he tells you, you will also think of something, take something that's useful for your life, not just listen, but [...] try and relate it to your life in order to improve.
> Alondra Robles, tutoría alumna from Los Reales

So tutoría gives you an edge, they teach you more deeply. As I was saying a moment ago, when you solve a formula or an equation [in conventional school], they tell you "these are its components," and there it is, they give you like twenty exercises for an equation. Why not teach it through problems, by telling you "here's a problem, solve it with an equation" --so you solve it with the equation and it's a lot easier to understand. Well, when I was in high school they gave me like fifty, one hundred exercises with different kinds of equations and I thought "that's too many equations..." And you just don't find the point in solving them, it becomes mechanical, like "yeah, this goes like this and this," without even thinking, right? But if they give you a problem and you analyze the problem and go "Oh, I'm going to do this operation because of this, I'm going to solve this equation because that will solve this problem."

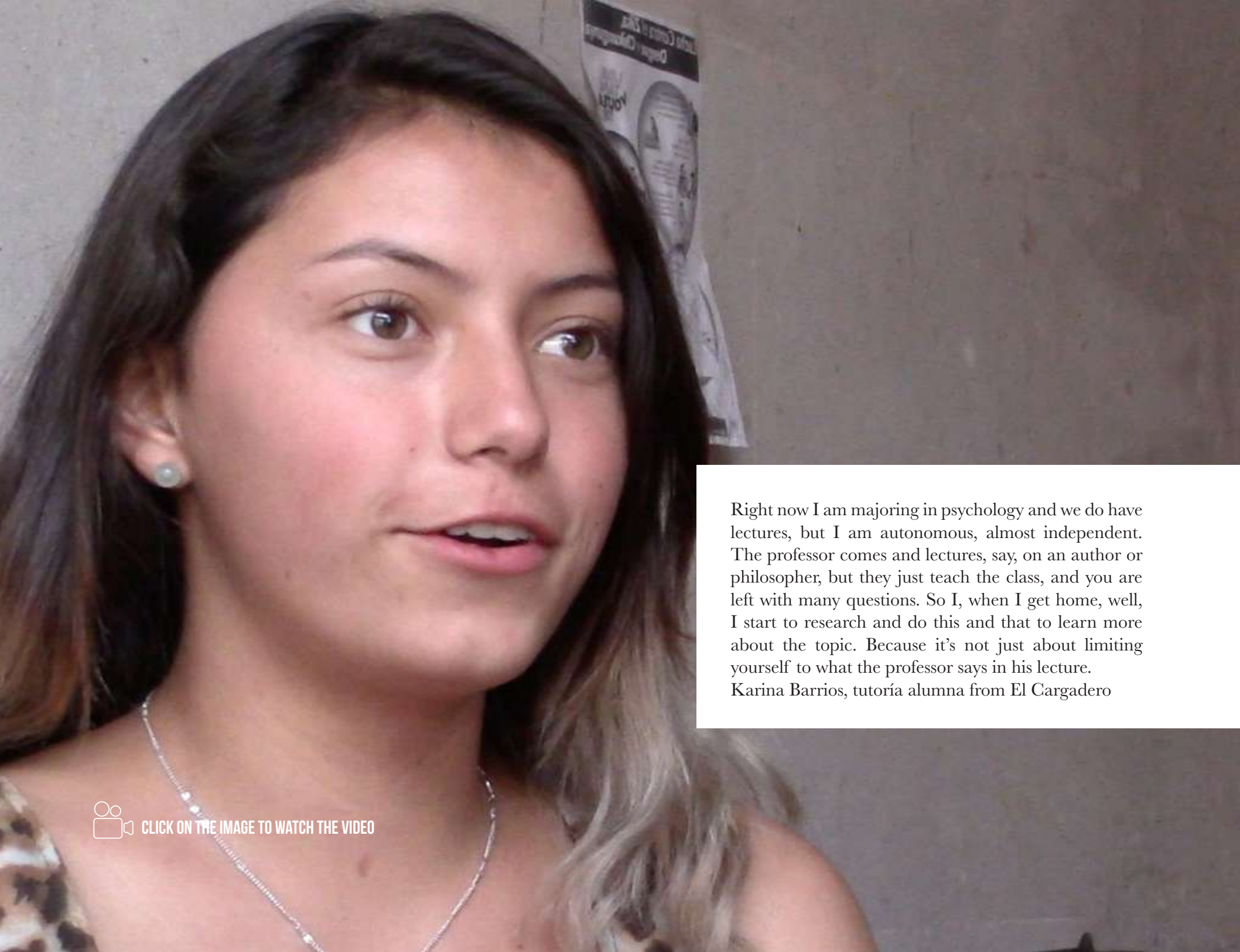
Jasmín Castro, tutoría alumna de Presa de Maravillas.

