Hispanic Heritage Month

Montessori Educator Spotlight:
Dr. Lucy Canzoneri-Golden

What does Hispanic Heritage Month mean to you?

I’ve always had a desire to go into education to make a difference, especially for students who come from marginalized communities. I started my teaching career in East Harlem, en El Barrio, working predominately with the Puerto Rican population at the time. I’ve always worked mostly with Latinx and African American children. As a young teacher I immediately realized that a lot of the systems in place were set up to make kids fail – especially Black and Brown children.

I discovered Montessori when I was reevaluating whether I wanted to continue being a teacher and was really struck by the Montessori pedagogy and how it could be a vehicle to allow each child to unleash his or her potential. Without even knowing it, I always incorporated a lot of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy into my classes because I felt it was important to do that. When Dr. Juliet King and I started our Montessori charter school, we started to explore how we could make our African American students and our Hispanic students feel included. We’ve always incorporated Hispanic Heritage and Black History Month.

I think what I’ve realized as a Latinx instructor is that Hispanic Heritage can be like a double-edged sword in the sense that the word “Hispanic” is actually celebrating the colonizing part of our culture. Those of us who have a background in Latin America are mostly a mixed people – African, Indigenous and European (that’s where the “Hispanic” comes in – the European part of it). So one of the things I’ve realized in the past 10-15 years is that’s not the only part of Hispanic Heritage that I want our students to know about. We’ve made some real intentional shifts showing the commonalities between our Black students and our Hispanic students, how the African and Indigenous cultures really influenced the music, food, language and many of the customs that we have. So now it’s a much broader perspective.
How can Montessori schools critically and respectfully celebrate and honor Hispanic Heritage Month?

I would start by examining your communities – who are the [Latinx] people in your community? Do they come to your school, do they work at your school, are they in some way connected to your school through business or other aspects? Reach out to those folx and bring them in. Use the history, landmarks, and stories/experiences of people as a jumping off point for learning. Hear from your students. Ensure that there is a sense of trust within the community by working with Latinx students, teachers, families and community leaders. Montessori needs to work on changing the face of the teacher. Schools need to have a diverse pool of teachers who can build trust and bring in resources/cultural capital by learning from their students’ families.