



FOLKLORE WITHIN COLEGIO REFOUS

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Colegio Refous is an elementary school In Cota, Columbia, just outside of Bogota. Just like any other school or organization the students and faculty of Colegio Refous make up their own folk group. What makes a folk group are the similarities those people within the group share. When you are around the same people every day, as the students and teachers at Colegio Refous are, you begin to do many things similar to that of the people around you. Not to say the members of the Colegio Refous folk group are all the same, but its members do have all sorts of things in common like the games they play at recess, what foods they eat at lunch, etc. which I will focus on later in much greater detail. Understanding as many of the similarities between the students of Colegio Refous is essential in understanding the folk group as a whole. I've interviewed a former student of Colegio Refous and reviewed secondary sources in order to further this understanding and define the folk group as accurately as possible.

Brief History of Refous

Colegio Refous isn't easy to research and resources such as the internet lack a lot of information that is needed to be able to really learn about the community in depth. Given the circumstances, primary sources would seem to be the best way to get valuable information. When I interviewed David Camargo I was privileged to be interviewing a primary source as David attended Refous for 9 years starting in kindergarten. David admitted to not remembering everything there was to know about Refous but assured me everything he did state was fact. David began to go into the History of Refous without me really even asking about it. I figure this may be because he and the other students take pride in their schools history and, although I may have had overlooked it, is indeed a part of their folk group. Refous actually means "shelter" in French. The principal of the school was actually from Sweden and David said before the principal came to Columbia he fought in some big war. His job in the war was to watch out for

enemy planes. To do this he would sit in a bell tower and if he saw the enemy approaching then he would ring the bell to alarm his fellow soldiers. The principal then constructed a similar bell tower at Refous. When I looked up Refous online the tower seems to be somewhat of an icon at the school as it appeared in many image results. The bell tower was said by David to be “one of the coolest things about it (Refous).”



Tradition

The first thing I asked David about was tradition at Refous. David was quick to note that Refous was a private school and that he couldn't remember about tradition as he would like to. I was told the students of Refous would do plays every year. Grades 1st through 5th would always put on a play for all the parents to come and watch. When the students hit 6th grade they continued putting on plays but instead of putting on a show for the parents they would now perform for the younger students at Refous. David recalls putting a parody of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. According to Living Folklore Second Edition by Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens, Tradition helps to create and confirm a sense of identity and is identified as a tradition by the community. These annually occurring plays do both, as David associates them with Refous and so do the other students, teachers, and parents that are aware of the tradition.



The only other traditions that David could recall were those that happened around the holidays. Refous was a Catholic school and most of its students followed the catholic religion so they celebrated Christian holidays such as Christmas and Valentine's Day. During

Christmas time Refous was usually out on break so David acted as if there wasn't really a lot done with it. Refous was in session on Valentine's Day or what David referred to as "a day of friendship and love." I found it interesting that Valentine's Day is actually in September in Columbia. David mentioned nothing about Going around and handing cards out like I think of when I think of Valentine's Day but instead mentioned a game called "amigo secreto" meaning secret friend in English. "Amigo secreto" was where each student would draw a name out of a box and would surprise that person with a gift on Valentine's Day.

Ghost Stories

When I asked about stories that David and his friends may have talked about he could think of only a few ghost stories. Even those were not in depth but just sort of a summary of what was said. It



was brought to my attention that the older students usually told these stories to the younger students in order to scare them. Refous was located right next to a mountain and when on recess there was an area where the students could begin to walk up the side of it. One story told about ghost that lived on the mountain and would emerge from their graves if disturbed by students. Another ghost story was one about an old grave yard under an outdoor, wooden theatre. The theatre was never disassembled for the students to see, but they were told that the cemetery was full of witches that could rise from their graves if disturbed.

