

“Don't Tell Me: Ask Me!”

An Engaged Latina Mother's Voice

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Don't tell me
what language I must
speak!

Don't tell me
who I must
be!

Don't tell me how to
become
a better parent to
my kids!

What will you tell us
next?
Who or what or where
or even in what language
we should worship—if at all?

Don't tell me!
Ask me, instead!

What language do I
love
my children
in?

What is the color of
my dreams
when I imagine
a future
for my kids?

Which one is our
sweetest
shortest
bedtime story?
Or, is our favorite
road song
always playing on resume?

Who are we?
 Who am I? And who
 my children?
 you may ask.
 But please stop telling us
 who it is
 you would rather
 see
 instead of them and me!

Why not ask of us what
 Latin rhythms
 reverberate
 at the bottom
 of our heartbeat?
 What *dichos* and *consejos*
 can we share
 with you and you
 with me?

Don't tell us who
 we are supposed to be!
 Ask us
 who we really are
 who our parents were
 and who our children
 dream of growing up
 to be!

Let us be ourselves!
 and together
 we may grow to
 know each other
 listen to each other's
 voices
 and respect each other's
 choices!

Love our children
 for who they are
 and for who they can
 and will become –only
 with our joint work
 our mutual respect
 and our dignity!

Don't tell us who we
must be!

Don't tell me how
to be a parent!
Let me be me!
Be not-you
but me!

Don't tell me what
language I must speak
at home
or how to sooth my children
with an unfamiliar
lullaby!

The honey in our voices
And the music in
our home language(s)—mind our choices!
hold all the magic
we may need
for them to fall
sound asleep!

Don't tell me
to become you
Or a better me—and here
con mucho respeto, Gloria,
I paraphrase—
For, me-without-my-language(s)
Is not-me!
It is no-body!
Don't tell me who to be!

Ask me who I am
and be ready
to respect
our language choices
our rich
distinctive voices
and
our children's unique selves
and history!