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**The Vulnerable Teacher: Working Towards Critical Consciousness in a
Second Grade Bilingual Classroom**

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Abstract

Telling your students that you are divorced and your two sons no longer live with their father is not the typical kind of conversation you would expect in a classroom, but in my second-grade Spanish–English bilingual classroom, it was the norm. I had decided to implement literature discussion around Latinx children’s literature. I found that in order for my students and I to develop a relationship built on trust and respect, I had to be vulnerable and willing to share some personal narratives. In the following article, I share how I, the teacher, was vulnerable with my students during our literature discussions around Latinx children’s literature in order to have conversations about critical topics, such as, immigration, bilingualism, and family. My ultimate goal was for my students to develop critical consciousness.

Keywords: bilingual education, critical consciousness, elementary, literature discussions, qualitative research

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Introduction

My second-grade Spanish–English bilingual students—Victor, Camila, Arcadia, Juliana, and Lucia—sat around the kidney-shaped table discussing the book we had read, *Waiting for Papá/Esperando a Papá* by René Colato Laínez. This story is about a boy named Beto, and how he and his mother had to leave El Salvador because of a war. Beto’s father stayed behind, resulting in them not seeing each other for over three years. For Father’s Day, Beto writes a letter to his father telling his father why he is so special to Beto. The letter gets into the hands of a radio personality and Beto is invited to read it on air. At the end of the story, Beto is finally reunited with his father.

My students and I were discussing why Beto, his mother, and his father are crying when they said goodbye to each other. During our conversation about Beto’s story and his feelings of sadness due to being separated from his father, the group reflected on individuals we missed and how that made us sad. I shared how my own children did not live with their father:

Por ejemplo, en mi situación, Pepito (mi hijo) no vive con su papá. Pepito y Poncho (mis hijos) viven conmigo. Su papá vive en otra ciudad. Entonces, ellos en los fines de semana van a ver a su papá. Entonces, no viven con él. Entonces, durante la semana, Pepito de vez en cuando sí se pone triste, y sí extraña a su papá.¹

I am a very private person who mostly keeps my work life and personal life separate from each other. During the academic year prior to this discussion with my students, I had divorced my sons’ father and had not told anyone outside my family, not even my closest colleagues at the school, until much after. But here I was sharing this personal information with my students. This is a testament to the relationship that my students and I had built with each other. This was not a conversation I had planned to have with my students, but it gave me the opportunity to reflect upon the images of family that had bombarded me most of my life—a mom, a dad, two kids (one boy, one girl). I wanted to push back against this ideal family image and share with my students, as they had done with me, that families came in many different forms and that no format was better than the other.

¹ Translation: “For example, in my situation, Pepito (my son) doesn’t live with his dad. Pepito and Poncho (my sons) live with me. Their dad lives in another city. So, during the week, Pepito sometimes gets sad because he misses his dad.”

Critical Consciousness

In my classroom, I had implemented literature discussions around Latinx children's literature. I brought in Latinx children's literature to combat the required district reading curriculum that did not reflect my students' lived experiences. I used the Latinx children's literature as well as the discussions around them to co-construct a curriculum with my students in order to center their linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism. My ultimate goal was to develop critical consciousness along with my students.

Freire's (1970) critical consciousness is where the lines of the teacher-student relationship are blurred, and the teacher learns from the student. I wanted to look at the teacher-student relationship at the most human level, one in which trust developed over time, where teacher and student truly cared for each other, and both individuals were considered knowledge holders who have a deeply interconnected relationship. The social ties built between my students and I made all of us feel valued, one in which caring, empathy, and trust connected us, and were reciprocal and collaborative in that everyone in the group was viewed as being an integral part of the learning process.

Freire (1970) talked about dialogue as the process in which the world is transformed and humanized. This is what I wanted for my literature discussions, for there to be dialogue between the teacher and students as a way of developing critical consciousness. Freire (1970) goes on to say that true education is not carried on by teachers *for* students or by teachers *about* students but rather by teachers *with* students. Many educational plans have failed because of the lack of realization that it is not a teacher's role to speak and impose their own view of the world, but rather to dialogue with the student about their various views (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Freire, 1970; Osorio, 2012). As the teacher, I worked to create an environment that was conducive to the learning of all its members.

If I wanted the teacher-student relationship to change it had to start with me. I had to demonstrate vulnerability if I expected my students to do the same. As Bhattacharya (2016) stated in her article, *The Vulnerable Academic: Personal Narratives and Strategic De/Colonizing of Academic Structures*, there is strength in vulnerability. We can offer each other that strength through being vulnerable together, making connections and finding ourselves in each other's stories. This is what I wanted to do with my students.