Humor

David told me all about different things that made the students of Refous laugh and the jokingly used statements they would use. First we discussed a noise that the whole class would make if a student were to say or do something stupid, like dropping a plate or book. The noise the class would make was a “behhhhhh” sound, sort of like a booing.”Beh” was then followed by “Lo Lincharon” which translates to stoning a person to death from Spanish to English. David couldn’t think of any traditional jokes but when I asked him if he ever heard “your mom” jokes he confirmed that yes, they are told in Colombia, at Refous, as well. There was also many little responses that the kids would say to each other that didn’t always make perfect sense but were

acceptable because they rhymed and added a sense of humor to a not so humorous situation. An example of this would be when some one would say “Que Mira” which in Bogota meant “what are you looking in a sort of a rude way. The memorized response was “que la cara se la estira con pan y mantequilla” which means “your face is a stretch between bread and butter.” This response is almost meaningless but is only used because it sounds the same; que being repeated and mantequilla sounding like mira. Similar to this, “Tricki tricki Halloween, quiero dulces para mi y si no me das se te crece la nariz.” Just like “que la cara se la estira con pan y mantequilla,” this silly verse is recited to be funny to those giving out candy on Halloween.

Slang/ Jargon

During the interview the point was made that in Columbia slang is very vernacular. David compared it to how people in the North American north and south talk extremely different. David said it was just like that except it varied that much from city to city. When I asked David if he could think of words that were exclusive to Refous off the top of his head he said no but again reassured me that there were many and explained how different the pronunciation was. He said when he moved to America he would talk to kids Mexico and they would ask him why he didn't sound like the Columbians from the movies. He would tell them “I'm from Bogota, the movies are based off of language in Medellin.”

Food Ways

Food ways are very important to many cultures and folk groups. David and I talked about foods ways and he explained that all the food that served at Refous is organic. David described it as healthy but not tasting so great. Some examples of these organic foods would be salads and rice. Also, they did not eat in a big lunchroom like it's easy to imagine. Refous was separated in to many small school houses and you ate with only the kids in your school house. The teacher



would send a few kids to go get the food, plates, and eating utensils to bring back to the school house. Students at Refous also brought food to school that served as sort of a second lunch or snack. In his final attempts to recall food ways, David recalled the Refous cinnamon rolls. David said they were

the best cinnamon rolls he ever had and his friends at Refous agreed. He told me a story about when he went back to Bogota while he was in high school in America. He ran into a friend and they went out to eat. They ordered cinnamon rolls and they first thing David thought about was how great the cinnamon rolls at Refous were.

Gender specifics

Lots of private schools are strict with lots of gender specific rules. David said while he attended Refous he didnt really notice any gender specifics but he did admit that his age may have contributed. There were no special uniforms and both boys and girls were in the same class all day. A gender specific that David did notice was in his physical education class that all students were required to take each year. Before sixth grade both boys and girls had physical education together. After sixth grade the class was then split and boys and girls participated in physical education separately. David said besides this obvious separation, boys and girls were completely equal.

Games

In elementary school, recess is every kid's favorite part of the day. Different schools do different things and play different games. Refous has its own games that kids would play at recess. One game that David said was played was a card game called Yu-Gi-Oh. Kids would collect the cards and battle on the breaks until the cards were banned from Refous. Other games the students of Refous would play were hide and seek, monkey in the middle, and sardines. These games weren't played every day but were common and played by all different grades from time to time. Hide and seek and monkey in the middle were played traditionally but sardines is a little less common and had a twist. Sardines is sort of like hide and seek except there is only one person who hides. Everyone is supposed to look for this one person who is hiding and when they find them they begin to hide with that person. This continues until everyone finds the group that is hiding. David also mentioned a little twist that I had never heard before. David said when you found that group you had to kiss someone. This was probably against the rules but David said everyone thought it was fun and that's what they did. Despite all the other games that students would play, at Refous soccer was the most common and most loved of all the games. David made the point that the country of Columbia is completely soccer oriented to begin with. He said there are gangs in Bogota who kill over professional soccer rivalries. At Refous there are a few fields that the students would play on. There were nice fields and a really "crappy field." David



said he remembers the younger kids were playing on the crappy field and it was overcrowded. To solve the problem the two classes on the field decided to play a game each week to decide on who got the field that week. When playing for the field, each class would select the players who have been playing the best to represent them. This would happen each week for temporary rights of the field. There were also intramural tournaments at Refous. Teams of boys and girls would play until one team was victorious and rewarded with a medal.

