


# LUNA JIMÉNEZ SEMINARS & ASSOCIATES

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## February LJS Book Club Blog

At LJS, we invite you to be part of a new, interactive book club format! Each month, Nanci will share her reflections about a new book on her blog. Please read along with her and share your thoughts. [Click here](#)  to subscribe to postings.



"What parts of your identity does it feel like you lose when you say aloud the phrase 'I'm white'?" With this line, author Paul Kivel touches on the premise of his book, *Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice*. Speaking directly to white people, Kivel eloquently articulates the dissonance between how the arbitrary term "white" leaves out individual, cultural, and economic distinctions and the reality that being "white" is "real and governs our day to day lives." Read Nanci's first [blog posting](#) on this winner of the "Outstanding Book on Human Rights in North America" book award and to add your comments.

## NANCI'S LISTENING

### Guiding Principles for Diversity and Inclusion: Authenticity

by Nanci Luna Jiménez

**Be yourself.** This is the simplest way I know to describe "authenticity" - a guiding principle when working with groups around diversity issues and a core competency for an inclusive work environment.

While the statements, "be who you are" or "stay true to yourself," sound simple, they are **surprisingly challenging to live up to**. This is especially true in a society that explicitly values and rewards particular groups and ways of "being" over others.

Many of us **purposely change how we present ourselves** in work environments to be seen as more credible or to advance our projects in our organizations. On some level, this strategy makes sense as we need political support and buy-in to be effective in our jobs. However, some of these decisions - how we dress and talk, how much we reveal about our personal lives, core values and beliefs, and how we live - have become so familiar and **reinforced by co-workers and society that the connection with our authentic selves begins to unravel**. We lose sight of who we really are.

I recently led a workshop where a participant insisted I couldn't be Latina because I was so "articulate." I grew up in a household where my parents spoke Spanish to each other, but spoke to us children in English because they didn't want us to speak with an accent. **I watched my father and grandparents be "stigmatized" as uneducated or less intelligent because English was clearly not their native tongue.**

**I learned as a very young person that English was the language**



This month LJS is pleased to highlight Jana DeCristofaro, who collaborates with Nanci on many LJS writing projects, including this monthly newsletter. Jana and Nanci met a little over two years ago through a fortuitous connection at Jana's workplace, The Dougy Center for Grieving Children. After many years of writing in academic settings, Jana was intrigued by one of The Dougy Center's volunteers, Andrea Carlos, and her work as a freelance writer. "One day I couldn't resist asking Andrea, 'So, you get paid to write and it doesn't have to be creative fiction?' As we talked she mentioned a woman who might be a perfect fit with my interests." A few weeks later, when Andrea connected Jana and Nanci, a new writing partnership began in earnest.

In her social work world, Jana coordinates support groups for children, teens, and young adults that have experienced a death. In this position she's co-authored a number of book chapters related to teens, children, and grief. "Writing with Nanci continually widens my perspective and inspires me to create an inclusive environment for the families who come to us for grief support." This is particularly true in the realm of "adulthood."

**of power and access.** I excelled at it, especially verbally. I knew that skillfully commanding English would bring recognition for being smart, because I would *sound* smart. Yet, I'm most "at home" in Spanglish. My tone softens, as does my heart, when those melodic syllables roll off my tongue. For the most part, I don't reveal that part of me in work settings. I remain wary of both the stigma and its possible "exclusionary" effect on non-Spanish speakers, even when I translate what I say. I worry that I may offend someone in power and as a result lose a contract or client, or worse, my credibility.

**When I hold back from speaking in my more familiar tongue, I have already lost credibility because I contradict my value of being authentic.** In order to come more in alignment with my value, sometimes it's enough for me to be open about how higher education and especially my decision to adopt "very formally educated" English impacted me. Other times, it makes sense to slip into Spanglish and share this aspect of myself. The outcome is two-fold: I bring more of myself to whatever I am doing, and this benefits everyone around me. Another outcome is that **by being more authentic I invite others to do the same.**

I recently asked workshop participants to do an activity in their first language. The resistance from a small group of immigrants was palpable. The room filled with nervous chatter, anxious clarifying questions, uncomfortable shifting in chairs, and even visible upset at me for making such a request. After the exercise, several of these **participants shared with me, one-on-one, how powerful it was to be able to speak their own languages at work.** They cried about how hard it was to speak only English and how doing so led them to forget certain words in their birth language. The grief was evident. As I walked through the lunch area after the session, the participants volunteered to teach me "thank you" and "good-bye" in Romanian, Tibetan, Arabic, and Eritrean, just to name a few. The participants felt safe enough to be more authentic in the workplace and the trust increased for everyone.

**Being authentic means being willing to be all of who you are.** The truth is, being less of who we are impacts our organizational effectiveness. It takes effort - more energy, more resources, more time - to be less of myself since my brain is preoccupied with what and how much to change or hold back. If you are part of a group that has institutional power - English dominant, male, white, Christian, heterosexual, etc. - you are especially poised to create more safety for others. You can do this by engaging your access and credibility to model authenticity and insist on a workplace that actively counteracts pressures to assimilate.

Where have you changed who you are in order to fit in or gain more acceptance? What can you do to be more authentic in the workplace? How would this increase the trust level and allow others to be more authentic? How would this impact diversity and increase inclusion where you work? I encourage you to **share your responses to this newsletter on our [blog](#).** I look forward to reading

The majority of the participants she works with are children and teens who are left out of the decisions that need to be made after a death. "Thinking about "adultism" helps me to teach parents, teachers, and other adults how vital it is to ask children and teens about their thoughts, feelings, and needs in grief, rather than assume what is best for them."

Jana gains so much from writing about the myriad trainings, workshops, and other adventures that Nanci and the rest of the LJS team are continually creating. She is also immensely grateful to work directly with Nanci. "As I write summaries of LJS trainings, it's obvious that Nanci's unflagging encouragement and positive support impacts so many people. As one of her employees, I feel very lucky to receive the same amazing treatment."

When she's not creating safe spaces for grieving children and teens or working to track Nanci's busy travel schedule, Jana is most often riding her bike around the streets of Portland, searching out fresh snowboarding tracks, reveling in well-crafted books by 'real' writers, and unrolling her yoga mat at various locations.

your thoughts!

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