

You live, and you Learn

By: Julio Lopez

Growing up, I was never those kids interested in reading. I was more of a math person with math there, only one correct answer. My dissatisfaction with the English subject goes way back into my elementary year, all the way up until high school. Coming from a country where English wasn't the spoken language meant I had to be placed into bilingual classes. The classes never focused on the English language, which I felt was the biggest mistake, and a waste of time studying the language I grew up with, Spanish.

My mom had spoken to me about removing me from the bilingual class, putting me in the categories where English was the main focus. I remember going to school the next day, sitting on the hard metal chairs, looking all around the room at the chipped painted walls and the dirty whiteboards stained with permanent markers, fearing being laughed at and made fun of by all the English speakers. I finally concluded that switching classes would benefit me and hopefully spark an interest in reading I never had; I was wrong. I was placed mid-semester, putting me behind all assignments and previous topics. For my first assignment, an essay about my worst experience was due and presented to the entire class when finished. Switching to a new course meant I had to make new friends and look around, making sure I chose my friends wisely; I remember seeing someone who had recently switched from bilingual classes. Throughout the week, we became close friends and helped each other complete the work to complete the essay assignment. A week flew like a breeze, and the time to perform was upon us. I was third to perform after my new friend I made, Carlos. My turn had finally come up, and although it was early February, the sweat dripped down from me like water running down a waterslide. The teacher asked me, "Julio, are you ready to perform?" I should have told her I was sick to my stomach, hoping she postponed my turn. "Cough, cough" was the first thing I heard; as soon as I opened my mouth to speak, someone yelled out, "Go back to where you came from; you don't belong in this class." Not being used to presenting in English, I started speaking "Spanglish." Everyone started laughing at me, pointing at me, mocking me, making me feel like I had just made the biggest mistake.

Initially, the most embarrassing moment I wrote about was when I peed my pants. After that performance, I never wanted to write a piece again, let alone attend school. Fast forward to the 8th grade, my interest in English started to enlighten the flame that blew out when I met the most relatable teacher. After explaining to him all I've been through in the past, he made sure the history wouldn't repeat itself. "This is a safe environment. He told me that everyone here came to learn and help each other grow," he told me. We could relate to where we came from the same country, and both had accents, but his accent wasn't as strong as mine. Throughout the school year, he helped me improve my English, boost my confidence, and overall my communication skills. My English was unique; although I wanted to change how I spoke, I didn't change my personality. My Spanglish gave me my sense of humor and made me a positive person. Thanks to my teacher, I improved my writing skills and could transfer my voice onto a piece of paper

within the year. I knew that my high school year would teach me a valuable lesson. My English has improved a ton as I grew, speaking more fluently and becoming too cocky. It's true what they say, "Choose your friends wisely." I had to learn that the hard way.

We recently had a transfer student from Mexico who barely knew English in my junior year English class. Every time he spoke out loud, my friends would tell me to laugh. Thinking I would be more popular, I did more than laugh at him. Getting kicked out of the classroom and a phone call home gave me that wake-up to reality. As soon as I arrived home, my mom tried lecturing me with her broken English. I couldn't help myself but laugh. That's when she smacked the lights out from me. "Why are you bullying other students for not knowing English! You should know precisely how your classmate feels. Remember when you didn't know English."

What she told me made me realize what English truly means. Within her broken English and my classmate, Spanglish was a way of communicating and expressing our thoughts. It taught me a lesson when I got made fun of and bullied. Others oppressed us both. English comes in many different forms, making it a new language where others can communicate. There's no such thing as proper English to me. Time passed, and I've dedicated myself to growing with others and met many people who motivate me to this day on not perfecting English cause there's no such thing as perfecting the way I express my thoughts.

Reviewers Memo.

I wrote this essay in a style that shows growth. I wanted to create an image inside the reader's mind to help better understand what I've had to experience from the beginning, where I didn't know English, to where I improved and started to judge other people's Englishes until it taught me a lesson. I hope to open different eyes to anyone that went through the same hardship I experienced, showing them their language is correct. While writing this project, I struggled to put my thoughts together. What helped me out was, closing my eyes and reliving every moment twice. I worked hard speaking and writing in English, but I used it as an excuse instead of motivation. After the experience I went through, I changed my perspective and motives.