**00:00:00**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

Um so yeah if you could just start by just talking a little bit about how and why you got into teaching.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

Well, I knew that I wanted to become a teacher ever since I was in second grade. I went to school—I was born here in the United States, but we moved to Mexico when I was a baby. And when I was in Mexico, I was always the teacher's pet and she always like let me grade and everything. So that, at a very young age like I just loved like helping others and stuff. So then when I came back to the United States in, uh, I was in third grade. You know I had to learn English and all of that, but still I was the student that was really…did really well in math, so people would like, oh they would help me learn English and I would help them learn math because I was a little bit more advanced. And, I don't know, that whole of just wanting to teach and my experience being an English language learner here in the United States, you know, just made me … to becoming a teacher and you know be there for students that had gone through the same things that I did—being … new to the country and learning another language at that age and it just stuck with me even throughout the years. Like in high school I just—I always saw myself as a teacher. Other careers interested me, but I just—being around kids and just being in the classroom, helping others. So I just knew from second grade that I was gonna become a teacher.

**00:01:30**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

That's incredible. I mean how deep that that goes back, it really shows that this is really a calling or like a vocation for you—that's incredible. And so, can you talk to us, then, a little bit about where you teach or where you've taught and maybe just a little bit about the school communities that you've taught in and both the unique assets that those communities have or any unique challenges faced by your students. Just anything, just some background or context about where you teach and what your teaching experience has been like.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

Okay, so for…so I went to school in California from third grade to high school. In high school that's when I made the switch to Arizona and after, I graduated from Arizona. So just the difference in between, I noticed a difference in between the two school systems and that really got me to thinking into like later on where I was going to teach. Because when I moved to Arizona, to the border town, it was like a huge culture shock for me, because it was like pretty much 95% Hispanic population to compare to where I was in California. So, then I…moved from the border town to Phoenix and that's where I did my—I went to ASU. And then once I graduated and while I was getting my degree, I started teaching. For my student teaching year, it was in South Phoenix so it was at a school—it was the biggest school in South Phoenix. I had about 800 to 900 students and from there, the population of the school was different. It was about, still it was more of like—there was a big Hispanic population, the majority was African American and then the white student population was less. So, as far as teaching, the faculty, I was like one out of three, I think, Hispanic teachers at the school, majority being Caucasians. And then, so I student taught there, and I—by the end of the school year before I graduated I got hired as a long-term sub because the school had like some sort of deal with the district where you would pass the test, you could get higher before we graduated. So I finished my student teaching year being a long-term sub in that school and I stayed at that school for three more years, I believe.

And then my goal was to always come back to my community for where I had graduated high school and, you know, to serve my community. So after, I said I was in Phoenix, and I moved back home and I taught at a school where it was like a 400—it was a rural school, we’re considered rural over here, and it was about 400 students and now again the majority population now again was Hispanic students. And we did have—the school that I was particularly at in that district, we also serve the Native American population here in the area. And then I made another move because of my husband's job to even a more rural area in Arizona where it was just a one K-8 school with about 125 students. Small town, snowbirds traveling and in the agriculture… The families from the school, they work the fields, which is the same for the majority of my home city. And again, I was like the only one out of two Hispanic teachers at that school, that school that I taught at. So I've taught in the city, I’ve taught in a more rural school with 400 students, and then a really rural school in the middle of the desert, middle of nowhere with about 125 students.

**00:05:32**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

Wow that's a really wide range of experiences. Can you maybe talk a little more about the kind of challenges that you faced as one of only a few Hispanic teachers at some of these schools, whatever you're comfortable sharing about that.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

Yeah I think, well being, because this is only my eighth—it's going to be my eighth year teaching um. I actually—from my personal experience I've always been supported by other teachers and I've learned so much from other teachers. Um sometimes the only thing would be where they—you know certain comments some teachers would make because they don't understand the culture, or they don't understand—or maybe they don't take the time to understand the culture. And most of them do mean well but just if we had a better understanding and really understood other people's culture, I feel like sometimes they wouldn't be so biased or it would help with their bias because those are like some of the instances that I had where—just one time I had a teacher say, “Oh they should learn English.” You know, and that like—oh my gosh I was like, “Woah no,” like, you don’t—that’s not professional, you shouldn’t be saying that. How come you don’t learn a second language to better serve your community? And so that's just, I think that that one has been the one that's always stayed. And again, they were a very very dedicated educator and stuff but it's just you know we all bias one way or another, but I feel like it would really—I feel like as teachers we—there's a certain responsibility that we have to better serve our communities as well and—but overall that's the one instance I can think of. But overall I've been very lucky to have great mentors at the schools I’ve been at, you know they've always been very supportive and if I had had any ideas you know they have welcomed me and everything. I mean I was the teacher of the year, at one of—my second school that I worked at. Then, last year, at the last school that I was at—you get nominated by the staff, I was nominated at the last school as well, I was a teacher of the year, I got the county and then that I got the Arizona rural school teacher of the year, so I can say, like that happened because.

**00:08:07**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

That's incredible, congratulations yeah

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

Thank you. A huge part of the reason why I was able to do it is because of the support that I had—the educators, amazing educators I work with, the amazing educators that I learned from. So and just like that experience working at a big school, you know, in the city to more like a mid-sized school to like a really rural school, I think all of those experiences like really helped me, you know, become the teacher that I am now.

