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You Are Irreplaceable

Ana Juan

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Ana Juan

LSEE 333

Final Narrative

5/10/2021

You Are Irreplaceable

I am a first year teacher working in Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Our school is located in South Los Angeles in a diverse community serving students and families from Pre K through 5th grade. The majority of our student population is latinos (93%) and African Americans (7%). My name is Ms. Juan, I am a latina and from South Central, Los Angeles CA. I wanted to graduate from Humboldt State University and get my teaching credentials to come back and give back to my own community. As a first year teacher I felt really nervous but I remembered why I chose this career. I want to make a difference, all children no matter their background deserve an equal learning opportunity. I am a second grade teacher, my classroom is filled with 25 students. 6 being white students, 10 African American students, 1 Chinese student and 8 latino students, 2 are Guatemalans (Teresa & Clarissa) who just immigrated to the U.S and 1 (Miguel) who also immigrated from Mexico to the U.S.

Prior to the school year starting I wanted to reach out to my students and their families, so I wrote a welcoming letter to each of my students and families. In the letter I wrote *"Hello students & families! I am so excited to meet each and everyone of you in person really soon. Before classes begin I wanted to know what is the best way to communicate with you (the parents/guardians) and in which language? I want you, as the parent/guardian, to be a part of our classroom and be welcomed! I would love to communicate and get to know each other so that we can all work and support each other to provide your child with the best education possible. Below you will find my*

contact information. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns.

Thank you - Ms. Juan.” Before mailing these letters out I included spanish and chinese translations as well because I knew I had latino students and a chinese student in my class and I wanted to make sure it was available in these languages just in case it was needed.

In the article from *Involving Latino Families in Schools* by Concha Delgado Gaitan she mentions in chapter 3 a strategy for welcoming latino parents into the school “Being willing to reach out to Latino parents through their language and culture.” (pg 25) which is why I, as the teacher, wanted to make sure the parents/guardians of all my students felt welcomed and to be encouraged to be a part of our classroom. In chapter 8 from *Educating Emergent Bilinguals* by Ofelia Garcia and Jo Anne Kleifgen they focus on building engagement with families and communities in schools. Family and community involvement will empower students' learning.

I had three parent’s reach out to me to let me know that they and their families have just immigrated to the U.S. They had concerns about their child adjusting to their new environment and to the school system. The parents of Teresa, Clarissa and Miguel all shared the same concern, their child not being able to communicate or succeed in the classroom due to their language barrier. When getting to know the parents during our phone call they let me know that Spanish is the preferred language to communicate in and that their child’s home language is Spanish. Being able to communicate with the parent’s allowed me to make accommodations and modifications to my teaching so that I can meet the needs of all my students, including my emergent bilinguals.

In chapter 5 from *Educating Emergent Bilinguals* by Ofelia Garcia and Jo Anne Kleifgen they talked about inequitable language/literacy practices. There have been many programs and policies that have been made to “support” emergent bilingual students. These programs affect our emergent bilingual students by taking them out of classes for long periods of time making them fall behind in the course and content. These programs also enforce the separation of languages, only allowing the English language to be seen as acceptable and not the students' home languages. In this chapter Garcia & Kleifgen talk about translanguaging “Translanguaging pedagogy leverages all the language practices that bilingual students bring to school.” (pg 80). From the first day of school I welcomed all my students and wanted them to know that they are valued for who they are. From the beginning of the school year I created an environment where all students, languages, families and communities were welcomed, valued and used as an important resource for our students' learning.

On the first day of school I did a small group activity where students are able to introduce themselves to each other and find one thing in common with one another. Ms. Juan: *“Hello and welcome to our second grade class! ¡Hola y bienvenidos a nuestra clase de segundo grado! For our first activity I want you to form groups of 3 and to share your name with each other and 1 thing. Then see if you have anything in common with each other. Quiero que formen grupos de tres para compartir sus nombres y una cosa de ustedes. Después hablen para ver si tiene una cosa en común.”*

I facilitated around the classroom and popped into each group to hear small parts of their conversations and to make sure each student was engaged. When approaching the group Teresa was in I heard her share in Spanish and then one of her other

classmates Victor, who is bilingual in Spanish and English language, translated for their peer Jacob who only communicates in English.