Literature Review

There have been some studies concentrating on bilingual students' participation in literature discussions (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Lopez-Robertson, 2004; Martínez-Roldán, 2005; Martinez-Roldán & López-Robertson, 1999/2000). DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) found in a fourth-grade bilingual English language arts class that students used critical incidents in stories to examine their own personal beliefs and societal realities. The goal of the teacher, Mrs. Lynn, in their study, was "to immerse all of her students in a process through which they would become full participants in the new literacy practice of literature circles" (p. 158). DeNicolo and Franquiz (2006) found that the students and teacher had "established a permanent relationship of advocacy for and with them" (p. 168). This was done through the use of quality literature that facilitated the literature circle discussions. The teacher and students had to (re)position themselves and blur the line between their relationship in order to develop critical consciousness (Freire, 1970).

Lopez-Robertson (2004) presents four students from a second-grade bilingual classroom and their sharing of experiences when discussing the book, *Friends from the Other Side/ Amigos del otro lado* by Gloria Anzaldúa. The students shared their life experiences which included, having their parents deported, helping others avoid immigration officials, searching for a peaceful resolution to undocumented border crossing and questioning why immigration officials only searched low economic status neighborhoods. The study illustrated that through dialogue, specifically through sharing, questioning and interpreting, students were able to sort their personal understanding of issues brought up by the book and therefore build their critical consciousness.

There have also been some studies that represent what it is like to be the teacher in a classroom promoting critical consciousness in students (San Pedro, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2010b). Souto-Manning (2010) in her book, *Multicultural Teaching in the Early Childhood Classroom* presents a Massachusetts preschool teacher, Dana Frantz Bentley, that implements culture circles with multicultural literature in her classroom. Culture circles are similar to literature discussions in that they happen around children's literature. One great different is that culture circles start from participants' individual and collective experiences, from what matters to the students. The teacher investigates the realities and practices of his or her students and then codifies these realities into the multicultural children's books chosen which serve as the focus for students to engage in questioning and problematizing (Souto-Manning, 2010a). This is not always the case

with books chosen by a classroom teacher for literature discussions. Dana “created a space where she harvested opportunities, generated from children’s actions and interactions, out of the children’s questions, conflicts and discomforts” (Souto-Manning, 2010b, 71). While this presents some of the reasoning behind the decisions made by the classroom teacher, it does not explicitly share an important aspect of this work towards building critical consciousness, which is a teacher’s own vulnerability.

San Pedro (2017) shows us an important example of how a classroom can be transformed when a teacher is willing to be vulnerable. He shares how Ms. Bee creates a space in her Native American Literature high school class where students’ lives can be shared. Through their storying, trusting and caring relationships are built. In one such assignment, Ms. Bee asks students to choose from four outlines of symbols (shield, drum, tipi, pottery) for which one best represents them. She asks them to create art of who they are, where they come from and who their families and communities are inside their outline. They are to later form a story from something in their art piece. Ms. Bee models vulnerability by reading aloud her poem titled “My Publishing.” Through this poem she shares personal details, which include being a survivor of abuse and attempted suicide. This might not be something many teachers would be willing to share but as Ms. Bee stated, “I’m not going to ask you (*her students*) to do anything that I’m not willing to do” (San Pedro, 2017, p. 107).

While most of these studies demonstrate how literature discussions can be used in a classroom setting, specifically in a bilingual setting, what they do not display a key component to building critical consciousness—teacher’s own vulnerability. In this article, I share how I as the teacher changed my positionality in these literature discussions. Specifically, I focus on examples of how I was vulnerable during the discussions with my students and my thinking around doing so. I had to be willing to demonstrate vulnerability if I wanted my students to do the same. I saw vulnerability as a key component in order to develop critical consciousness. In this article, I focus only on the data on the participation of the teacher, although there were interesting findings on the students as well (Osorio, 2015; Osorio, 2016a; Osorio, 2016b; Osorio, 2018b).

Methods

Context

The data shared here is based on a larger qualitative action research study in my own

second-grade Spanish–English bilingual classroom. The elementary school was located in a mid-size city in the United States. The school, Lincoln Elementary School,² housed the bilingual program, with one bilingual classroom per grade level. The program followed a developmental model of academic enrichment. This model had the primary goal of promoting bilingual and biliteracy development, using both the student’s native language and English for academic instruction.

Native language learning was an important aspect of the literacy instruction in my classroom. In second grade, the literacy instruction was in Spanish. The philosophy behind this was to have students develop a strong base in their native language so that it could be used to facilitate literacy development in English (August & Hakuta, 1997; August & Shanahan, 2006; Francis, Lesaux, & August, 2006; Rolstad, Mahoney, & Glass, 2005; Slavin & Cheung, 2003).

