

## APRENDICES | T1: E3 Denise Mota

### Desgrabación corregida - Inglés

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#### INTRO

I believe we are all good by nature, but there are things you must teach, because the fastest reflex is to shut down and say: "No, that is what I know, what I want.."

No. Always being engaged in dialogue because that is what makes you grow.

And understanding where the things they tell you and that may hurt you come from, to work them through and see how to deal with them.

Because the world is going to change, it changes every day, but it's easier and faster to change from within.

#### PREVIA

We are like... having dinner with the in-laws. First dinner with the in-laws. You go there very tense.

Camera on, sound on...

Running. Running. Running.

I'm doing clapboard first...

Apprentices, Denise, take 1.

Just a second now, we're doing the color chart.

We have no idea what you're doing.

But one trusts.

Yes, yes. We have no choice, Darío.

## CHARLA

I would define myself as a woman, as all of us, in waiting.

Waiting for the clouds of uncertainty to pass, but learning from them as well.

Well, as a mother, I think it's a defining experience.

For women and for men. Right? It's not an exclusive or essential experience.

And a person always trying to learn with others, always on the margins.

And I think we're going to talk about that a lot today because it's an experience that does mark me, from the moment I was born, and it will follow me until the last second of my life, an experience with which I feel comfortable with today, but it's been a long journey.

I am a black woman, and I like talking about that because it's no detail.

Being black in the world we live in is also a challenge.

It's also something of a living testimony to... You're always figuring out why you're doing things, how you're doing things.

Maybe it should not be this way, but in the world we live in, 2021, it's still like this.

Maybe when my children are older, in 2040, things may change, but for now, and for many centuries, being black means something.

So I also establish a dialogue with that, and I try to do something through my work so that in the future others may have easier lives.

In that sense, I think of myself as a woman who is conscious of what her figure, her face, her skin tone, her origin means.

For myself and for others.

I must also be careful with that. Being careful with my thoughts, with my interlocutions.

Right now I think I am that, but I'm trying to learn, to listen and to receive, to feed off others' experiences.

**Woman, mother, black. Right? All three of them were...**

Yes... some.

Foreigner, immigrant.

**As a child, did you imagine openly and proudly calling yourself a woman... Well, I don't know if you saw yourself as a future mother then... and black?**

And black.

It's a construction...

You know...

There are many studies today, luckily. I think studies on being black in the world have developed.

You are not born white, or black, or Asian, you build yourself, from a social point of view.

So I built myself, obviously in a family, my mother is black, my father is black, my brothers...

And I remember that as a child I always heard my father and mother say: "No, you must be proud..." And that's a word I... Why do I have to be proud? I didn't get it.

And that's a topic we still discuss to this day, because I have no pride whatsoever. I have no pride of being black, as I believe a person should no have no pride of being white.

What I do understand is that each one of us from their place can contribute to a better future.

So it's not a matter of pride, it's a matter of serenity.

Being serene, being sure, being convinced you can bring something to the world being yourself, and that goes for everybody.

It's not better nor worse.

Because pride gives me a slight feeling of... superiority.

But when I was a child, pride was a big thing within me. "You've got to have pride". And then at school it was the total opposite. Because at school I was the only black girl for a long time.

And then when another black student came in, it was insane, because I was always the sister of the other black student who was in another classroom, who had another family...

"Are you the sister of...?"

We had different surnames, obviously, but being the only two black kids in a school where everyone else was white... Of course, you have to be related, right? That's something... In Brazil, 57% of the population is black.

So those small worlds start to form and they push you away from reality.

Because of course, I went to University later, and there was a far more real world there, and the same thing happened when I started working.

But all that construction of me coming home and having one life, and going out into the world and having another.

Outside of my house I was a minority.

That noun really does bother me.

Because: minority to whom? Minority in relation to what?

In world terms, non-whites are not a minority, they are the majority.

So when we talk about minorities, it's a political, economic and social concept.

I don't usually use the term "minority".

