

Learning to Love

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Growing up

The most important memories I have of speaking outside of school are with my family. My home and first language is Spanish, but I don't remember a time where I didn't speak English to my family or at least my sisters because they also almost always spoke in English (not the *no sabo* type though). It was really common for me to use Spanglish growing up and I do think that my siblings rubbed off on me and on other family members. My reading skills were expanded predominantly in Spanish by my parents because they constantly read to my sister and me when we were younger. I remember we had a Spanish book that had many fairytale stories like *Caperucita roja*, *Cenicienta*, and *Ricitos de oro y los tres osos*.

Reading in English is the first memory I have of struggling in school. There was a teacher assistant in my kindergarten and first grade class named Sra. Villanueva. She would take us out to the hall to read short stories, and I remember I struggled a lot in the pronunciation of the words because there are words that have different sounds than the ones in Spanish. The teachers and teacher assistants always got really frustrated because we weren't learning as fast as they thought we should. The class was Dual Language and consisted only of Latinos. I'm not completely sure why it was like that

because I'm pretty sure all of us in the class would have really benefited from learning to read, write and speak English with classmates who already had it as a first language. In the classroom, we were constantly told that more English was better and that Spanish wouldn't take us anywhere in life. I know what you're thinking: Wasn't it a Dual Language class? Yes, it was and it was at this moment where I put a foreign language above my family's language—above my language.

Cheater

Some discoveries I made about myself as a learner are that I constantly think in both languages which makes it really hard for me to think as fast as others. I have especially seen this when I am writing in my Spanish class. I have learned how to use it to my advantage. When I don't really know a word, I can either change it to Spanish or I can look at the definitions in both languages. I had introduced myself to using both languages to write when I was in high school in my creative writing class. I found it easier to come up with ideas that way because I was able to continue in another language and hardly got stuck that way. Where I really worked on this ability was in my college Spanish writing classes. I have a really hard time putting my thoughts on paper if I'm writing in one language and thinking in another. I have learned that my best resources when writing is using Google Translate, a writing corrector and a thesaurus. My best writing is done when I'm challenging the words that I think fit to the ones Google Translate thinks fit because I am introduced to vocabulary I wouldn't use myself. Some people could say I

am cheating by using Google Translate (they have, shout out to my haters) but I think it is just taking advantage of what goes on in my brain.

I am stupid, I am stupid

This last fall, I decided to take a reading analysis class in Spanish, and that class had some of the hardest literature I've ever had to read. I didn't have much practice with reading in Spanish; therefore, I took hours just to read one single story, and I would have to read them, like, five times because there were so many words I didn't understand because they were too complex for me. The stories were from writers like Jorge Luis Borges and were extremely difficult and time consuming just to read. I literally had to do some type of background check on every single writer to understand their perspectives. I was constantly looking up the multiple meanings of words to understand their metaphors, and after all of that work I still had to write a long description and analysis of what I had read. I can honestly say that was one of the hardest classes I've ever taken (LOTS OF MENTAL BREAKDOWNS). Even though I was in constant panic (I don't know how else to describe my anxiety attacks), I do think that I learned how to read with attention rapidly, write all of my thoughts even when I find it so hard to put it into words, and most importantly question everything. When you question everything, you open yourself to new ways of thinking and perspectives; this is something key that I learned from this class.

Learning to use both languages to express myself freely made everything so much easier. Translanguaging is a tool that has helped me step away from writer's block

because I could continue in another language. Even now as I am primarily writing in English, *no dejo de pensar en español*.

Growing a love for my home language

Mi querido español,

Te he extrañado.

In “On Writing *The House on Mango Street*,” Sandra Cisneros wrote a fragment that reads like an ode to the Spanish language and her heritage. She says,

It is not enough simply to sense it; it has to be named, and then written about from there. Once I could name it, I ceased being ashamed and silent. I could speak up and celebrate my otherness as a woman, as a working class person, as an American of Mexican descent.

This quote mentions the celebration of otherness, something that I am now able to do. I grew my love for myself and for my language with the help of two professors, profesora Patricia Gimenez and profesora Claudia Costagliola. From profesora Gimenez, I learned to love, respect, and appreciate the many variations of the Spanish language. When we were doing a class activity, where we were listing the different ways we can use and say a word, correctly of course, and the word that she gave us was *Luz*. There were people saying “dar Luz,” “Lucero,” “Luces,” etc. I had said one that I found pretty common, “aluzar.” Some students said *aluzar* was not a word, but the professor just looked curious because, like them, she was unfamiliar with the term. She briefly stopped the class and looked up the meaning of the word. When she came back to continue, she thanked me

because it helped her transition to the main lesson of the day which was about variations. From profesora Costagliola, I learned to celebrate the parts of myself that I had neglected and despised for so long. She introduced me to my voice through the readings, writings, and presentations of Hispanic, working class women like Dolores Huerta.

Gracias a mis padres, for not letting me forget their roots and the beautiful country where they come from.

Lamento mucho haberte descuidado durante tanto tiempo.

Un placer saber de ti,

Jennifer Perez Ramos

Works Cited

Cisneros, Sandra, "On Writing The House on Mango Street." 1994. PDF.

Author Bio

English Version

Hello, my name is Jennifer Perez Ramos. I am a second year student at Western Oregon University. My career goals are to achieve two bachelor's degrees: one in Early Childhood Education with an ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) Endorsement and another in Spanish with a Certificate as an Interpreter. My biggest goal is to one day make a bigger difference

Spanish Version

Hola, mi nombre es Jennifer Pérez Ramos. Soy estudiante de segundo año en la Universidad de Western Oregon. Mis metas profesionales son lograr dos licenciaturas: una en Educación Infantil Temprana y otra en Español. También obtener mi agregado de ESOL (Inglés para Hablantes de Otros Idiomas) y un Certificado como Intérprete.