Teacher’s Background

I had been a bilingual classroom teacher in the same elementary school for eight years. I had taught mostly first and second grade. My interest in becoming a teacher developed from my personal experience. As a child, I attended a bilingual preschool in the city of Chicago. When I entered a monolingual English kindergarten, my teachers told my parents to stop speaking Spanish to me because, in their view, it would cause me confusion. Luckily for me, my parents ignored their suggestion and continued using our native language, Spanish, at home, allowing me a strong connection to my cultural background. I believe my parents were told to stop speaking Spanish because of the thick accent they had in English. The school administrators and teachers had made assumptions about me using a deficit view (Valencia, 2010) before even meeting me. I wanted to become a teacher so that Spanish bilingual students could see someone similar to themselves in the classroom and someone who would not place a deficit-based identity upon them. I wanted to create a classroom space that would welcome and sustain all my students.

Literature Discussions

I decided it was important for my students to see themselves reflected in the literature of the classroom, so I brought in Latinx children’s literature to encourage literature discussions

² All proper names are pseudonyms.

in my classroom. This was after several years of using the school district's required basal reader program that did not reflect my students' lives. I wanted to use Latinx children's literature written by Latinx authors whenever possible because my students had been sent the message that they were not valued and would not be successful for far too long. I implemented criteria similar to Martinez-Roldán and López-Robertson (1999/2000) when it came to choosing which texts to bring into the classroom: (a) stories that were interesting and would appeal to my students, (b) stories that allowed students to see aspects of their lives reflected positively, and (c) books to which my students could connect. Now when I say connect, there was no true way to find the perfect book for each of my students given the complexities of each individual. What I did do was choose books I felt might connect with one aspect of their lives and offer students a choice. The students were offered four to five books titles to choose from organized around a particular theme (i.e., family, cultural stories, language, and speaking English). This meant that students chose the books that spoke best to them. I never forced a book on a student and said, "this one is for you." The majority of the books that I selected were bilingual, written in both English and Spanish.

For literature discussions, we used sticky notes. I gave students a list of sentence starters that they could use to write ideas on their sticky notes to later share in their groups. Some of the sentence starters were: "*Estoy pensando. . .*"; "*Esta parte me recuerda a. . .*"; and "*Tengo una pregunta sobre. . .*"³ Students were expected to prepare for the discussion by reading their chosen book several times and writing ideas or comments on the sticky notes. This way, they could remember what they wanted to say in the literature discussion groups. After a couple of days of preparation, students had three days of literature discussions in small groups facilitated by the teacher. Each day each discussion group lasted about 20-30 minutes and was done while other students were in literacy centers.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection consisted of audiotaping literature discussions over a five-month time period. Data collection included observations, field notes, audio recordings and reflective journal entries of the literature discussions that included the four focal students. This resulted in over 35 hours of audio recordings.

³ Translation: "I'm thinking. . ."; "This part reminds me of. . ."; "I have a question about. . ."

The findings presented here are from a secondary data analysis. In the first analysis, I had looked at the roles both the students and teacher had taken on during the discussions. For students, I found the importance of students sharing their personal narratives to make meaning of the text (Osorio, 2015; Osorio, 2016a; Osorio, 2016b; Osorio, 2018b). This sharing of personal narratives is what promoted the development of critical consciousness which was my ultimate goal. When it came to my role as the teacher I saw that I facilitated the discussions by asking questions, reiterating what others said, clarifying information when necessary, pushing students' thinking, and trying to make it personal for students whenever possible. Since I wanted to promote critical consciousness in my students, I wanted to look closer at the following research question: "How can a teacher encourage student vulnerability and sharing of personal narratives?"

In the secondary data analysis, I first pulled every example of student sharing their own personal narratives to look at what the teacher did before and after each particular instance. I organized this into a chart and conducted an overall open coding for themes in students' and teacher's responses (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The analysis was grounded in the data gathered during the literature discussions: field notes and the transcriptions of the discussions. The analysis began by reading through my field notes and transcripts related to the examples of personal narratives I had pulled from the overall data and by making comments about each of them.

I started to notice that at various times throughout the discussions I was sharing personal aspects of my life that I would have never thought I would. I decided to take a closer look at these times of vulnerability. I therefore conducted a more systematic level of analysis using a constant comparative method. I did a more focused coding where I looked for salient categories and wrote initial memos (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). When looking across all my data in a thorough analysis, I realized that if I expected my students to be part of critical conversations and to make themselves vulnerable, then it was important that I, the teacher, did the same. That is what I share here. More specifically, from the start I knew that I wanted to break the mold of the traditional teacher and student roles and instead form a dialectical relationship with my students and develop our critical consciousness. One way I did this was by being vulnerable in the literature discussions. I became a storyteller, sharing stories about my family, about my father growing up, about my own children and some of the expectations I held when it came to the

Spanish language. The following are some examples of how I became vulnerable in front of my students, in order to encourage them to do the same.