**00:08:37**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

Wonderful, thank you so much. Yeah that I really appreciate that response. Um so I guess this is, this is the time when we can jump into 2018 and Red For Ed and the teacher strike and um if you could maybe just start by talking about how and why you started getting involved with some activism surrounding that and if you want to just tell the story from the beginning, go for it, and I can just interject as you go along if i've got follow up questions.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

Okay, well, I mean that brings it all back to coming back to the United States, and you know wanting to achieve that American Dream. You know our families being the first generation college graduate with a bachelor's with a master’s. You're being sold this dream of like, “Oh, you get an education, you're going to be just fine financially like you'll have a good future.” And so you know I fell for it. It's like, “Oh, I need to—I'm going to leave town, I'm gonna have a scholarship, I'm gonna go out, I'm gonna get my bachelor's degree, I’m gonna be the first one in my family,” and all of that. So then once my first year teaching came, and I mean at the time I knew I wasn't going to become rich off of teaching, but I was like well l have a bachelor's degree I should be able to make enough money, you know, to support myself. I shouldn't depend on my husband to, you know—I have a bachelor's degree, he doesn't, like I should be just fine. And first year teaching, my salary, I was like, “I'm barely making ends meet, like I can barely,” you know, with student loans kicking in and everything I was like… All the hours that I was spending away from my family, you know, it was supposed to be this thing where you're working Monday through Friday. You have enough money to go back home to travel, you know, help out your parents, which is like one of the biggest things of me wanting to—because my parents are field workers and it's like I should be able to provide for them. Like they shouldn't be out in the extreme heat or extreme cold anymore because I have a bachelor's degree and I'm a teacher.

But I mean first year I didn't—I was one that was never—I was not an activist prior to 2018. I had really no idea what was going on in Arizona, with all the everything, you know, defunding schools and all of that. So then, when Red For Ed came, the first two-three years of teaching I always wanted to get involved and I would see like different Facebook groups advocating for teachers. But I was a new teacher, I just didn't know how to help or like what to do. And at the first school that I was at, our association, association or union did not, was not—it was there, but it wasn't like all the teachers were part of it. So I didn't have that whole thing of like, “Oh join.” I mean, I was told to join, but I couldn't afford it first. That was the main reason, it's like I cannot afford any more out of my paycheck, like I'm having to pay my student loans, you know, so then when I didn’t join my association at the first years of teaching, once I moved back home that first time, that's when I saw just randomly on Facebook like this group was created. They were asking for people to moderate the page, so I was like, and I saw that some of my colleagues from back in Phoenix were going to attend this Facebook event to just wear a red shirt so I was.

**00:12:13**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

called sorry.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

Arizona Educators United.

**00:12:16**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

got it.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

They were—well it started as Arizona Teachers United and then we switched the name. But I just saw they were willing to attend this event. So then, then I joined the event, I found the group, and then they said they were looking for moderators so I just volunteered. I was like, I mean I have—at that time I was away from my husband, he was staying in Phoenix because of his job, so I was back home, on my own. So I was like “Okay, I have more time, I guess, not free time but I'm able to help more this time around.” I didn't know what that was going to look like at all, no idea of what it was going to turn into. So then I just volunteered and then next thing I know we're like meeting, like there's like 10 of us meeting online. And then that's when I just quickly started learning everything that was going on. And then I started seeing like, “Oh my gosh, I thought it was just me that was like struggling so much” and barely…you know, having to move back in my in-laws, just for that year til my husband came back. You know, and still barely being able to afford everything, you know. And then I saw that this is not normal, it's not just me like there’s—this whole issue has been going on in Arizona for years. There's like people that have been advocating for years. Um so then it's just the group of us, the 10 of us—nine of us that, you know, we just started organizing and then we were able to start working with um the Arizona Education Association. And I—once I learned more, I was even more upset—more pissed off and that like really motivated me to want to be more involved and, you know, be there for my students because everything started making sense. It's like well my first three years of teaching in Phoenix I would see teachers quit left and right, I would have huge class sizes, I would have, you know, people just would put more students in my classroom because I have good classroom management instead of finding a way to provide more support for those students. And everything came back to funding; it's like oh I'm having to spend all this money in my classroom, well the school can’t provide there's no funds for it and it's like the…And I remember that when I first started teaching, the teachers at the school they had just gotten a raise that year but they had been frozen like for a couple years and I was going to start making the same amount as them that had been making for the five six—the past five six years and I just remember looking at the veteran teachers that taught me so much, and I was like that is not fair for them. Like, how can I be—I'm a new teacher, I mean, why am I making the same as them when they’ve been teaching for so long, like that is not fair. I mean selfishly good for me that I'm making that but it wasn't even good money you know. But I was just so upset for them as well, and for my students that, you know, they would just keep defunding education and I just—I don't and that's when I, once everything started, when I started connecting the dots and learning more that's when I just kept going with Arizona Educators United and, you know, advocating for my students, for my colleagues because I was like, “Well if we don't do it then who’s going to do it for us.” It's like, we can't just expect somebody magically to pop up and fix everything for us. It's like, we have to do it. So, I don’t know I think I went all over the place.

**00:15:36**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

No, that was great, that was great. And so can you talk a little bit, actually, you know what, alright I'm gonna, I'm so sorry.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

It’s okay.

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

So my mother in law was coming back because there was a family member sick and things aren't going well. So I am so sorry I'm gonna have to, I have to hop off cause I have to deal with this.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

No worries, we can meet again.

**00:16:02**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

I really—your story is so compelling and so incredible and I, I will definitely—I'll just send you a follow-up text if that's okay for like part two, just 15 or 20 minutes. But I really I, yeah, I can't wait to finish, but thank you so much, I really appreciate it.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

No problem, yeah just let me know, we'll figure it out.

**00:16:21**

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

I will. Okay thank you so much.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

Alright see you.

**Joel Berger (he/him):**

Bye bye.

**Vanessa Arredondo:**

Bye