

# “LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE” | Lupe Anguiano: Lifelong Activist



Pictured from left: Marni Brook, Dawn Dyer, Lupe Anguiano, Hannah Yale, Sue Osborn and Barbara Bellfield, gather on March 8 for the Ventura County Women’s Day Festival in Mission Park, Ventura. The women in white are the Suffragette Passion Players. Photo by Kimberly Rivers.

by Kimberly Rivers

[kimberly@vcreporter.com](mailto:kimberly@vcreporter.com)

Today, March 12, 2020, is the 91<sup>st</sup> birthday of Lupe Anguiano, a resident of Oxnard, who has a lifelong story of standing by her convictions to benefit others. A child of a Spanish mother and a father who was a member of the Huichol people indigenous to central northwest Mexico, Anguiano was born in La Junta, Colorado. She picked lemons with her family for the Limoneira company in the 1940s. Her older brother participated in the lemon strike in Ventura County in 1941 (1). Later, she challenged policies and protocols of the Catholic Church during the 15 years she was a nun, and was eventually

called to leave the church, but never left her faith.

She bucked the norms of welfare policies she called a “trap” when she developed programs that were effective in getting women off of welfare. She volunteered with Cesar Chavez from the early days to organize and fight for farmworker rights and led the grape boycotts. She worked with gangs in Los Angeles, she was roughed up and kicked by police and was part of a team of women that included Gloria Steinem, Shirley Chisholm, Betty Friedan and others that fought for the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

When we met recently in Downtown Ventura, she wanted to talk about her work in developing the 1968 federal Bilingual Education Act and how the policies we have in place today do a disservice to many students by preventing them from learning in their native language. According to federal data, the national graduation rate for all students is about 84 percent. That rate drops to 67 percent for students who are non-native English speakers (2, 3), and some school districts are still trying to keep Spanish language out of schools (3).

### **Learning in the native language**

Today, the standard approach to teaching Spanish-speaking students in our nation’s public schools is titled “English as a Second Language” or ESL. The approach emphasizes immersing students in the English language and



Lupe Anguiano at the Ventura County Women’s Day Festival on March 8, 2020 in Mission Park, Ventura. Photo by Kimberly Rivers

teaching all subjects in English, with the idea that they will more quickly learn and excel in English.

The other approach, championed by Anguiano for decades, is bilingual education, sometimes called bilingual immersion. She says it should be available to all students, not just native Spanish speakers.

At the core of the idea is that children will learn best when they can learn in their native language, in this case Spanish, introducing English progressively. At the same time, English speakers will learn Spanish.

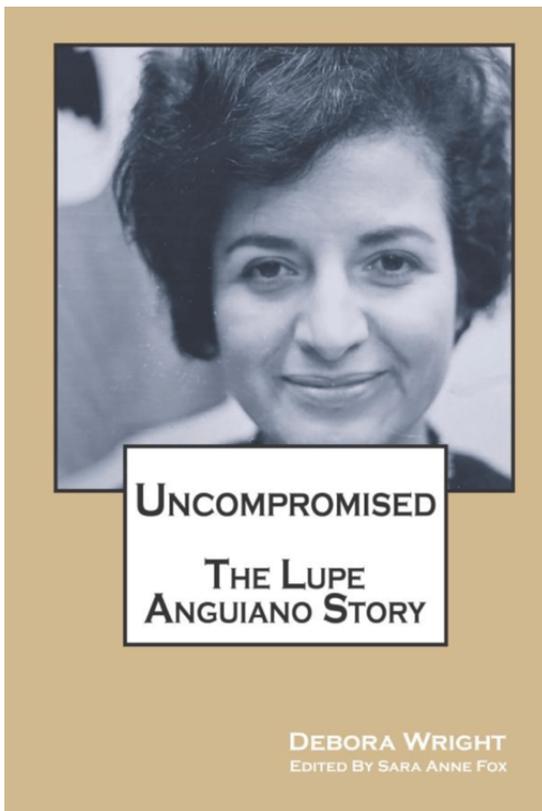
An ESL teacher will only speak English with all students, whereas in a Spanish-English bilingual classroom, the teacher will instruct in both English and Spanish. Bilingual programs in other languages can be offered as well — Mandarin and Arabic, for example.

