

SHORT ESSAY
Reflections of Me: Divergent Educational Experiences

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My first memory: The line of streetlights illuminated our journey from Morelia into San Ysidro. I pretended to be asleep and next to me my younger brother Niño was sleeping. We were in a car with a couple of strangers. I have no memory of my parents before being put into the car with the unknown faces. I also don't recall being reunited with my parents after we had entered the U.S. I had fallen asleep and it wasn't until my mother's voice that we were awakened.

Voice: “while most immigrants enter the country with optimism and an energetic work ethic, many of their children are at risk of being marginalized and ‘locked out’ of opportunities for a better tomorrow. Why will many immigrant children graduate from Ivy League colleges while others will end up in federal penitentiaries?”³

Elementary School: Mrs. Calderon thought the best of me. I was “one of the smart ones.” She comforted me when Juan called me four eyes when I wore my plastic, purple, glasses, which the school had paid for.

The following year, Niño was placed into Mrs. Calderon's class. Years later, he told me that Mrs. Calderon always talked about how smart I was and how it made him feel, as if he had disappointed her.

Me: ¿Por qué dices eso?

Niño: Porque...eres mas inteligente que yo.

Voice: “In schools, where students' success hinges on their perceived intelligence, Latina/o students have been described variously over the years as ‘mentally retarded,’ as ‘linguistically handicapped,’ and, euphemistically, as ‘at-risk’”⁴

Middle School: It was an awkward moment developing as an adolescent pre-teen. I felt that I never belonged. I had experienced bilingual education up until I entered Lincoln Middle School and my anxiety emerged.

Meanwhile, my brother, Niño was diagnosed and placed in Special Education for his dyslexia with no ESL classes.

Voice: “The dropout rates for English language learners are 15-20% higher than the overall rate for non-English language learners. This lack of academic success is also the cause for referrals of English language learners to special education.”⁵

High School: Sometimes I would try to convince myself that I really had an illness, which exacerbated the anxiety I felt every moment in THOSE classes. They were the classes all the

3 (Suarez-Orozco, C. & Suarez-Orozco, M. M., 2001, p. 3)

4 (Bender, S., 2003, p. 105)

5 <http://www.misd.net/bilingual/ellsandspedcal.pdf>

White kids took. They were not ESL classes. They weren't AP courses, but college track nonetheless. Every day I went to THAT White, middle class high school, where even the two Black kids had white parents, I did not belong.

Niño was moved out of Special Education and placed in ESL classes and soon after dropped out and began to work as a laborer.

Voice: “Hispanic youth are almost four times more likely than White students and twice as likely as African American students to drop out of school”⁶

Undergraduate **School:** I graduated high school with honors and went to a university in the Northwestern United States. I worked diligently on my studies. I worked for the Multicultural Center for four years and my last year I was co-coordinator. I had regained my self-confidence. I majored in Ethnic Studies and Spanish. I was exposed to my history, to truths and misinterpretations, to social theories and to social justice...and injustices. *And Niño?*

Voice: “While many immigrant children succeed, others struggle to survive”⁷

Graduate **School:** I graduated from college with a double major and a minor—all with honors. I received fellowships as a master's student. I continue to be a fellow as a PhD student. *And Niño?*

Voice: “What happens in schools today will to a large degree determine the future of all our children”⁸

A letter to my brother:

I see you as a reflection of me, even as others including our father see us as polar opposites. He has placed us at two opposite ends of success and failure. However, it's not only our father that has differentiated us. Ultimately, it is the US public school system that perpetuates the haves with the have not's, even within the same family.

I remember the pictures of you in pee wee football and one with a saxophone. But, I can't remember you actually playing either one.

We were not there for you.

You fixed my computer.

You fixed my car.

It pains me to see you suffer, to see you struggle. I don't know how we lost sight of you. I was supposed to be the role model. I was supposed to guide you. Be there for you. *Soy tu hermana mayor.*

6 National Center for Education Statistics, 2007.

7 (Suarez-Orozco, C. & Suarez-Orozco, M. M., 2001, p. 2)

8 (Suarez-Orozco, C. & Suarez-Orozco, M. M., 2001, p. 15)