

March 30, 2003

Dear Teachers of Norman and Ivan Flores at Kenwood Academy:

Before you take charge of the classrooms in which our sons are enrolled, ask yourself, why you going to teach an imigrint child. What stereotypes do you bring with you into the classroom?

What values, class prejudice, and moral principles do you take for granted? Please remember that "different from" is not the same as "worse than" or "better than", and the yartstik you use to measure your life satisfacrily may not be appropriate for their lives. The word "culturally deprived" was invented by good meaning middle class white teachers to describe something they don't understand.

Many teachers, unfortunately, seem to see their role as a rescuer. Norman and Ivan (ages 13) do not need to be rescued; they do not consider being Asian American with a Philippine heritage as unfortunate. They have an Asian culture older than many; they have meaningful values and a rich and varied background. However strange it may seem to you, you have no right to do or say anything that may imply to both of them that it is less than satisfactory.

Like most imigrint children their age, and whose parents like we must make a decent living in a new harsh world, Norman and Ivan are both competent. They can take care of themselves, prepare a meal for themselves and clean up afterwards and care for each other. They know the neighborhood like the back of their hands because they must survives on the streets where we immigrants live. They are not use to asking permission to do ordinary things that are part of normal living. They are seldom forbid to do anything, and they are allowing to decide for themselves whether or not to act.

They are not self-conscious in the way other children are. Nobody has ever told them their efforts toward independence are cute. They are young human beings, uprooted from their native country, energetically doing their jobs, which is to get on with learning in new and sometimes strange surroundings. Our sons will respect you as a person; they will expect you to do the same with them.

Norman and Ivan learned English as a second language in Philippine schools, with non-native English speaking teachers. As a result, they have accents like any other book-learned English speakers; but are not linguistically handicapped. They have a useful vocabulary. If you will take the courtesy and time to listen and observe carefully, you will see that they and the other immigrant children of the same ethnic background communicate very good among themselves and other immigrants. They speaks functional English very effectively with facial expressions, gestures, body movement and use of personal space.

Will you helps our sons love literature, or will you teach them that they have a reading problem? Will you helps them develop problem-solving skills or will you teach them that school is where you try to guess what answer the teacher wants? Will they learn that their own sense of value and dignity is valid, or will they learn that they must always be appalogetic and should always be "trying harder" because they are brown? Can you helps our sons acquire the intellectual skills they need, without at the same time, imposing your values on top of those they already have?

Respect our sons. They are persons. They have the right to be themselves. We don't understand your IEPs because as far as we are concerned, the school and you have no right to attach any disadvantaged label on them.

Yours for a better awareness of immigrant children,  
Manuel and Lupe Flores, Concerned parents