Anguiano met with many teachers in the 1960s who thought the Spanish-speaking children may have learning disabilities, and thought they were not as intelligent as the English speaking students.

“I said to the teacher, the problem is you don’t speak the language of the children and the children don’t speak English.” Anguiano knew the only issue was that the children didn’t understand the language the teachers were speaking, putting them at an immediate disadvantage.

Anguiano was called to President Lyndon Johnson’s White House to a meeting aimed at studying the needs of Mexican Americans in the South. “Because he was from Texas and saw it was a major problem . . . I testified and [Vice President] Humphrey was listening. I told him the problem . . . is that the teacher needs to be able to speak Spanish and English so the teacher teaches them English but in the context of their own language.”

Impressed with her knowledge and passion, Anguiano was invited to join the Office of Education inside the Department of Health, Education and Welfare



(HEW) in Washington to help develop a bilingual education program. She started working with Texas Senator Ralph Yarborough and a linguist, Dr. A. Bruce Gardner (1), who was working with the schools where the children of the ambassadors from other countries were taught. They spoke French, Mandarin and Arabic and were taught in their native language and in English.

“We started work on a bill that proposed real bilingual education,” modeled on the ambassador schools.

*Uncompromised: The Lupe Anguiano Story*, by Debora Wright tells Anguiano’s life story including working with Cesar Chavez, canvassing for Bobby Kennedy and more. Edited by Sara Anne Fox, Publisher: Opportunity Development Enterprises, LLC, 2016. Available on Amazon.

<https://www.facebook.com/UncompromisedLupeAnguiano/>

She also studied a successful bilingual program in Florida, where teachers hired had come from Cuba. “Cuba taught in English and Spanish . . . Florida welcomed the students and teachers joyfully and then the school districts hired some of the teachers who taught in Cuba, it was

perfect.”

The 1968 Bilingual Education Act (BEA), introduced in the House of Representatives by Yarborough, was modeled on Florida’s program. Anguiano said that professors and educators supported the concept but didn’t understand the “history [in Florida] of bilingual education using both languages.”

Anguiano nevertheless became the advocate and the driving force to get the BEA passed in 1968. It passed, but with a mere \$1 million budget (1), almost immediately there were funding and implementation issues.

"The department was just giving the money to the schools, but the school didn't know what to do, so they used it as their general fund," she said. "You know the problem with Washington is that you have a good bill, an innovative project, but then they don't know how to implement it." Anguiano said that she felt the people in Washington had no experience with Mexican Americans at that time and things "west of the Mississippi were considered foreign."

Instead, HEW brought in a professor who had developed the English as a Second Language or ESL program — the main program used in public schools today. ESL uses "the syntax of the English language to teach English to Spanish speakers . . . the program uses repetition, it's not bilingual, it's really a remedial [program using] memorization . . . and so I became very frustrated."

When she voiced her objections, "they begged me to stay," but Anguiano would not compromise her position. As a final effort, the HEW secretary set up a retreat for Anguiano "to work with the men to get them to understand, and what the guys did . . . they met at night and they didn't invite me." Anguiano was not happy. "I left and went back to Los Angeles."

During that time, she consulted with educators in Bakersfield about their use of the funds. When the bilingual program was implemented as Anguiano had envisioned it, "it was very successful."

Even after her frustrations in Washington, she would be drawn back to the nation's capital by the Nixon Administration to evaluate the ESL programs. She continued to hope that she could improve bilingual education.

## **Equal Rights Amendment and welfare**

Not long after, Anguiano became involved in the fight for women's rights. Feminist activist Gloria Steinem asked Stan Pottinger, Anguiano's boss at HEW, if he knew any great women interested in civil rights who would be

interested in developing a Women's Political Caucus (WPC). He said he knew "the perfect woman, she's a fighter," and gave Anguiano's name to Steinem.

"Gloria liked 'she's a fighter' and that's how I met Gloria Steinem." In 1970, Anguiano went to New York and met with Steinem, Shirley Chisholm, Bella Abzug and others. "We talked about the [Equal Rights Amendment], and [forming] the Women's Political Caucus. The discussion was to get the ERA, we need to form a political arm."

A diverse group of women came together: members of the Republican and Democratic parties and the Black Caucus, a Native America representative and Anguiano, who represented Raza Unidas.