Teacher as Storyteller

Beyond Academics

Most of my students were of Mexican descent, a couple of students had family from Guatemala, and my family was from Colombia. One of the books we read in literature discussion groups was *Braids/Trencitas* by Kathleen Contreras. *Braids/Trencitas* is a story about a girl named Isabela and her relationship with her grandmother. Throughout the book, Grandmother braids Isabela's hair and they both use this time to share stories. Isabela shares her written stories while grandmother shares her oral stories. Isabela then realizes that her grandmother can't read and teaches her how to do so.

During the discussion of the book with Alejandra, Adriana, Sofia, and Mercedes (the girls who had chosen this book), I shared what I had written on one of my sticky notes: "*Yo extraño que nunca tuve abuela.*"⁴ This was something that had always brought me great sadness, but in that moment I felt compelled to share. I went on to explain what I meant: "*Porque cuando yo nací, mis cuatro abuelos—dos abuelos y dos abuelas—ya se habían muerto.*"⁵ I then continued reading the rest of the sticky note: "*Entonces, dice, 'Pero las historias me las cuentan mi papá. Me encantan las historias que cuenta mi papá.'*"⁶ The memory of the stories that my father had told me about his childhood made me smile. I wanted to share with my students that even though I might not have a grandmother like Isabela's to tell me stories, I had another family member who fulfilled that role. By sharing this, I opened up the discussion for my students to share about their grandparents. Sofia shared a story about seeing her father cry after learning that his father had died in Mexico. She said, "*Mi abuelo, de mi papá ya está muerto porque estuvo enfermo y no había medicina allá en México, entonces está muerto. Y le estuve preguntando, 'Papi, ¿porqué estás llorando cuando tu papá se murió?'*"⁷ Also Alejandra shared how her grandmother died in Mexico by saying, "A mi mamá

⁴ Translation: "I miss that I never had a grandmother."

⁵ Translation: "Because when I was born, my four grandparents—two grandfathers and two grandmothers—were already dead."

⁶ Translation: "Then it says, 'But my dad tells me stories. I love the stories my dad tells me.'"

⁷ Translation: "My dad's grandfather is already dead because he was sick and there wasn't medicine in Mexico, so he is dead. I had been asking, 'Dad, why were you crying when your dad died?'"

también le pasó eso. Se murió su mamá, en México. Se durmió y ya no despertó.”⁸ Even Mercedes, who tended to be one of my quietest students, said, “*A mi mamá y papá también.*”⁹ I had to ask for clarification but found out she still had one grandmother and one grandfather that were still living. Through our continued conversation, I also learned that three of my students in the group (Adriana, Alejandra, and Sofia) each had one grandparent in town. For Alejandra and Adriana, it was the same grandparent because they were cousins. By putting myself in a vulnerable position and sharing a personal story, my students learned a little bit more about me and felt comfortable sharing personal information about themselves. This was us being vulnerable together and beginning to develop critical consciousness. Sofia shared some of the social and economic differences between living in Mexico and the United States, she felt that Mexico didn’t have the medicine necessary to save her grandfather. I had to become more than a teacher; I had to become a storyteller willing to share my own vulnerabilities and struggles.

Taking the Whole Student into Account

During the discussion of the book *Waiting for Papá/Esperando a Papá* by René Colato Laínez with my students Victor, Camila, Arcadia, Juliana, and Lucia, after I shared that I was divorced and my own children did not live with their father, Victor shared, “*Yo tengo dos [papás]: uno que se fue a México, y otra acá.*”¹⁰ Arcadia lowered her head and said, “*No, no vivo con mi papá.*”¹¹ This was a more recent situation for Arcadia, so I knew not to push her to speak more about it. I knew that by creating this safe space, she might share more in the future without me having to pry. Lucia reflected on how she was happy to have her parents at home with her, but that she really missed her grandparents, “*Pero los únicos que extraño son mis abuelitos, porque ellos son los que necesitan mucha ayuda.*”¹² She went on to share that her parents were currently going through the process of becoming U.S. citizens in the hope of bringing her grandparents over. Arcadia then asked the group, “*¿Porque el papá de Beto se fue?*”¹³ I wondered if she was really asking how her own father could leave her.

⁸ Translation: “That happened to my mom too. Her mom died, in Mexico. She fell asleep and did not wake up.”

⁹ Translation: “My mom and dad too.”

¹⁰ Translation: “I have two [dads]: one that left for Mexico, and another here.”

¹¹ Translation: “No, I don’t live with my dad.”

¹² Translation: “But the only ones I do miss are my grandparents, because they need a lot of help.”

¹³ Translation: “Why did Beto’s dad leave?”

