

What The “Other” Taught Me About Bilingual Basics

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(A more complete version will be shared at <http://www.joanwink.com/sched.php>)

For the first 10 years of my career, I stumbled along the road to a multilingual future, and I was lucky enough to land in southern Arizona with teenage native Spanish-speakers, who had much to teach me about the basics of being bilingual. There I was with *mi simbolismo de Don Quijote, mi pluscumperfecto, y mis pronombres requeteimportantes*, and there they were with their *real Spanish*. I was a convert the first day I was with them, and I never looked back. For the next 20 years of my career, I continued to help build that road; I carried a few rocks and smoothed a few basic bilingual bumps. I loved it, but then I realized that I was always singing to the choir, and as good as it felt, I began to wonder what the “other” was thinking. I dropped all of my bilingual and multilingual graduate classes, which I was then teaching; I started presenting at more English-centered professional conferences, and I found *Foundations of Education*, filled with the “other.” They, too, had much to teach me, and today I want to share some of what I learned from their resistance and their questions in the last 10 years. Here is the bottom line: As TESOL is filled with leaders of our multilingual 21st century, I challenge each person to create their own narrative, which makes our mutual complex understandings of language/culture/pedagogy understandable at the family dinner table. None of us can build this path to a multilingual perspective alone, but together, we can. We must. We will.