

MY JOURNEY

Starting 6th grade, I knew little to no English making it really difficult for me to help my teachers understand what I was trying to say. I used to try my best and at times I thought I had perfected ~~the~~ English and was better than most ESL students but my interactions with people said otherwise. I remember the second day of school, I went to school early and was asked to wait in the cafeteria, but I couldn't understand a word my teacher was saying to me. She kept explaining to me that I was not allowed near the classroom before homeroom started but I failed to understand this simple sentence. At last, she ~~finally~~ gave up just before I was literally "saved by the bell" for the homeroom. But I was so ashamed ~~of myself~~ for making a fool out of myself right in the beginning of the year. I couldn't stop thinking about what my teacher, Mrs. Skalet must think of me.

Mrs. Skalet was the type of teacher who would make sure that you understood everything before moving on, and ~~she~~ would never judge you for not being able to understand the ~~E~~nglish language properly. She used to always look for unique ways to teach us this new language and make sure that we never felt like we didn't belong. She made the learning space very comfortable and accepting of all our differences. I was in her class for two years and those years were so memorable for me.

Unlike Mrs. Skalet who was welcoming and non-judgmental, my fellow classmates were the exact opposite. I, along with some other ESL students, were mocked for English not being ~~our the second~~ language and had the hardest time trying to fit in. I was colored and was the stereotypical brown girl who didn't speak any ~~E~~nglish. I remember even being mocked by one of my teachers for pronouncing the word 'volleyball' in a Pakistani accent. My teacher pointed my accent out in front of the whole class and to her it wasn't a big deal, but for me it felt like the world was ending because I had to stand in front of the whole class and be humiliated while the whole class laughed. Although her intentions weren't to hurt me or make fun of me, to me it felt like I was ~~jjsxnjskjsks~~ up to my stereotypical expectations.

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Fast forward to 9th grade, I was starting high school as a confident person who left behind all the negativity and was ready for a new start. At this point in my life, I was educated enough to be able to speak enough English to communicate properly and fit in. At this point in my journey, I was trying my hardest to learn the language that would help me communicate with others for the rest of my life. I used to read plenty of books and was familiar with many educational channels on Youtube. I was proud of myself and wanted to expand this knowledge. So instead of taking the Urdu regents, I chose to learn a new language and take the Spanish regents instead. It was a very proud moment and although I was a bit scared, I was really excited to learn another new language.

I took Spanish for about four years and although these four years didn't make me fluent in Spanish, I got a chance to explore a new language and feel pride in having tried something new. When it came time to take the regents, I wanted to back down and take the Urdu regents instead. This was the time that I didn't feel so confident in myself and felt like I couldn't make it if I took the Spanish regent. I knew that I had spent 4 years learning this language and I shouldn't back down but taking the Urdu regent seemed so much easier than taking a regent in a language that was still foreign to me.

I shared my concerns with my Spanish teacher, Mrs. Intravia, who kept trying to help me understand that the regent is not as difficult as I think and kept telling me that everything will be alright. When I insisted on taking the Urdu regent even after our talk she said, "I can't force you into taking the Spanish regents but just think! Why did you want to take the Spanish regent in the first place?" I thought for a while and although I was scared, I decided to challenge myself and take the Spanish regent. Some time later, I had ACED the regent and felt so proud of myself.

My mother used to be a housewife and although she didn't go out too much she wanted to learn English for the times she does go outside to get groceries. She would try reading all kinds of children's books and although she didn't understand everything she was reading she kept trying. During the summer I started to help her out and spent the whole summer reading with her and translating the book. I

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would give a new word to learn everyday and slowly she started picking up the language. I remember my dad once said “There are many people wishing to be in your place, I was one of those kids and although I immigrated to America I didn’t have as many opportunities as you do. Don’t take them for granted, and be grateful for what you have” and watching her I felt so blessed to have gotten a real education and to have earned english along with so many others. I wanted her to have the same thing, so instead of teaching her myself I signed up for ESL classes for my mother. Over time she not only learned the English language but she also started working as a helper in school buses. I was so blessed to not only have learned the language myself but to also have shared my knowledge with others. Although I’ve had my ups and downs with the English language, I feel proud to have learned it and will keep expanding on this knowledge with time.

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Feedback:

Hi Khadija. Excellent first draft. I’ll write a summary to show my understanding of this piece. You open by describing how in sixth grade, you did not know that much English. You go onto describe an event where you were unable to understand the instructions of a teacher on your first day back to school. This event embarrassed you, but it also forced to realize that your English wasn’t as excellent as you had initially thought. You then launch into another narrative wherein you had a teacher who was kind and inclusive and worked patiently with all of the students in her class. You felt this teacher helped shape your English skills. You describe how your native-English speaking peers, however, were cruel and exclusionary of ESL students. You go onto tell of how a gym teacher unwittingly hurt your sense of self when this teacher commented on you accent. You jump ahead to ninth grade, where your English skills have grown and you can now confidently communicate. You assert that this came from practice, reading and consumption of English media, like educational channels on YouTube. Feeling empowered, you decide to start studying Spanish, but when the time comes for you to take the Spanish regent four years later, you get cold feet. However, your Spanish teacher convinces you to take it anyway, and you pass the test with flying colors. You conclude the piece by outlining how your mother didn’t speak much English but

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wanted to learn. You describe how you helped her read children's books and study new words daily. You outline how then decided to take ESL classes with your mother so that both of you can continue to practice. Your mother's English proficiency grew. You feel that although your English education has had its ups and downs, you feel a sense of achievement and look to learn more.

All of these narrative snapshots are well written. Together, they form a sort of collage thematically linked by the title. Your series of narratives does equate to a "learning journey," and I enjoyed reading it. You write clearly and have a nice mix of exterior action and interior reflection.

I have two suggestions for you. The first is easy and pertains to streamlining. I once had a professor who advised me to write out my first draft and then try to cut out any unnecessary words in the second draft. I still do this today. As you can see from my comments, I suggest re-reading this piece and seeing what words are extraneous.

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My second suggestion involves cutting one of your narratives (I like all of them, but hear me out). Although your Spanish narrative is interesting (it's also great that you speak at least 3 languages!) it may read as thematically extraneous. Your other events involve English and the kinds of environments that are conducive to learning it. Positive environments, like Mrs. Skalet's class, made you feel welcome and encouraged you to learn. Negative environments — some interactions with peers, your gym class — were exclusionary and discouraging. This carries over to the positive environment you helped make with your mother, and the result was that her English greatly improved too. Although this lesson is also found in your Spanish class (your teacher encouraged you and you did well), maybe we could cut this event and add a concluding paragraph that explores the themes connecting positivity and learning you've depicted.

Excellent first draft.

Keep up the great writing.

Dilan Schulte

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