



HISPANIC HERITAGE MONTH

Montessori Educator Spotlight: Roberto Germán

What does Hispanic Heritage Month mean to you?

I have mixed feelings about all of these terms. It's hard to think about that aspect of my identity without thinking about what was robbed. The African diaspora, the native tongues/tribes disrupted through the enslavement of Africans – it's hard to disconnect the colonization part of my undeniable heritage as an *hispanohablante*. My



family is from the Dominican Republic. There is a duality to my identity – part of it is trying to maintain the Spanish language and Dominican culture, which allows me to stay connected to family/friends in the Dominican Republic and the larger *hispanohablante* community. In terms of thinking about Hispanic Heritage Month in regards to feeling connected to different groups under a big umbrella, then yes, I have enthusiasm for that. I enjoy learning about other people. All individuals that come from Spanish speaking backgrounds are not same – there is an incredible amount of diversity. Everything from looks to pronunciation and vocabulary can be so different from one country or culture to the next. That's why terminology can be tricky. In my case, for example, my nationality is American and my ethnicity is Dominican, but I don't always feel warmly embraced by the Latinx community as a Black man.

How can Montessori schools critically and respectfully celebrate and honor Hispanic Heritage Month?

We can celebrate/uplift while keeping it real all at the same time. Do so by asking the right questions and getting people to process their identity. I'm a big process person. I like to ask people, "what do you mean when you say this?" "When you use these



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terms, who are you referring to?” Peel back the layers. Get people to dig into their identity – how do you self-identify? Suspend the assumptions. When I self-identify, I identify as Black Dominican. This gives me an opportunity to explain further, to share more of my lived experience. It’s important to engage people in thinking and sharing about their identities. We all should have room to think about and share about that and it provides us with an opportunity to think critically to ask, “have I explored this enough?” Getting more introspective about our identities allows us to make more intimate, specific connections with others. It’s critical that we bring the works of authors that represent a diversity of voices and experiences into our classrooms. Often schools bring in the most known authors. But publishers are subject to same biases as wider society. The media is also subject to same biases (most featured artists are light skinned). Name that and try to identify resources that will reinforce the voices that historically have not been uplifted, like the voices of Black, Indigenous and People of Color etc. All of these [Latin American] countries have Black people – something we need to talk about. Some of these Black communities have held on to their roots in these countries. Using the arts is always an easy way to engage and foster dialogue, whether visual, film, poetry, etc. I like to conduct writing workshops, and start by sharing an example to use as template (for example, my poem, *Ode To Spanish*) to show how we can center our writing on our identity.





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Ode to Spanish by Roberto Germán

There's... something different about you
Not different like I want to build a wall to keep you out because of my own bias and perceived threat

No...different as in you are uniquely beautiful
I love to hear the soft flowing syllables from your mouth
And rolling r's to reaffirm who you are
Because you are not limited by skin color, eye color, your color, my color
You are... colorful

Full of life like don't pump the brakes
Let's break night and keep it moving like a tilde
Then we can relax like un acento
Acentos como los caribeños
Y aún en decir eso hay diversidad
Acentos como los norteamericanos
Y aún en decir eso hay diversidad
Acentos como los centroamericanos
Y aún en decir eso hay diversidad
Acentos como los sudamericanos
Y aún en decir eso hay diversidad
Acentos como los europeos
Y aún en decir eso hay diversidad
La historia nos dice que eres el idioma del conquistador... y es cierto
Pero también me has introducido a otras culturas
Expresas cosas que entendemos
Pero porque eres tan amable también las compartes con otros

You orgullosamente make yourself accessible like... toma mi lengua
Y sube el volumen a 'to lo que da porque this is the language of my emotions
The language in which moriré soñando y seguiré viviendo
The language in which me sale la ira como el humo del café
El cual me lleva a mi tierra
Donde la brisa calurosa y tus palabras me abrazan cariñosamente al salir de las puertas del aeropuerto