

# **A Través De Mis Ojos: Stories of Leadership, Community, and Equity**

Marlene Perez, M.Ed.  
Walla Walla Public Schools



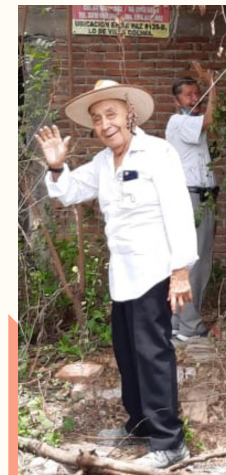
# About the Presenter

I currently serve as the Multilingual Learner Program Supervisor in the Equity and Dual Programs Department for Walla Walla Public Schools. As a bilingual paraeducator, teacher, interventionist, and administrator, I have dedicated my career to advocating for multilingual learners and advancing educational equity.



# Leaving Home, Crossing Borders

I grew up with stories of courage woven into the fabric of my family. My parents' immigration to the United States was not a glamorous journey, but one filled with sacrifice, uncertainty, and faith.



# Session Objectives



Reflect on personal and cultural identity in our schools



Explore advocacy and equity through storytelling



Identify ways to uplift the next generation of teacher leaders



## Framing Question

"Whose eyes are we seeing our students through?"

# La Niña Invisible

5:00



Key themes: Invisibility, Newcomer Experience, Cultural Disconnect



Summary: A deeply personal story about entering the U.S. and Mexico school system as a young newcomer student, feeling unseen and unheard. This experience shaped my understanding of the importance of visibility and cultural belonging in schools.



Reflection Prompt:

- Who do we overlook in our schools?
- How do we ensure that each student is viewed through the eyes that embrace their fullness/uniqueness?



# Becoming Joey

## BECOMING JOEY

by Paul C. Gorski

José's ten.  
Looks six by size,  
twenty in the eyes.

Down  
the school-morning street  
José ambles along  
dotted lines of big cheese busses  
that spit exhaust like expletives.  
José chokes  
on a few final moments of peace.

Hand-me-downs hang  
from José's slenderness,  
patched and stained.  
Soles flop beneath battered shoes,  
worn but hanging on,  
if only by a lace.

José pauses in the schoolyard  
where fairer kids laugh and  
scamper  
unaware of this, his battle;  
of this, his burden;  
of these, his borderlands.

Behind him: cracked sidewalks  
and frosty nights sweetened  
by the warmth of belonging.

Before him: manicured  
playgrounds,  
colorful classrooms,  
lectures and quizzes about a world  
that doesn't see him.

Still, José moves forward—  
what feels in his stomach  
a regressive sort of forward.  
He straightens his shirt,  
dusting off the stains of ancestry.  
And he clears his throat,  
spitting out his Mexican voice.

And, becoming Joey,  
he crosses  
into school.

# La Voz que Floreció

5:00

## Key Themes



Bilingualism



Student Voice



Empowerment

## Summary

Transformative year as a student, bilingual teacher, witnessing self worth. This story highlights the power of affirming language, culture, and leadership from a young age.



## Reflection Prompt

How do we amplify multilingual voices?



# El Puente de Dos Mundos

5:00



**Key Themes:** Bicultural Identity, Leadership, Emotional Labor




**Summary:** We reflect on the complex emotional labor of serving as a cultural bridge between communities, systems, and expectations. This centers on identity and resilience in leadership.



**Reflection Prompt:** How do we navigate and honor dual roles?





What is one shift you  
will make in your  
classroom tomorrow?

# Leadership Mantra

“I lead with my (your) story, so others may rise with theirs.”



## Call to Action

- Mentor a Latinx student or educator this year
- Create visibility and opportunity in your role



# Activity - Write Your Lens

## Activity: Write Your Lens

Write 3 sentences or thoughts about your leadership journey. **(Share out is optional)**

## Reflection Prompt

Consider one action statement that, when attained, will allow you to more actively embrace the uniqueness of each scholar/student?



# Stay Connected

Marlene Perez, M.Ed.   
maperez@wwps.org  
Office: 509-526-6748

## Muchas Gracias

- Thank you for sharing space, stories, and your powerful presence today. I'm honored to be part of this journey with you.
- Let's stay connected and continue to lift one another.