"Can you believe that, it was heavenly," remembered Anguiano. One of the aims of the WPC was to provide strategy and support to women of all parties who wanted to run for office.

Anguiano and others pushed the WPC to "develop a grassroots political base to [build] support." She recalled that "It was really wonderful because . . . we just got along very well." There was a press conference held at the press club in Washington D.C. to announce the national WPC. "We invited women from all states. We were amazed women came who were ready to run."

"I'll never forget Gracia Molina [de Pick] from San Diego . . . my friend. She stood up 'hey, you're welcome to come, but we're already ready! They were ready to file."

Anguiano found her work on the ERA "conflicting with my evaluation of bilingual education." The idea emerged to form a women's project in the HEW. Women were selected to study education, business, higher education, health. Anguiano took welfare, and had access to an ample budget.

"It was eye opening when I saw that women were called the caretaker . . . not head of the family when they were a single parent," she said, adding that she saw immediately that the welfare policies did not provide education, training, childcare or transportation. "It wasn't offering them what they need to succeed in a job."

The idea came about to combine the welfare department and the department of labor, and "when the woman comes to welfare we offer training, send her to school." Some people working on women's issues said, "What are you doing, Lupe? Are you turning Republican?" They were critical of the policies she was supporting that would send mothers of young children to work outside the home.

"I said, 'I'm working with women who are Republican, Democrat, Raza Unidas,' " and she referred them to the numbers showing that nearly 65 percent of American women will choose to work when they become single. "They select to go to work. . . . The only ones who don't work are the women who do not have training, education . . . Some people in welfare [department] were thinking I was taking the safety net away, but Bella, Shirley and Gloria stood behind me."

She was developing a model program when Bishop Patrick Flores from Texas came to Washington and asked her to become the director of the Southwest Regional Office of the Council of Catholic Bishops. She took the position and worked on the welfare program in San Antonio, where it drew a lot of attention — from the local Chamber of Commerce (which contributed to the fund) to the Governor of Texas and President Reagan. \*\*\**60 Minutes* even came and did a show about the program.

"We had enough jobs for [the women in the program], we had enough money to pay for childcare and transportation. We got 500 women off of welfare."

**Let your light shine**

"The woman who really awakened me to my womanhood and to activism was Gloria Steinem. She still is my guardian angel," said Anguiano on March 8, 2020, at Mission Park during the VC Women's Day Festival in Ventura. She noted that Steinem's birthday is March 26, close to her own, and that during a recent communication with Steinem, she said, "Gloria, I'm tired." Steinem replied, " 'You have to hold in there, because I intend to live to 100 and I want you as my companion.' I have been particularly gifted with knowing the women who have been part of my life and moved me to the next level."

In terms of what gives her hope, Anguiano said "friendship" and the "many wonderful women that I have met . . . really working for the same goals," and she is "very inspired by the young people, [their work] gives me hope for the future and gives me energy. Like the Sunrise Movement, I'm so impressed with them."

Anguiano continues to advocate and speak out on issues impacting local communities, including climate change and the negative impacts from increasing oil and gas operations in Oxnard.

"There is a beautiful thing happening in our country, mindfulness, people are starting to consider their inner wealth . . . love that is within them and finding ways to express that love."

"My message is that everyone here is the light of the world. You have a light within you, and letting it shine, let your light shine, please."

1. *Uncompromised: The Lupe Anguiano Story*, Debora Wright, edited by Sara Anne Fox, Opportunity Development Enterprises, c. 2016.
2. National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010-2016.  
[nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17\\_219.46.asp?refer=dropout](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_219.46.asp?refer=dropout)
3. "Hecho en USA: Bilingual Education, More US schools teach English and Spanish, but not enough to help Latino kids." Erin Richards and

Kristin Lam, USA Today, 31, 2020. [www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/education/2020/01/06/english-language-learners-benefit-from-dual-language-immersion-bilingual-education/4058632002/](https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/education/2020/01/06/english-language-learners-benefit-from-dual-language-immersion-bilingual-education/4058632002/)

*In 2017, the UCLA Lupe Anguiano Scholarship Fund was established to support scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students at UCLA who represent the next generation of leaders working toward the advancement of Mexican Americans in society. Students with AB540 status are encouraged to apply. For more information, visit [www.giving.ucla.edu/lupeanguiano](http://www.giving.ucla.edu/lupeanguiano).*