Teresa: *“Hola yo soy Teresa y a mi me gusta hacer arte.”*

Victor: *“She said Hi my name is Teresa and I like to do art.”*

Jacob: *“Hola Teresa, I also like to do art such as painting.”*

Victor: *“Él dijo que también le gusta hacer arte como pintar. A mi tambien me gusta pintar.”* I then came next to the group and said *“Have you all found something in common? Ya encontraron una cosa en común?”* Teresa, Jacob and Victor replied with smiles on their faces saying *“Art/Arte!”* I then told them to find another thing in common while I check in with other groups.

In chapter 6 from the book *Building academic language: essential practices for content classrooms, grades 5-12* by Jeff Zwiers he talks about the importance of small group instruction. When students are put into small groups with their peers it removes the stress and anxiety that students, specifically our emergent bilingual students may feel when asked to speak in a whole classroom setting. Small group instruction and small group work can be a great strategy to use to build our emergent bilingual students academic language as well. Being able to communicate with the parents of my emergent bilingual students allowed me to include strategies into my teaching that will make them feel comfortable and build their repertoire.

After checking in with all groups I directed us all to come back together as a whole class. Ms.Juan: *“Can I get some volunteers to share what they found in common with their peers? Puedo tener unos voluntarios para compartir que encontraron en común con sus compañeros de clase?”*

Miguel: *“En mi grupo los gusta jugar videojuegos”*

Ms.Juan: “Cuanto más les gusta jugar videojuegos, who else loves to play video games? Raise your hands, levanten sus manos.” Six other students raised their hands and looked at each other smiling. I then said *“Can I have another volunteer? ¿Puedo tener otro voluntario?”*

Samantha: *“Something we found in common in our group was that christmas is our favorite holiday.”*

Ms.Juan: “Raise your hands if your favorite holiday is christmas, levanten tus manos si navidad es tu día festivo favorito?” All my students' hands went up, I then used this opportunity to dive a little deeper in our conversation. *“Does anyone want to share what they like to eat on christmas day? ¿Alguien quiere compartir que les gusta comer en navidad?”* Jacob mentioned that him and his family love to eat ham. Clarissa shared that in her family it's tradition to eat tamales. Alex mentioned that his family tradition is to eat chinese dumplings, his favorite. As more students shared, all my students realized that some of them shared traditions and some didn't but that either way it was still their favorite holiday. From this activity I shared with my students the importance of welcoming, valuing and respecting each other. We all come from diverse backgrounds with different traditions, experiences and languages. Just because we may all be different in many ways, we can also be similar in many ways. We are each unique in our own way, which makes each single one of us irreplaceable.

In conclusion we as teachers can create meaningful and purposeful conversations with our students if we welcome and allow them to express themselves in their home languages as well. In the article *Uninvited Guests* by Bogum Yoon she

observes several teachers for her research. One of the teachers Mrs. Young's mentions "I did not sign on to be a teacher only to work with the brightest and the best. I signed on to work with all of them." (pg 505) If we as teachers want to address and support all our students needs, then we must also advocate and include purposeful strategies and pedagogies that also meet the needs of our emergent bilingual students. Creating an inclusive classroom to me means creating an equal learning opportunity for all students no matter their background, disability or cultures. All students should be seen, heard and valued for who they are.

Resources:

Gaitan, C. D. (2004). *Involving Latino families in schools: raising student achievement through home-school partnerships*. Corwin Press.

García Ofelia, Kleifgen, J. A., & Cummins, J. (2018). *Educating emergent bilinguals: policies, programs, and practices for English learners*. Teachers College Press.

Zwiers, J. (2008). *Building academic language: essential practices for content classrooms, grades 5-12*. Jossey-Bass.

Yoon, B. (2008). Uninvited Guests: The Influence of Teachers' Roles and Pedagogies on the Positioning of English Language Learners in the Regular Classroom. *American Educational Research Journal*, 45(2), 495–522.

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