

Sharing Language and Recognizing Biases - May 7th, 2021

Six years ago, when I started working at Hilltop, helping Children's House during lunch and nap, I sang softly in Spanish all the time. There was not much interest from my young audience in the beginning, but the more I sang, the more I got their attention. One of my sons was part of the group with whom I spoke in Spanish constantly while in the classroom. I found that this helped increase the other students' interest. After a few weeks, my songs began to be accompanied by a small group of kids who would repeat the last syllables of some of the lines while enjoying their lunches. That was beautiful to witness and inspired me to update my repertoire.

One day, one of those curious kids asked me without any hesitation, "what is that sound that you are making?" In the beginning, I thought the students meant the name of the song, so I proceeded to explain it. After I finished my explanation, I realized that that was not the answer that this student was looking for, that the questions were about something much more complex; it was not about the song itself but the actual sound of something that was not English. It was about the sound of something different. A behavior that perhaps most of them had never been exposed to, something that didn't make any sense but somehow communicated something.

When we talk about bias, we talk about the things that aren't consciously registered in our everyday codes, things that might be "weird" for us, or that perhaps don't make any sense, or appear "wrong" based on the ways, context, environment in which we have been raised. When we talk about learning about our biases, we are talking about the possibilities of bringing awareness to the multiple differences that coexist in our environments, towns, neighborhoods, schools, classrooms, houses, markets, etc. When we talk about our bias, we are talking about the possibilities of being much more respectful and inclusive. Seeing our biases is not a punitive action; rather, it is a cleanse from systemic hegemonic norms ingrained as part of an oppressive polarized culture. When we reflect on our biases, we create the possibility of constructing a different world, one in which respect is not just a concept that sees people as individuals, as equals, but seeks to know people as members of a broader community, of many cultures and ethnicities.

As an immigrant who came to this country with no English in his pocket, who's understanding of this society was based on TV stereotypes, and polarized political

perspectives, I understood why my young friend didn't recognize my native language. The sounds of a different language that at the beginning pushed me aside and made me want to run away today make sense, but I have to say that it still intimidates me. Language is the window through which we communicate with each other. Still, I think that understanding the cultures of other societies is the door that will open up our possibilities for communicating more intentionally and respectfully. But it is up to us, as educators and parents, to show children that those windows and doors can in fact be opened, so they can accept and enjoy the differences in our communities.

-Yupaichani / Gracias / Thank you

Marco Yunga Tacuri



Marco shares a book in Spanish with Children's House students during his first years at Hilltop.