But I was a real minority in that school, and later in some workplaces, but you learn to establish dialogue and become stronger there, too.

But it was a construction and as a kid I had a lot of trouble with my hair, my skin color, and, as any kid I'd say: "Why am I not like the others? Why?" And I had that feeling of "Oh, I want to be!"

I came home crying.

I had a very understanding mother.

My father was much more of a "You can't cry!" type. He pushed me towards a bit more pragmatic view of life.

And I'm super pragmatic. Too much so.

And my mother gave me the emotional support necessary to build myself from within.

And to listen, which is very important as well.

When a kid comes, and I don't mean racially, but when a kid comes with a problem, with a conflict, it's important that there's an available adult to listen, not to laugh, not to minimize, not to say: "Oh, that's nothing".

And my mother had that wisdom. Because it's more common now.

Well, you as a teacher know that pedagogy has advanced a lot, but in the eighties if you came home crying you got: "Well, if he hit you, hit him back".

Kids had to resolve their issues among themselves.

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And sometimes it's not the case, because bullying exists and it leaves marks, because there are social constructions in school that promote inequality and leave marks.

I come from a family... As I said, black mother, black father.

My father is the son of a woman, my grandmother, she washed clothes to raise her 11 children, my father among them.

My father joined the Marine, in the Brazilian Armada, very young, to get an education and to be able to finish his studies. He was always diligent with his studies.

And the Armada took him through various places of the world and he kept studying; he graduated as an engineer. My father's an engineer.

That resulted in my brother, my sister and I being in an economic position which was new in my family, in the broadest sense.

I had a grandmother who washed clothes; the second generation had an engineer who got to be an executive in a Sao Paulo multinational company.

He came out of Bahia, he also did... Well, my father could tell you a lot more about self-improvement than I could right now.

It was a very important change because as a child I learned to see both sides of the same coin, two very close realities, because we all came from very humble beginnings, and I got to see how my father made his own road, but my uncles and cousins didn't get there.

For many years, I was the daughter of the rich uncle or the rich son of grandma Joanna, whom we would visit every year in Salvador de Bahia.

So there were the margins once more.

We were all black, but we were the ones to arrive there with the car...

So again, the otherness, even inside your own family.

The way the cousins looked at us and how we looked at them, too.

Hence the importance of learning with the other, which you learn as a child. You have to teach it. The human being...

I believe we are all good by nature, but there are things you must teach, because the fastest reflex is to shut down and say: "No, that is what I know, what I want..." You always have to be part of that dialogue because it is what makes you grow.

And the difficulty that comes to your life, is, for example: dolls.

All my white classmates, the white dolls, the difficulty of finding a black doll.

In Brazil.

I'm talking about the eighties.

Now they exist. Here in Uruguay, too. But it was very hard then.

You really had no role models back then.

If I think about it, the first black teacher who was a role model for me, who I loved and will never forget, was an English teacher, when I was already 15 years old.

And I'll never forget her; she was the first black teacher I had, and I adored her.

Because she was also an English teacher, which I loved, and she had a fantastic experience.

She had lived in London...

A black woman like myself.

And it was the first time I said to myself: "Damn, I can too. I can do that too".

And I think she got that because she'd always encourage me: "Brilliant. Keep up the good work".

I think there was a communication.

Now, looking back... Back then I didn't notice, I thought "Oh, she's so nice".

But now, looking back, I think she understood her role in relation to that 14-year-old black girl in that white bubble. That teacher, the only black teacher in a white school, understood her role of stimulating that girl to go on... to feel like she could do it, too.

And I try to carry that forward, not just with my children, obviously, but with any black kid or teenager I find before me.

"Oh, but I want to leave University".

"No, no, no. Go on. Go on until you finish it. It will help you in life. Go on, on, on".

That you can, you can, you really can.

Even though we know the objective conditions are very difficult afterwards.

Because I am an exception. I'm totally aware that I am an exception, and I am an exception thanks to the opportunities my father and mother had, but that not everybody has.

