

Viva la Conexión

SOME DAYS IT'S REALLY HARD to be a middle school Spanish teacher. Balancing multiple levels of proficiencies in multiple classrooms with minor doses of pre-teen hormones can lead to a bit of *la vida loca*. Yesterday, however, was not one of those days. Instead, it was the kind of day that reminded me of why I love this job.

It started with the weather forecast: sunny, highs in the 50s with moderate wind. *Perfecto*, especially since it was the day to fly *barriletes* in Spanish 7. We are in the middle of a semester-long study of Guatemala and have been learning about a unique way of celebrating *El Día de los Muertos*. Guatemalans—especially in two small villages of Sacatepéquez—create giant kites to fly every year in early November. With these barriletes, participants invite their ancestors back to Earth for the day. Barriletes are immense and filled with beautiful colors, symmetrical patterns and messages of peace, hope and connection.

Our seventh-grade students study the history and meanings of these barriletes and then get to work on creating their own miniature versions. Collaborating in small groups, they choose *colores, formas y mensajes* for their barriletes. They conjugate verbs for cut (*cortar*), glue (*pegar*) and fly (*volar*). (Watch out! *Volar* is stem-changing!) They practice how to sound out Sa-ca-te-pé-quez and how to roll the double “r” in barrilete so they can present to their classmates. They make predictions (*¿sí o no?*) about whether the kites will fly. I love this unit: It's authentic, it's fun, and it



Tricia Kelly is a Spanish teacher at The Gordon School in East Providence, Rhode Island.

helps students feel a personal connection to this language they are learning.

Yesterday, as I headed through the hallway, that connection started to run even deeper. Frances, our spectacular lower-school librarian, asked me if I still had all the Guatemalan picture books I had checked out in September.

I did. “Could you run them down to Lindsay’s second-grade classroom?” she asked me. She explained that one of Lindsay’s students was, on that very day, celebrating the anniversary of his adoption from Guatemala.

I went to speak with Lindsay, and right away she adjusted her schedule

SHARE YOUR STORY

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY JESSICA SCRANTON



What motivates you to get up each morning and serve students in our nation's schools?

Down the Hall

so I could come and share some information on Guatemala with her class. I brought a few books, a flag and a small gift of Guatemalan worry dolls. Her student stood next to me and beamed as he shared impressive knowledge about his birth country. He knew about active volcanoes, Lago Atitlán and traditional Mayan clothing. He opened up the book his family had sent in with him and pointed out how “most people in Guatemala look like me.” When I brought out a barrilete, he quickly flipped to the back of his book and showed the photo of Sumpango, Sacatepéquez, with barriletes *gigantes* dancing in the air.

We invited Lindsay’s class to come outside with us that afternoon. Amid the excitement, I happened to catch this moment: Two seventh-grade students—one whose mom is from Ecuador, the other whose mom is from Perú—are standing with this second-grader from Guatemala. They are laughing, chatting and getting ready to fly a kite.

This was a great day to be a teacher. It was a great day to witness the kind of global connection we get to celebrate on a sunny, perfectly windy day.

Next unit: MayaWorks and fair trade. *Viva la conexión.*

DID YOU KNOW?

2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States are born with a detectable level of hearing loss in one or both ears.

—CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

17 percent of high school biology teachers do not cover human evolution in their classes.

—ASSOCIATION OF RELIGION DATA ARCHIVES



Miguel A. Salinas is a behavior specialist at Jane Addams Middle School in Bolingbrook, Illinois.

It's Heart Work

Meet Miguel A. Salinas, a middle-school behavior specialist who works with the most-referred students in the building. Salinas describes his day-to-day practice as “heart work,” and is unrelenting in his commitment to ensuring that all students feel valued and see themselves reflected at their school.

What first steps did you take to build relationships with the students on your caseload?

This position gave [me] an opportunity to rebuild relationships with families in the school setting, where

Not all educators stand at the front of a class. In each issue, we interview an outstanding educator who works outside the classroom.

the parents can start to trust that the building [staff are] doing their best to support their son or their daughter. The first thing I did at the beginning of the school year is I made home visits. From that point, I got to hear what the families needed.

“What do you need from us? What do you need from me personally? I want to make sure that your son or daughter is extremely successful here. Tell me what that is.”

“I work from 6:00 [a.m.] to 6:00 [p.m.]. I need my son involved in something.”

“Let me find out about your son’s interests. What is he into?”

Then I was able to connect maybe three or four students on my caseload with the boxing program here