Deeper learning can be observed. As Rincón- Gallardo points out, one of the ways to spot it is to ask students what they are doing, why they are doing it, and what they are learning from it. This visibility allows teachers to value their own and their students' effort.

> The students, well, when you watch them doing public presentations of what the have learnt, you see they are capable of handling concepts, handling examples and, by doing so, they demonstrate the learning they have experienced as they present. So one can tell that students are not just memorizing but also thinking independently and analyzing all they have learnt, which prepares them for life.
> Albino Jarillo, Academic Coordinator, CONAFE Hidalgo

Another trait of cognitive development that occurs in the interviews is the students' interest to continue learning.

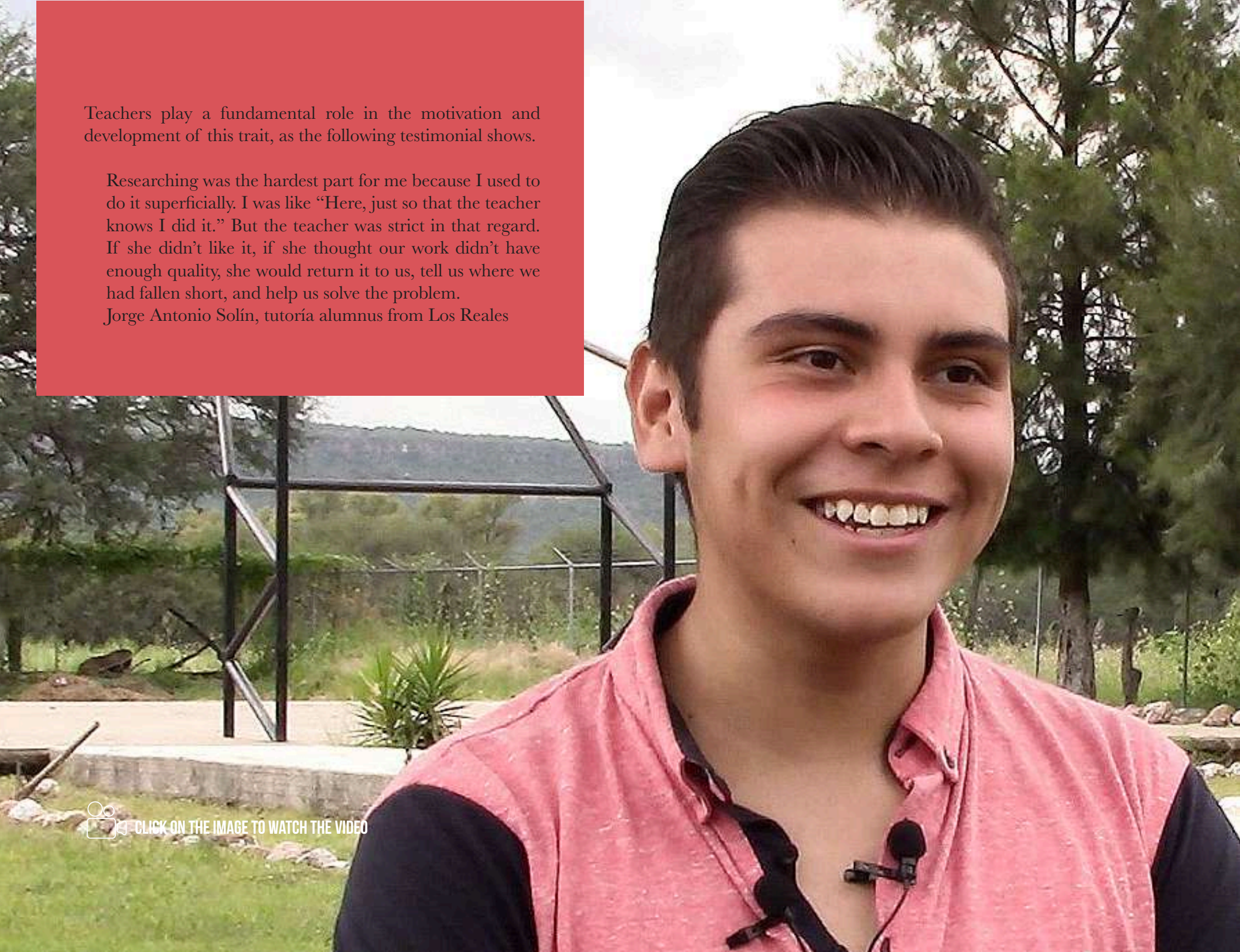
> We learn to become ambitious people, to go beyond what others tell us. To also be inquisitive and say, "well, a person told me this but I will research on my own to confirm it and make sure we are not being lied to." That's why it's good to read and research, because it's not just about saying, "well, they said it was like that, so it must be." No, one has to do one's own research and only by doing that, truly, will we be able to grow and become better in life.
> Esmeralda Ramos, tutoría alumna from Malpaso