School House Division

Something very unique about Refous is the multiple school houses on the school's campus. Each grade was put in a separate house to learn and spent the majority of their time in that building with that group of people. This made it easy to make friends and enemies. David said occasionally there was a fight between students in a school house but it was rare. Despite staying in the same school house, the students did communicate with students who were not in their class. Between each class there were breaks in which the whole school would be on at the same time. Students who had friends in other grades were able to go meet with their friends, talk, and hang out.

Religion

As mentioned, Refous was a catholic based school. The majority of its students were Catholic but it was not a requirement. If you weren't catholic, David says you were probably protestant. Refous offered a religion class for all of its catholic students but if you weren't catholic your parents were allowed to write you a note and you could have a free period instead. I asked if not being Catholic was frowned upon and David said it really didn't matter. If you weren't catholic the students were still very accepting of you and treated you the same. This sort

of acceptance of other religions is a great quality for a school to have because, as Samuel J. Ayers and Shelly Reid explain, religion has a lot to do with how many societies function and is always a topic in world news. According to Ayers and Reid, as long as Refous does not shun other religions and make false statements to strengthen Catholicism then religion at school can have many benefits.



It's easy to stereotype Catholic schools with harsh punishments and nuns walking around with rulers smacking kids. When I asked David about this he said that wasn't the case. If a student were to get in trouble the punishment was usually detention.

The students would then have to show up at school at six in the morning before school started.

David said it was sort of more a punishment for the parents because they would have to wake up and take the students all the way to Refous which was up to an hour drive for some of the students. Students who were not in trouble could catch a Grey Hound bus from Bogota or Cota to school.

Cirricula

At Refous students partake in 21 subjects per year. Many of the classes are what most consider to be standard, such as math, science, and history. Refous also offers art, music, photography, religion, ethics, P.E., and pelucheria classes, to name a few. With the variety of classes, students are given the opportunity to become very well rounded. David said that some

classes like P.E. are required to be taken every year. Lots of schools require P.E. classes in order to promote life long physical activity.

Studies also show that daily physical activity leads to increased motor skills and higher academic performance among elementary school students so requiring such a course every year comes as no



surprise. In a series of surveys taken from 2009 – 2012 by Tyler G. Johnston, from Boise State university, and Sandy J. Slater and Frank J. Chaloupka, from the University of Illinois at Chicago, a little over twenty percent of primary schools require physical activity everyday. At Refous, uniforms were required during P.E. where students would play games such as running exercises, soccer for boys, and handball for girls. The uniforms consisted of a white shirt, blue shorts provided by the school, and white socks and shoes. One class David told me about was his pelucheria class where he made stuffed animals. David said he made killer whales and stuffed animals while his class sat in silence because the teacher was very strict. The process to make these stuffed animals was first cutting out an outline from cloth. Next the students would sew around the edges but leave an open area where they could stuff cotton inside. Lastly the students would finish sewing the edges and decorate the outside with eyes and other decorations depending on the animal. In carpentry class students made shelves, stools, and other objects out of wood which is another example of the diverse set of curricula at Refous.



Conclusion

Every school in the world has qualities that make it one of a kind. Colegio Refous has a unique history, traditions, stories, jokes, slang, food ways, gender specifics, religion, and games that mold it into its own folk group. From an outsiders perspective the school may seem like any other elementary schools. With the help of primary sources we were able to see Refous from the inside and that it is not just any other elementary school and anyone who has attended the school would tell you that. David said he would remember these qualities of Refous for years to come and he thinks all the other past students will do the same.

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