The group continued their dialogue, sharing their thoughts about why Beto's dad had left and how that made Beto feel. The discussion moved on to the topic of crying when Lucia asked why they were crying in the story. We discussed as a group about missing people. I pointed out how many of them had things in common with Beto because I knew they had family in other countries, such as Mexico. I also shared my own personal experience: "*Por ejemplo, yo aquí en los Estados Unidos tengo mi mamá, papá, hermano, y no más. Toda mi otra familia está en Colombia.*"¹⁴ This is something I had struggled with my whole life, the fact that I did not have any extended family here in the United States. I had not even really met my extended family until a trip to Colombia at the age of 14; I had previously gone to Colombia at the age of 2, but did not have any memories of that visit.

My students shared that sometimes they feel sad ("*triste*") being separated from family. We then tried to think of ways we could unite our families more and not have this sad feeling. Victor said that you can talk to your family over the phone. Camila shared how she uses Skype to video-chat with her family in Guatemala. This way they can see her and she gets to see her uncles and cousins. She said they sometimes like to hear her talk in English.

Our conversation actually enabled us to learn more about each other. For instance, I had learned that Victor considered himself as having two fathers: his biological father, who had been deported when he was young, and his mother's current partner. Victor had not spoken to his father in Mexico in a while, so I told him that if he brought his father's phone number, we could call him using Skype. I asked his mother for her permission, and she said yes. On a couple of occasions during lunch recess, Victor stayed and we Skyped with his dad. I thought it was important that I support this relationship, since I knew it was important to Victor. This was going beyond the classroom space and academics. Though Victor's calls with his father did not directly connect to the academics in the classroom, it was nonetheless extremely important for Victor's overall well-being. By supporting Victor in this way, I was able to show him that I truly cared about him beyond how well behaved he was in class and the grades he received on assignments. This experience greatly improved our relationship and further build the trust we had in each other.

¹⁴ Translation: "For example, here in the United States I have my mom, dad, brother, and no one else. The rest of my family is in Colombia."

Building that Connection

Like most young children, my students loved sharing stories with me, whether or not they were made up. During many of our literature discussions, I shared some of my favorite stories that my father had told me about his childhood growing up in Colombia and about his experiences in the United States. During the discussion of *Braids/Trencitas* with Angel, Diego, José, and Sergio, we talked about storytelling. I shared one of my favorite stories about my father when he was young:

Estaba enfermo con algo y le tocaba ir todos los días al doctor para que le ponga unas vacunas. Él fue el primer día y se dio cuenta que eso le dolió mucho entonces él no volvió. Lo que hizo es que metió las inyecciones en su mochila. Entonces él iba a la escuela y antes de la escuela necesitaba ir al doctor y él le decía a su mamá, ‘O sí, mamá, yo fui al doctor.’ Y la mamá le decía, ‘¿Adónde te chuzo el doctor?’ Y él le decía, ‘Aquí, mira ese puntito que tengo ahí.’ (Students giggle.) Y las vacunas, las inyecciones estaban en la mochila. Después la mamá encontró todas las vacunas en la mochila, ¿y qué creen que pasó?’¹⁵ José answered, “Lo llevaron al doctor.”¹⁶ That was correct, so I continued my story. “Lo llevaron al doctor y le pusieron todas esas vacunas de una vez en las pompis.”¹⁷ (The boys turn to each other and laugh. Sergio contorts his face in pain. José covers his mouth to laugh.) “Entonces el doctor le dijo que esté relajado si no se le iba a romper la aguja de la inyección¹⁸—(Teacher demonstrates with hand how the needle had to go in.)—Y él se ponía todo tieso¹⁹—(Shows tension by squeezing hands together and shaking.)—porque él sabía que le iba a doler, entonces esa es una de mis historias favoritas.²⁰

Angel shared that when his mother was young, her mother had died, so he never got the opportunity to meet his grandmother.

¹⁵ Translation: He was sick with something and he had to go to the doctor every day for them to give him a shot. He went the first day and realized that it hurt a lot so he did not return. What he did was he put the shots into his backpack. So, he would go to school and before school he was supposed to go to the doctor and he would tell his mom, “Oh yes, Mom, I went to the doctor.” And his mom would ask, “Where did the doctor give you the shot?” and he would say, “See this little point right here.” (Students giggle.) And all of his shots were in his backpack. Later, his mom found all the shots in his backpack and what do you think happened?

¹⁶ Translation: “They took him to the doctor.”

¹⁷ Translation: “They took him to the doctor and they gave him all those shots at once on his bottom.”

¹⁸ Translation: “So the doctor told him to relax because if he didn’t the needle of the shot was going to break—”

¹⁹ Translation: “—and he would tense up—”

²⁰ Translation: “—because he knew it was going to hurt, so that was one of my favorite stories.”