**There is something about being an exception which is the importance of talking in the first person.**

**"I am this", "I could do that". Is speaking in the first person important for black women, for black mothers?**

Yes, it's terribly important.

I think what has helped me is understanding my story and its connection to a broader context.

I believe that is very important.

I believe the first thing is to untie one's personal story from the collective story, which is a social problem.

And that's where I believe things are enriched.

From my experience, I can contribute to the collective and social experience we know exists, because there are studies that quantify that, and qualify it, showing that not only are there fewer black people who have finished university, but also fewer in positions of trust, and in politics.

It's not just quantifying but qualifying where those black people are, where the women are, where the immigrants are, what places do they occupy, what ideas we have about them.

And that's where personal example comes in to contribute to that.

I think that's a very concrete tool I learned with time, also due to my work.

As a journalist, what is my attitude? What is the purpose of my work?

I think it's a reflection that came to me after I turned 40.

Purpose. What I do every day, what purpose does it have?

Beyond the short-term purpose of reporting, paying the bills, of course, what is the metaphysical or philosophical purpose behind it?

In truth, that intangible thing is what's real.

It is what will endure after I retire, after I die.

In other words, what I do leave behind for the people I met?

Every time I open my mouth, a concrete tool is thinking about giving a positive, dynamic, stimulating message. I don't like the word "empowering", but yes, an empowering message to those women, those mothers, those girls, boys, who are now living the things I lived through.

I lived too, I live every day. We are a construction, I have nothing solved, but there are some basic little things I think I have resolved.

The issue of being on the margins, of being the exception... Not the good kind of exception, but the kind where you don't want the attention.

You arrive at school: the only black girl. You go to a certain place: the only woman, or fewer women... Or you get a job that entails a certain responsibility and you notice the looks: "Is she up to the task?" Sometimes even for being young.

Taking those situations as learning curves, as situations for empathy, has been for me most useful in my life.

Stopping a moment, taking a breath and understanding where the things they tell you and that may hurt you come from. To work them through and see how to deal with them.

Because the world is going to change and it changes every day, but it's easier and faster for you to change from within.

How do I deal with aggression? How do I deal with prejudice? How do I handle feeling that I'm not up to the task? How do I handle specific difficulties that I know exist? What road...?

That is to say, having a plan.

**What could Denise ask of us teachers, speaking from her story, as a student inside the educational system?**

**What could we change? How could we incorporate other models and establish a dialogue between those margins?**

I think the first thing as a teacher (and I've had some great teachers, like the brilliant English teacher I told you about) is to take diversity to the class.

Not just in content, but through specific individuals.

Regrettably, often the only black person the children sees is someone in the cleaning staff or the cafeteria.

We have to look for ways to explain to the children that diversity exists in all environments.

Even though regrettably we may not see this in our society. Where is the Uruguayan black judge? Right? And we could give a thousand examples.

So we must take diversity. And not just black people, because I don't like being self-referential. Take women, take immigrants. People who can tell us their life stories and make them valid experiences.

Take that diversity to the classroom because it makes it easier for students to come into contact with real life and understand the diversity of the world, because that is the way of the world. We are all in the world.

Besides, for that kid, it will come as a relief to say "I don't have to be a certain way", "there isn't just one way of knowing". There is no superior knowledge, but everyone may engage in a dialogue to build something better for everyone.



The idea of intersectionality, which I adore and am taking to journalism, is dialogue. Dialogue between different areas, different people, people with different experiences...

So, why can't a white academic tell us something about black culture, and why can't a black academic talk about a different subject, and let it be part of the dialogue?

It's working from there that we can really achieve something different.

I believe taking diversity to the classroom is extremely important. With specific, real individuals who can tell us a bit about their life experiences.

And for the teacher to have a... I know it's difficult, but they have to try to have a more individual understanding of their students, and to listen to them.

It's what I said. A responsible adult capable of noticing subtleties and seeing the relationships between the children, who may occasionally reproduce the violent relationships they see outside the school.

If we can do that, it's worth centuries of progress.