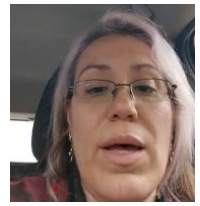


Multilingual Learners With Disabilities: Parent–Teacher Collaboration

Ms. Kurth, a second-grade classroom teacher, is preparing to welcome Hugo into her classroom. Hugo is a multilingual learner with Coffin–Lowery Syndrome. Before the start of the new school year, Ms. Kurth has a conversation with Hugo’s mother, Araceli, to learn more about his home life, previous school experiences, home language practices, and disability-related experiences. She also learns about what has helped and hindered Hugo and Araceli in the past. As she listens to Araceli, she documents what she learns in the Information Collection Tool and thinks about practices she can implement to ensure Hugo feels comfortable, included, and successful in his new classroom.

Home Life

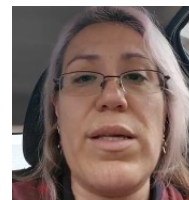
Hugo is a sweet, sensitive, and empathic soul with a big heart and strong preferences. He loves being around people who love him, enjoys helping others, and is incredibly reciprocal—if you’re kind to him, he’ll give it right back. He likes his toys and his phone . . . preferably both at once. He has a big sense of justice (hates fighting), likes routine, and seeks approval from others. He’s funny, observant, and surprisingly exact—once you teach him something, he’ll repeat and learn it exactly as shown.



It sounds like Hugo likes routine. Many of my second-graders have trouble remembering directions. Hugo could be a big help with repeating instructions of activities. I can make a routine to have Hugo express his understanding of the activity instructions before every big activity using all of his resources. I will also keep in mind that he may benefit from mnemonic devices that use repetition when learning new content.

Previous School Experiences

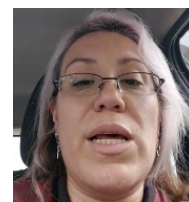
Hugo has been in school since he was 6 months old, attending seven different schools across Mexico and the United States. His experiences range from Montessori and traditional to special education settings. While every setting taught us something, special education has been the most supportive in helping him develop his skills. At the start of one school year, Hugo came home with a black eye. I waited 2 days for an explanation—nothing. But they did reach out to ask for diapers. That lack of care and basic humanity was deeply disappointing.



I would like to work on forming a community with the students. I will work with Hugo and Araceli to develop a presentation introducing Hugo, his interests, his skills, and his uniqueness, including his disability. I expect his peers to be curious, and I want him to feel understood and accepted as a fellow second-grader.

Home Language Practices

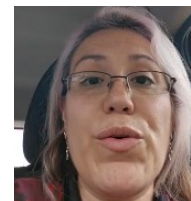
Spanish is Hugo's home language. He also understands English and sign language. He learned sign language in his first school by observing a classmate who was deaf and English through videos and school. At home, we use Spanish mostly, but we support his communication in all the ways he understands—signs, gestures, or his device. In the community, he navigates mostly with signs or nonverbal cues.



To effectively communicate with Hugo, I will need to become familiar with his nonverbal cues. I will make a goal at the beginning of the year to work with Araceli to build my knowledge of his communication style so that I can bridge his expressions of language to new vocabulary words. I will also seek resources to support his sign language and embed opportunities to use it in classroom materials, such as sign language blocks. It also will be important for Hugo's classmates to understand the way he communicates. I will build that into our community-building activities, such as morning meeting and during circle time.

Disability-Related Experiences

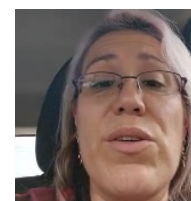
Sadly, in the school setting, Hugo's Coffin-Lowery Syndrome (CLS) diagnosis has not been used to support his potential—sometimes it feels like it's used as an excuse rather than a guide to better help him. Often, schools treat his diagnosis as a reason to check boxes instead of as a guide to help him thrive. I wish educators would take the time to really read and understand the diagnoses—not for legal protection but for meaningful support.



I know that disabilities vary in how they show up in different individuals. I would like to learn from Araceli how CLS shows up in Hugo and the specific supports that she has found most successful. I also want to work closely with the SPED teacher and related service providers to ensure my lessons are accessible.

Successes and Challenges

The teachers who have made a difference are those who see Hugo as a child first. They are patient, believe in him, and treat him as an equal, even when he struggles to believe in himself. The biggest success came with a teacher who truly cared about Hugo. She fought for him, even when the school didn't back her up. That same teacher would email us regularly and always kept us informed. Her communication created a community—parents worked together, and Hugo thrived in her class. The biggest challenge is always with teachers who are indifferent, disconnected, or uninformed.



Although I always reach out to parents with concerns that arise, Araceli's comment reminds me to include successes in my communication. I will build a rotating, weekly schedule to ensure I can reach out to parents monthly with current successes and challenges. I will also ensure these communication efforts include opportunities for parent feedback and input so our classroom community feels like a true two-way partnership.