

As a part of the Public Scholarship course, students were required to review their educational experiences from pre-k to the present. The goal of this assignment was for them to assess the ways in which they were treated based on their marginalizations or their privileges. Students provided three terms for what their narrative would share — the terms were not to be included in their narrative. After reading their narratives aloud, a class discussion connected their terms to the associated experiences. There are a total of four narratives in this issue, three are also accompanied with a voice recording by the author.

The following is one such narrative.

An Educational Narrative by Grace Eberhardt

In order to understand my education, one must understand the bilingual and biracial reality I live, and that starts with names. Yo tengo muchas nombres en español, I have many names in Spanish: flaca, flacis, flacita, amorsita, moñequita, preciosa. I have a few nicknames in English, but they don't hold the same power that my Spanish names hold. In Perú, names mean everything. Out of my five cousins and myself, only one of us is not named Maria. Tenemos Maria Pia y Maria Jose, las mellizas, the twins, and then Maria Alejandra, Maria Diana, y yo, Grace Maria. My mom always told me that when naming me, my parents had to make sure my name could be easily pronounced in English and Spanish. Learning Spanish and English at the same time was seen as a gift to my White family. They always told me I was lucky, and to never lose it. But no one knew the consequences I would face by knowing Spanish.

I spent kindergarten and first grade in San Jose California, known to have a large population of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. In my school, the majority of us had olive or brown skin, brown hair, brown eyes, and most importantly, spoke Spanish. My education in San Jose was bad. I remember our teacher would wear sunglasses inside the classroom, give us our grammar lesson for thirty minutes, and the rest of the time let us write in our workbooks while she lied her head on her desk. At some point in the day, another teacher would come in and take a group of students with her, myself included, to go read aloud. This had been happening regularly and no one ever told me why we were there and what we were doing. It turns out, they had wrongfully placed me in an ESL program, English as a second language. My parents were furious. Upon confronting the office, my mom was welcomed with a "oh you must be here about the uniform scholarships." With the school wrongfully placing me in the ESL program and now assuming our financial status based on the color of my mom's skin, that was enough incentive for my parents to decide what to do about my dad's new promotion, take it and move.

My new school in Sunnyvale California, the heart of the Silicon Valley, was very different and much more challenging. The demographics of my new school mostly consisted of White and Asian American students, and not many Latinos. Before the move, I had honestly thought this country had two languages, Spanish and English, but slowly I came to the realization that that was my reality, not everyone's. At my new school my parents told me not to tell my teachers I speak Spanish because they didn't want me to be treated differently, but how could I suppress a part of who I am?

Fast forward to fifth grade, my teacher introduced me to a new student in the special education department who had just come from Perú. She told me he didn't know English and wanted me to talk to him. All he would tell me was "I have already forgotten Spanish, I don't want to know Spanish," I knew what he meant. He was wrongfully placed in special education like I had been wrongfully placed in ESL, because this school didn't have an ESL program. The closest they had to that was special education.

Going into middle school and high school, having to take Spanish classes for non-Spanish speakers was humiliating to say the least. It was humiliating to be in a class that was not structured for me, it was structured for the majority, structured for the non-Spanish speakers. Despite the structure of these Spanish classes, I had to take at least two years of language class to be considered college-bound, and I chose to take Spanish because I wanted to improve my writing and reading.

I know my parents felt humility when it came to supporting me in higher education. The fact that starting at age eight I was helping my mom edit her work emails and in high school, I had surpassed my dad in his knowledge in the sciences. My parents never took SATs, ACTs, or applied to be a full-time college student. I appreciate the education I have received and the support I have received from my parents, and despite the challenges I faced, I know my languages and names will never be taken away. Es mi lengua.

The Three Terms: Identity, Racism, and Internalized Oppression



Grace Eberhardt is a junior at the University of Puget Sound and is double majoring in African American Studies and Biology and emphasizing in Bioethics. She came into college knowing she would pursue the sciences, but by sophomore year, she found passion and sanity in taking African American Studies classes alongside her STEM classes. She has now taken an interdisciplinary approach to her education and has earned the Richards Bangs Collier Interdisciplinary Research Grant for this summer and has helped developed a quarter unit interdisciplinary class with two professors that will be offered in fall 2019. Through African American Studies classes she has learned about her identity as a biracial woman and systemic injustices people of color face.