I shared another story about my father's childhood during the discussion for *Braids/Trencitas* with Alejandra, Adriana, Sofia, and Mercedes. We had just been talking about who had grandparents who were alive and who had some who were already deceased. I shared the following story:

*Era que mi papá tenía muchas hermanas y el novio o algo de su hermana, le traía una bolsa a mi papá de bombones. Nosotros les decimos bombones, ustedes les dicen paletas o lollipops. Él tenía como dos o tres años, mi papá. Lo que él hizo es que se metió con esa bolsa grandísima de esos bombones debajo de la cama y se puso a desempacarlos. Entonces desempacaba uno, le lambiaba, y lo ponía ahí a su lado, y desenvolvía otro, lo lambiaba, le pusía ahí al otro lado, después era otro, lo lambiaba y pusía otro, después seguía haciendo eso. Siguió así hasta que resultó que se quedó dormido debajo de la cama. Pues mi abuelita estaba toda preocupada diciendo a dónde se fue el niño, porque era chiquito, dos, tres años, dónde está el niño, dónde está el niño. Al fin lo encontraron debajo de la cama, ahí alrededor de él, todos los bombones de la bolsa solo lamíado una vez. Uyyyy, en el problema que se metió mi papá.*²¹

Sofia went on to share how her little sister loved stories so much: “*Mi hermana le gusta leer muchos cuentos y mi mamá dice, ‘no, no, ya no cuento, ya no cuentos, ya es hora de dormir.’*”²² Though sharing these stories was not directly connected to classroom academics, what they did do was show my students that I was a person. I have a family, some of whom lived far away, and many aspects about myself beyond just being a teacher. We were strengthening our relationship through the sharing of our personal narratives. This allowed my students to feel comfortable in them sharing their own stories.

Not only did I tell stories about my father's childhood in Colombia, but I also talked about his experiences here in the United States. This was a way for my students and I to forge

²¹ Translation: “My dad had lots of sisters and it one of their boyfriends brought my dad a big bag of lollipops (bombones). We call them “bombones,” you call them “paletas” or “lollipops.” He was like two or three years old, my dad. What he did was he took the big bag of lollipops with him under the bed and started unwrapping them. He would unwrap one, lick it, and put it to the side and then unwrap another, lick it, and put it to the other side, then it was another, lick it and put it to the side, he kept doing that. He kept doing that until he fell asleep under the bed. Well my grandmother was all worried, asking where was her baby, because he was little, two or three, where was her baby. They finally found him under the bed, surrounded by the whole bag of lollipops that he had licked each of them one time. Ohhhh, the trouble my dad was in.”

²² Translation: “My sister likes to read lots of stories and my mom says no, no, no more stories, no more stories, it's time to go to bed.”

connections across our similar experiences. Most of my students were U.S. citizens, much like myself, with parents who were either undocumented or going through the process of becoming a U.S. citizen, just as my parents had been and done. During the discussion of the book *From North to South/Del Norte al Sur* by René Colato Laínez with Alejandra, Juliana, and Lucia, I told such a story. This book was about a boy named, José who is separated from his mother after she is deported to Tijuana. José and his father cross the border from San Diego to Tijuana in order to visit his mother, who is staying in a refugee home.

We had been discussing why and how José's mother had been deported while she worked in a factory, and whether my students ever knew anyone who had been deported. Lucia shared how an uncle had been detained and that her family was still unsure if he would be deported. Alejandra shared that her father had been stopped during a trip to Chicago: "*Mi papá, un día que fuimos para Chicago, le dijeron que ya nunca podía manejar.*"²³ Juliana said that her own father might be deported. I shared an experience that my father had at work:

*Mi papá trabajaba en una factoría. Ya está retirado. Era una fábrica donde se empacaban alimentos para otras compañías como Kraft, McCormick, y el ejército de Estados Unidos. Todo esto, se despachaba, en grandes camiones a sus lugares de destino. Ahí trabajaba con un compadre guatemalteco. Un día, llegaron los agentes de inmigración, buscando a alguien. El compadre se puso muy nervioso, pues no tenía papeles. Estaba asustado que lo iban a deportar a Guatemala. Entonces mi papá lo escondió en un tumbo, una cosa donde se empacan cosas, que estaba vacío, lo metió y lo tapó. Entonces inmigración pasó, porque lo que hacía inmigración era que pasaban preguntado y pidiendo papeles, los papeles donde decía quién es y esto y lo otro, y lo deportaban. Los agentes terminaron su inspección y el compadre pasó el mal rato, ya más tranquilo.*²⁴

²³ Translation: "My dad, one day we went with him to Chicago, they (police) told him never to drive again."