Right now I am majoring in psychology and we do have lectures, but I am autonomous, almost independent. The professor comes and lectures, say, on an author or philosopher, but they just teach the class, and you are left with many questions. So I, when I get home, well, I start to research and do this and that to learn more about the topic. Because it's not just about limiting yourself to what the professor says in his lecture.
Karina Barrios, tutoría alumna from El Cargadero

Teachers play a fundamental role in the motivation and development of this trait, as the following testimonial shows.

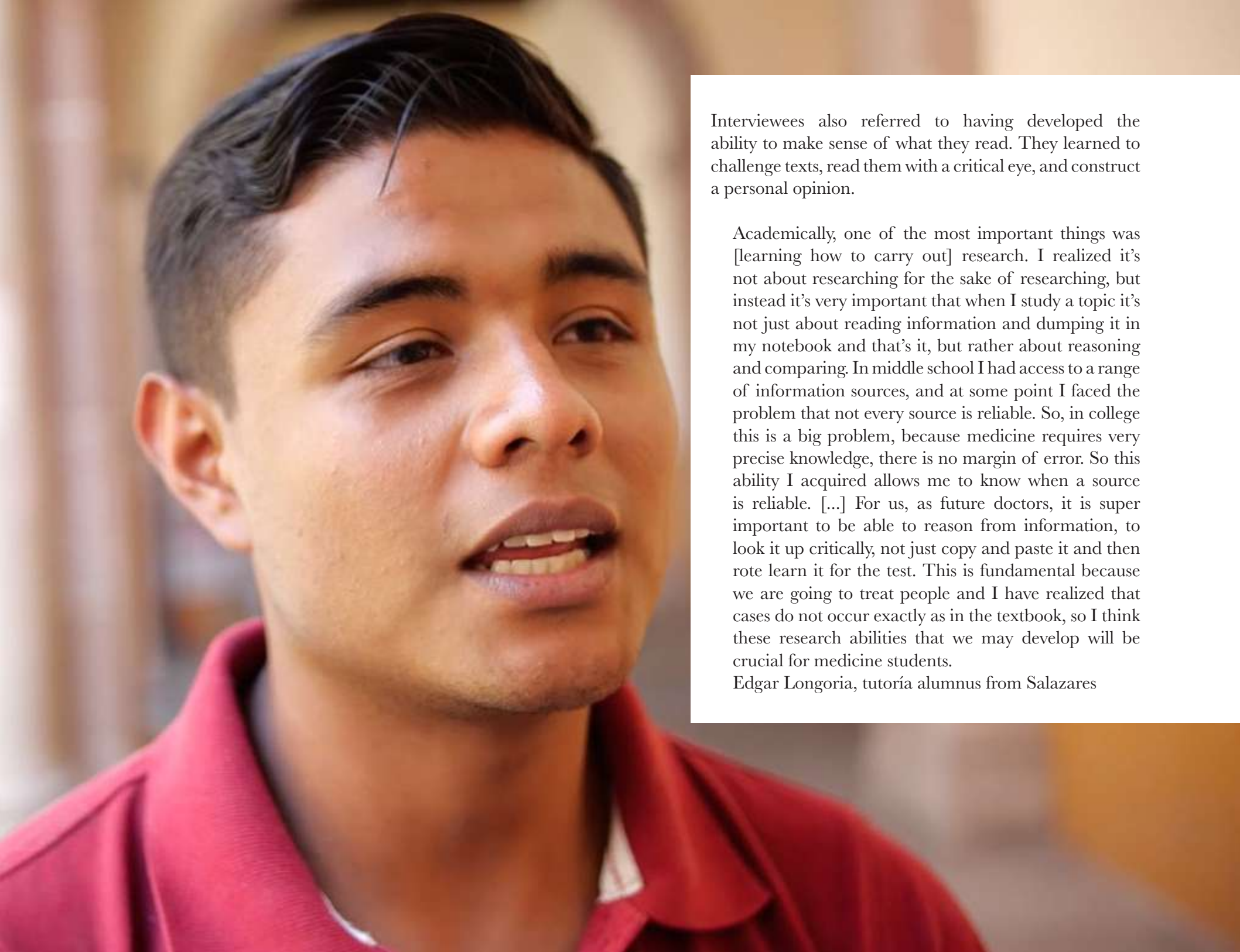
> Researching was the hardest part for me because I used to do it superficially. I was like "Here, just so that the teacher knows I did it." But the teacher was strict in that regard. If she didn't like it, if she thought our work didn't have enough quality, she would return it to us, tell us where we had fallen short, and help us solve the problem.
> Jorge Antonio Solín, tutoría alumnus from Los Reales



