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TE 845

Narrative Sketch

I grew up in an English speaking home with little exposure to any language other than English. In ninth grade I entered a Spanish Level One course for my language elective that I needed in order to graduate high school. I had the option of enrolling in German, French, Chinese, or Spanish. I had never had any experience in any other language besides English before that course. As I walked to class I remember clinging to my friend who shared the same section. The teacher greeted us from the hallway saying “Hola!” From prior experiences I knew she was saying “hello” and her welcoming smile helped me to feel comforted. My nerves were slightly calmed, but the fear of not understanding stayed in the back of my mind.

Inside the classroom there were posters all over the room with pictures and words in a language I had never seen before. I knew a few colors in the Spanish language from crayons, and numbers from various songs learned in elementary school, but that was as far as my vocabulary extended. I sat next to students I had been friends with for years, those I felt comfortable around. We all chatted nervously before class began. When the bell rang and my nerves started up again. The teacher introduced herself in Spanish and I felt confused and out of my comfort zone. I had no idea what she was saying. She could see the confusion on students’ faces and repeated what she had said, but this time in English. The first day of class was filled with a lot of English and some Spanish. As the class went on and the school year progressed the amount of English gradually became less and less. It took a long time for me to be comfortable speaking a language other than

English. English was what was comfortable and effortless. Speaking Spanish was difficult and required me to think about what I wanted to say and whether or not I was speaking it correctly. Spanish One introduced simple vocabulary words that named people, places, and common actions. I was never required to speak more than a short sentence at a time.

I continued on to Level Two and Three Spanish while in high school. I was required to recount weekend events in my Spanish Two class and was always wary of how to communicate in Spanish. I had the ability to understand spoken Spanish by my teachers and other students, but constantly struggled to speak it myself. I often looked to a friend in class to help with a word or verb tense in order to communicate through Spanish. I sat in the back of class, which I never did in other subject courses, and I tried going un-noticed by the teacher. I partook in small group discussions with students I felt comfortable with that would understand if I had to speak some English to figure out how to express words in Spanish. I did well on written exams through studying the Spanish language, and luckily was only evaluated on the spoken language once. I had to record a paragraph given to me that I had a week to practice and prepare for. The teachers also let us rerecord if we were unhappy with our first recording. This was beneficial in my course grade, but did not help to improve my knowledge of the spoken language of Spanish.

My experiences in Spanish courses were not easy and often challenged me and placed me outside of my comfort zone in high school. After completing my required three years of a language, I stuck to English speaking courses and did not take any Spanish courses in college. I have retained some of the skills I learned in my Spanish courses, but have not retained the ability to have a fluent spoken conversation in Spanish.

After reading, “Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez” I have been able to compare my high school Spanish experiences with his feelings of learning English in elementary school. Listening to a nonnative language can be terrifying and confusing. Our native language will always sound most intimate, whether we have limited knowledge or fluent knowledge of a secondary language.

### Sources

Rodriguez, Richard. *Hunger of memory: the education of Richard Rodriguez ; an autobiography*. Boston: Godine, 1982. Print.