²⁴ Translation: "My dad worked in a factory. He is already retired. It was a factory where they packaged products for other companies like Kraft, McCormick, and the U.S. Army. All of this was packaged in large trucks and sent to their destination. One day immigration officials arrived, they were looking for someone. My dad's friend got super nervous because he did not have papers. He was afraid that they would deport him back to Guatemala. So, my dad hid him in a container, a thing where they pack things, but it was empty. He put him in there and covered it, then immigration passed, because what immigration would do was pass by and ask for papers, the papers that say who you are and everything and then deport them. The agents finished their inspection and my dad's friend's bad ordeal was finally over. He began to calm down."

I shared this story in order to help explain how the detainment of José's mother in the story might have happened. The experiences that my students had shared about deportation had all taken place during engagements with police, but in the story *From North to South/Del Norte al Sur* and in my own father's experience, it was the immigration enforcement agencies (I.C.E.). I also shared this story to show some of the similarities and differences between my students and me. My students knew that some of their parents were undocumented and that someday their parents might be deported. I grew up with parents who were undocumented but I did not live with the fear many of my students seemed to be living with on a daily basis.

Learning Together

We used stories not only to go beyond academics and bring in all aspects of our lives, but also to learn from each other. Many times, I shared stories about my own children. At the time I had two sons, who my students knew because they attended the same school, though my sons were in lower grades. During the discussion of the book *Waiting for Papá/Esperando a Papá* with my students Victor, Camila, Arcadia, Juliana, and Lucia, we talked about how Beto's dad stayed behind because he had to work in order to make money, that he needed money in order to survive and pay for bills. I shared how my son Pepito always says, "Yo quiero esto, Yo quiero esto"²⁵ (as he points to different things). "Y a Pepito le digo, no hay dinero para todas esas cosas."²⁶ Lucia then shared how she sometimes asks for things, but realizes there isn't money so she tells her mother that maybe when there is money she can get it. She said, "Mi mamá a veces dice eso. Yo le digo a mi mamá que es mejor no me lo compre que otro día cuando tenemos dinero."²⁷ I responded by saying, "Claro. Es lo que yo digo. No se puede comprar todo porque lo más importante es los dos tener una casa donde vivir, ropa para ponerse, comida para comer."²⁸ Lucia went on to share how poor children are more important than toys "ni modo porque hay niños allí ni tienen juguetes, ni carro, ni nada."²⁹ She went on to say, "Los niños pobres son más importante que los juguetes, porque dicen que,

²⁵ Translation: "I want this. I want that."

²⁶ Translation: "And I have to tell Pepito, there isn't money for all those things."

²⁷ Translation: "My mom sometimes says that. I tell my mom that it's better she doesn't buy it for me, but she can buy it another day when we have money."

²⁸ Translation: "Of course. That's what I say. We can't buy everything, but the most important thing is for the two of them to have a house to live in, clothes to put on, and food to eat."

²⁹ Translation: "because there are children there that don't even have toys, or a car, or anything."

si eres rico y dices, 'Ah, yo soy rico' (singing), dice a veces te puede pasar algo."³⁰ She ended with how we should be helping. Here the students and I are discussing our connections to issues in the larger social context; building our critical consciousness. While I was their teacher for this particular grade level, I was still supporting them in the process of becoming active participants in our democratic society.

During our discussion about *Pepita Talks Twice/Pepita habla dos veces* by Ofelia Dumas Luchtman with Guillermo, Sofia, and Carlos, we began to discuss who in the story spoke Spanish, who in the story spoke English, and who spoke both languages. The book is about a girl named Pepita who is a Spanish–English bilingual child who always had to interpret for different people in the neighborhood. She tires of interpreting and decides to give up one of her languages—Spanish. This comes with its own set of problems. During one of our discussions, I shared with my students the expectation I have for my children about speaking Spanish. I told my students about my household rule that only Spanish be spoken at home:

Cuando Pepito y Poncho están jugando y están hablando inglés, yo les estoy gritando, si yo los oigo abajo jugando y digo, '¡Hablen español! Ustedes saben que se hablan español en esta casa.' Entonces yo los regaño."³¹ Carlos asked why and I went on to explain: *Porque ellos saben inglés, ellos saben inglés, pero quiero que practiquen español, porque el español yo tengo miedo que se les vaya a olvidar. El inglés, mucha gente aquí habla inglés, ¿verdad? Ellos cuando van a otras cosas necesitan hablar inglés, entonces en la casa es que necesitan hablar español, porque necesitan practicar el español, porque sin practicarlo, se les va a olvidar.*³²

I was sharing with my students my own personal expectation and belief about the Spanish language use for my children as a way for them to see the value in it and hopefully encourage their use of Spanish as well. The reason I did this was that I felt that many times my students were getting a very different message from the media, the school, and even sometimes their parents. The

³⁰ Translation: "The poor kids are more important than toys, because they say that if you think you are rich and say 'I am rich' [singing] they say sometimes bad things can happen to you."