Students also refer to the importance of reflecting about their learning process, which points to the development of a metacognitive ability.

> So, I really liked doing mathematics, and I like doing the processes and presenting because that's how you really know you are learning, and it's also what will help you solve future challenges --that you write, write down the process and actually more than the process, the strategies that we implemented to get to a solution, because that is what will help you solve problems, right? So, if you later forget it, it's written down. That's why it's important to write things down, that's why it's important to presenting your learning: you account for a really good learning.
> Maximiliano Alfaro, tutoría alumnus from San Ramón

[When] doing a presentation on a theme, sometimes it's not about doing an exaggerated PowerPoint, it's about what one knows, what one has been learning. Sometimes they tell you to speak about a topic and it's not about looking things up like crazy to see what they are, it's about saying "I know what this is." Sometimes it's really useful to research and inquire, but here it's also important to say, "I as a person, have been educating myself and I have learned this and that."
Esmeralda Ramos, tutoría alumna from Malpaso



Interviewees also referred to having developed the ability to make sense of what they read. They learned to challenge texts, read them with a critical eye, and construct a personal opinion.

> Academically, one of the most important things was [learning how to carry out] research. I realized it's not about researching for the sake of researching, but instead it's very important that when I study a topic it's not just about reading information and dumping it in my notebook and that's it, but rather about reasoning and comparing. In middle school I had access to a range of information sources, and at some point I faced the problem that not every source is reliable. So, in college this is a big problem, because medicine requires very precise knowledge, there is no margin of error. So this ability I acquired allows me to know when a source is reliable. [...] For us, as future doctors, it is super important to be able to reason from information, to look it up critically, not just copy and paste it and then rote learn it for the test. This is fundamental because we are going to treat people and I have realized that cases do not occur exactly as in the textbook, so I think these research abilities that we may develop will be crucial for medicine students.
> Edgar Longoria, tutoría alumnus from Salazares

[Tutoría] teaches you to really analyze things, not just saying "Well, this author says this," and just recite it verbatim. You might agree or disagree with the authors --an author might claim this, but I disagree with what he says. There's this other author who claims this other thing, it speaks to me more and that's what I'm going to teach them [her peers], what convinces me. So, it's a lot better.
Jasmín Castro, tutoría alumna from Presa de Maravillas

[Tutoría] gave me the ability to do research on my own, to [...] use a book and not just going on the internet and downloading [information], because nowadays [as a college student] I have to go into libraries and I have the ability to research, to find the most important points, to develop what's most important and not just limit myself to what the teacher gave me in lecture --because one day the teacher will no longer be there to tell you what to learn.

