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## Samuel Canseco Reflection 2

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## CEL Project - Reflection Two

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The materials that were presented while teaching the students at Columbia Elementary all had a purpose. The idea was to present light hearted stories with important meaning. Some of the concepts and theories that were presented through the short stories were: nepantlismo, culture of borderlands, the loss of identity, cultural identity, etc. Nepantlismo is the idea of being “in the middle”, or the land “in the middle” that is created through two different borders. Nepantla then went on to become a way to heal oneself for their struggles and “loathing” experiences that were created through colonization, and allowed for a new perception of oneself.

For example, a poem that we read, *Legal Alien*, showed the idea of living in Nepantla. The narrator of the poem describes her struggles for being a Mexican American. Pat Mora describes how she would be discriminated against by Mexicans for speaking english, but when she spoke spanish the Anglos would then think of her as an Alien. She was in a vicious cycle of confusion in which she felt as an outsider. Also, in the short story *Rice Sandwich* by Sandra Cisneros, the main character feels out of place for being different. Esperanza is the main character and she goes through segregation for not eating in the canteen. She then proceeds to have lunch at the canteen, and she immediately gets segregated for what she eats. She brings a rice sandwich to school and everyone immediately makes fun of her. She is not wealthy, so the bullying she experienced broke her in every way possible. The border that she had to live through was a financial border, and that is a border that many people experience in their lifetime.

Some of the students in my group felt as if they lived in between two borders. Some of the borders that some experienced were cultural and others we simply personal. Ellie, talked

often about having a lot of siblings from different parents. Ellie also talks about being Latina and speaking Spanish. A lot of the times she comments on how she does not know whether she is Hispanic or not because her fathers are both different. One of them is indeed Hispanic but the other one is not. Ellie also faces nepantlismo with her gender, because she enjoys to play football. She claims that she enjoys playing football, but gets criticized by her brothers and peers at school. Football is a sport that is “generalized” to be strictly played by males, so she receives a lot of criticism. There were other students who felt as if they had a loss of identity, because of where they were from. For example, Kiedis claims to have been lived in Mexico and he mentioned to have felt “Mexican” before and now that has changed. Ever since he moved over to the United States he lost his true Mexican identity. The poem *Legal Alien* is about a girl who is from two different cultures and she does not seem to fit in neither of them. She then proceeds to use the term “hyphenated” in order to describe herself as both. The students then proceeded to utilize this term as well. Some talked about being hyphenated in sports, culture, language, and hobbies.

Some academic skills that I used for the students in order to comprehend the theories is to show them that these borders existed for me and then proceeded to utilize personal examples for the students. I believe that it is important for these students to see these examples on others, so that they feel as if they are not alone in any situation similar to the ones presented through the material. Eduardo and I made sure that the students all felt comfortable with the topic at hand. Also, if any borders were present in their everyday lives, we showed them that this was something that occurred to a vast majority of people. In order for the message to be clear for these students, Eduardo and I attempted to be serious and light hearted. We did not want to scare the students by making them believe that these border issues will haunt them personally for the

rest of their life. We simply wanted to bring forward awareness that would then help them in the long run. The awareness of feeling in the state of nepantlismo is important because borders are always generalized to be physical, but we showed the students that they are everywhere. Feeling to be “in the middle” can be due to anything and not simply for being from a different place.

Eduardo and I also made sure to be sensitive with the students because we were aware that some of the students struggled through borders back home. We were aware that some kids were foster kids back home, and others had parents that were in prison. We tried our best to not single out anyone and make the lessons for everyone. At the beginning of the lessons, some kids were convinced that being different was something that was worth making fun of. Others already had a mentality to not judge people, nor bring others for who they were. Towards the end of all the lesson plans, the students matured and learned to not judge people for being different.

The understanding of the material was clarified for me because although I was aware that borders were not all physical, It was very clear to me that everyone suffers from feeling different in some sort of way. This clarification was made possible by going out to Mount Vernon and seeing these kids feeling different or in the middle for the borders that they feel separated from. I sadly believed that these borders were simply created by racism that exists within physical borders. Hearing the students open up to me really showed to me that the problem of being in Nepantla was within the majority of the students.