³¹ Translation: "When Pepito and Poncho are playing and speaking English, I yell at them if I hear them downstairs playing. I say, 'Speak Spanish! You guys know that we speak Spanish in this house.' Then I yell at them."

³² Translation: "Because they know English, they know English, but they need to practice their Spanish, because the Spanish, I am afraid they are going to forget. The English, lots of people speak English, right? When they go to different places they need to speak English, so at home they need to speak Spanish, because they need to practice Spanish, because without practicing they are going to forget."

message my students received often was that they had to give up Spanish, their native language, in order to learn English. This could sometimes come in direct communication (ex. “Speak English please.”) or in subtle messages, like the fact that as students moved up in grade levels, the number of English-language subjects increased. I was sending a very different message; one in which the Spanish language should be kept and promoted. Just as I expected Spanish to be spoken in my household, I also expected my students to speak Spanish during our time together. I never forced a student to do so, but I always encouraged them to use Spanish whenever possible. Based on my own experiences growing up, I did not want my students to feel like they needed to choose one language or another. My students and I had many conversations about the benefits of bilingualism, the importance of keeping both languages, and how that is a part of our identity.

Conclusion

This article focused on how, I, as the teacher had to demonstrate vulnerability and share personal narratives if I wanted my students to do the same. Instead of seeing vulnerability as a weakness, it was a strength in my classroom. This is similar to how Bhattacharya (2016) found vulnerability as a strength in academic spaces. This was just a different space and with students who were much younger. Even though my students and I never explicitly discussed being vulnerable, by the fact that I was willing to share personal narratives with my students we were able to build trust and respect in our relationship. This article presents one example of how it can be done in an early childhood setting during the implementation of literature discussions. By being vulnerable together, making connections and finding ourselves in each other’s stories we were able to have critical conversations on topics such as immigration, bilingualism, and family. There is not enough room to go into depth about the students’ discussions around these topics. Those discussions can be found elsewhere (Osorio, 2015; Osorio, 2016a; Osorio, 2016b; Osorio, 2018b).

One of my biggest learning revelations from participating in literature discussions with my students was the fact that I, as the teacher, had to be vulnerable in order to truly build a trusting relationship. I had to share with my students that I was more than just a teacher; I was a mother, a daughter, a bilingual student. Freire (1970) calls this blurring the lines of the teacher-student relationship in order to promote critical consciousness. There has been previous research that demonstrated critical consciousness development (DeNicolo & Franquiz, 2006; Lopez-

Robertson, 2004; San Pedro, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2010a; Souto-Manning, 2010b), but this article focused on the role of the teacher. The stories I shared were never planned beforehand trying to get the students to go in a certain direction. They all came up naturally during the conversation, most of the time building off of what a student was saying. I realized through this process that in order to be a true conversation partner, I had to be willing to get personal.

Relationships are one of the beginning pieces for encouraging students to share their own personal narratives. A teacher has to be willing to become a storyteller. In order to do so he or she has to be willing to move beyond academics, take the whole child into consideration, build connections and learn together. The only way to truly do this is for the teacher to be vulnerable with his or her students. Vulnerability means being willing to share aspects of your own humanity, not just what make up your teacher identity but what makes you, You. For example, Ms. Bee did this by sharing her own story about being a survivor of abuse and her attempted suicide (San Pedro, 2017). These topics were appropriate given she was working with high school students. For me the identities I decided to share were a mother raising bilingual children, a daughter of immigrants and a teacher wanting to create a classroom that sustained all the linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism that were a part of my students.

One aspect that cannot be ignored is the use of literature that was representative of my students' lived experiences. I had decided to bring in Latinx children's literature because I did not feel that the required district basal reader, accurately reflected the experiences of my students. I know that I would not have been able to have the same level of vulnerability if I had not drastically changed the type of literature we were reading and discussing. If I wanted to have critical conversations with my students, I had to choose the literature I brought into my classroom carefully. It is not just about bringing in the literature into the classroom, but what you do with it (Osorio, 2018a).

I had some similarities with my students in that we both came from Latinx backgrounds, even though the majority of my students were of Mexican descent and I was Colombian, we nonetheless all grew up speaking Spanish. We also had our share of differences: I had grown up lower middle-class while the majority of my students were from working class families. Even if a teacher is not from a similar background as their student, as the majority of teachers are not today, there are still ways to be vulnerable and connect with your students on a personal level. One such example was my opening vignette when I shared with my students that my children

don't live with their father. My divorce was something very personal to me that I did not share with many. But I shared this fact with my students because it specifically connected to the discussion we were having. They were being vulnerable and sharing how it felt for some of them to be apart from their fathers, and I felt that the only acceptable response was for me to be vulnerable with my students as well. It doesn't matter who you are, you can still take steps to build a stronger relationship with your students and work on implementing a pedagogy that helps sustain the linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism present in today's classrooms.

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