Maricruz Ramírez, tutoría alumna from Santa Rosa

Final Considerations

What students, alumni, teachers and parents say in the recorded interviews is literally what any educator, parent, functionary or group of experts hopes will happen in schools, where young people spend six hours every day, five days a week, ten months a year –many for twelve years. Students are expected to grow socially among peers and adults, respect others and be treated with respect in return, master the written culture for their personal benefit and the benefit of society; they will be able to express themselves clearly and truthfully, experience their power to transform what needs to be changed; also, they will recognize all they have received and will remain thankful for it, ready to share what they now are and know. This way contemporary youth will turn into full-fledged citizens responsible for themselves and for the welfare of their communities.

The list of desirable traits could be augmented and refined, but those just mentioned are enough, because practically they constitute a universal consensus. This consensus squarely coincides with the transformation attested to by those interviewed here. Unfortunately, their experience is the exception, not the rule in the general panorama of the educational system. What is expected of the formal school years is not happening in the majority of students, which is a social scandal and the origin

of the recurrent educational reforms designed in the hope of fixing what has been preventing the desired outcome. The problem is not the general purpose of the endeavor, about which everybody agrees, but to find the particular manner in which it should be implemented in order to become reality for all students, independently of their social status, geographic place, family situation or personal needs. From this perspective, public education acquires a political dimension and tutorial relations a special relevance.

The excellent accomplishments made manifest in the interviews happened in settings usually considered least conducive to learn, because of the poverty of the families and the deficient equipment and organization of their educational centers, when compared to their urban counterparts. If the changes evident in the interviews happen in what could be called "green wood" –the most difficult contexts– what would it happen in the dry wood, where external conditions are supposed to be far more conducive? This should be enough to dispel negative views held against incomplete, poor marginal schools.

The natural spontaneity and satisfaction with which the interviewed talk about a profound transformation –after a few years of tutorial practice– shows that the most important educational achievements do not depend necessarily on the quality of the physical setting, the family situation or the type of school equipment. As far as possible, all those things are desirable and even legally enforceable, but they are not decisive for learning how to learn academically and how to learn to live peacefully together. What is essential is to ensure that knowledge occurs in the confluence of interest and capacity. What is absolutely necessary is the affection, the complete acceptance and truthfulness of those who decide to share knowledge. It does not take much more to achieve the educational goal in any part of the country, because by natural endowment all teachers and students are able to learn and to teach.

Conviviality and academic achievement should be paramount results of basic education, as expressed in the official goal of any educational institution. But commonly the two objectives run in parallel channels and demonstrate outcomes that are difficult to assess. Academic achievement practically means the number of selected questions from a standard program that students manage to answer correctly. Social accomplishment is judged by the students' fidelity to the discipline and practices of the school and, indirectly, by the fact that the program includes hourly assignments on socio-emotional aspects, tutoring and the like.

Instead, students and alumni trained in tutorial relations show that emotional gains are inseparable from their academic achievement; both real, visible and demonstrable. The personal assuredness so manifest in the interviews comes from the effort with which they engaged in solving the intellectual challenge presented and accompanied by an affectionate and earnest tutor. In a tutorial dialogue the rigor necessary to pursue

knowledge and the respect and trust demanded by the apprentice are inseparable. Emotions cannot be induced in programmed hourly assignments, as they are products of a sustained effort at trying to grapple with a difficult challenge, willingly accepted in the first place. The apprentice's satisfaction with the achievement goes far to explain the gratitude towards the tutor and the willingness to share with joy what was learned in depth and with satisfaction.

The video recordings make clear the remarkable coincidences in discourse and practice among the different actors, be they teachers, pedagogical directors of CONAFE, students, alumni or the students' parents. Some have been practicing tutoría for more than ten years, some just during middle school, and of these, some did it for just one or two years, even for a few months. In CONAFE, tutoring, by the name "Learning Based on Collaboration and Dialogue", became general institutional practice only in the two last school years. One must conclude that the learning model, and the theory behind it, owe their efficacy to the fact that they are easily understood by anybody, young and adult, teacher and student. The tutorial dialogue, "the learning nucleus", is in effect the centerpiece of any educational endeavor; a necessary criterion of excellence, yet accessible to anybody. It is indeed a rather minimal innovation, capable of realizing some of the most desirable outcomes in public basic education anywhere.

The video recorded interviews show that educational reform owes more to ethical than technical factors, being more dependent on trust and respect than on professional excellence and pedagogical resources. What was new, but within the range of the regular budget, was to offer workshops to interested teachers and to visit them in their own schools to help them form learning communities. In sum, training time, travel money to work with teachers in their schools, regional meetings of teachers and students, reviews and dissemination of results.

The most effective promotion of tutoria has been the contagion of teacher to teacher, student to student and even parent to parent. The visibility and efficacy of the practice has also touched regional and even national administrators who, as an exception, sanction and even promote it in extreme cases. Educational practitioners and researchers, curious about the unsuspected changes in poor schools, became enthusiastic adherents of the practice after having been tutored by rural middle schoolers. Some took the practice back to their countries, and have been talking and writing about it in important journals. Undoubtedly, these developments and the partial acceptance, so far, by the educational authorities have been influential to spread the practice, but the main thrust for its diffusion is clearly the professional satisfaction of so many teachers; a veritable social movement, as Richard Elmore defined it the first time he became immersed in a rural learning community in Zacatecas in the year 2010. There, Elmore experienced in himself the kind but firm tutoring of Maricruz, a thirteen-year old girl.

An unavoidable conclusion from these testimonials is to question the conventional view that holds multi-grade schools in contempt, judged inferior to their uni-grade counterparts. What is questionable is the pedagogical prejudice, not the right that incomplete schools have to receive the same, and even added, benefits of full-fledged schools. We must keep in mind that the extraordinary achievements just presented took place in multi-grade schools.

It is difficult to imagine that schools with more experienced and stable teachers, better equipment and with students from middle class families would openly boast that their teachers, students and their parents consider sharing relevant learning the highest achievement of their school years. Low academic achievement in the last year of High School, violent school behavior and a rising number of dropouts at the end of so many years of schooling reveal just the opposite: that the formal settings nowadays are not conducive to learning and conviviality.

Finally, a less obvious but perhaps more important lesson is the equity that tutoring creates in educational settings. Usually educational inequity is judged by the number of students that remain excluded from the service, by the very low academic achievement of those who access it, by the scarcity of school resources and finally by the number of students that leave prematurely. The testimonials disclose another kind of inequity, made imperceptible by simple habit, when the capacity of each one to learn, and especially teach, is not acknowledged, much less allowed, in regular classrooms. Tutoring is impervious to external impositions that are alien to the particular learning process. In this process, only the tutor and the tutee decide and control. Contrary to what ordinarily happens in traditional schools, learning communities thrive on trusting the professional capacity of teachers to choose subject matter, as well as the right of students to decide how and on what to engage their learning interests. Trust is the key-stone in any tutorial relationship. In the case of CONAFE, the power of tutoring to impose equity in the service is particularly striking. The institution follows a line of authority that gives administrative cohesion to a rather complex operation, but academic activity follows the norms of a learning community in which all stand on the same footing, as all are both tutors and tutees, depending of what one knows and what the other wants to learn. In a learning community authority becomes service, the tutor turns apprentice and the apprentice, tutor, be he/she director, trainer, instructor, student or a parent.

The leveling power of tutoria rests on the assumption that accepting the incommensurably equal capacity of all to learn and to teach makes effective the belief in the dignity of everybody to produce culture and live in harmony. The occasion is indeed the time that youth spend in schools, but the manifest outcome transcends intellectual and similar gains, because, as we have seen in the interviews, alumni of tutoría are already thinking and acting on the assumption of a more just and convivial society.

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