

Chatterbox #168 – Interview with Paula MP

Episode description

Join Andrew as he talks to Paula, the new author of a book written specifically for adult ESL learners! Come take it easy and learn all about Paula, a Brazilian immigrant to the United States who has achieved her American dream.

Fun fact

In 2014, according to the Migration Policy Institute, about 79% of households in the United States spoke only English. The other 21% also spoke languages from all corners of the world, including Spanish, Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, French, Korean, Arabic, German, and Russian!

Expressions included in the learning materials

- The American dream
- To put yourself out there
- To put your heart (and soul) into something
- DIY
- To take it easy



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hey, everybody. My name's Andrew and you're listening to Culips.

Announcer: If you want to learn English for everyday use, you've come to the right place. At Culips, we help make English understandable. By listening to our podcast, you can learn natural expressions and conversational structure. If you're interested in learning more about Culips and what we do, check us out on Facebook or our website, Culips.com. That's C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Thanks for listening. We hope you enjoy this episode.

Andrew: Today we are very happy to have Paula Massadas Pereira here with us on Culips. Today we'll talk with Paula about her book, *How I Learned English: The Story of a Brave Mexican Girl*.

Paula, hello. Welcome to the Culips podcast.

Paula: Hello, Andrew. How are you?

Andrew: I'm very good. How are you?

Paula: I'm fine. I'm very happy to be interviewed by you today.

Andrew: Awesome, thanks. Well, we'll get right to the interview and my first question is, could you please tell us about your book, your new book? What is the story about?

Paula: Sure. Well, the book is about a Mexican girl who moves to the United States searching for a better life. It describes the challenges that she faces not only to learn English, but also to adjust to a new culture, new housing, new friends, new school, and so many other things that immigrants usually go through when they go to another country.

Andrew: OK, very interesting. So who is the target audience? Is this a book for everybody? Is it a book for kids, teenagers?

- Paula: Well, it's funny because the book was written with the adult ESL students in mind, but I was surprised when I realized that other schools are interested in reading my book as well. There are several parents who also want to read the book with their children, because the book talks about issues related to immigration. So it looks like the parents also want to educate their children with issue related to immigration in general.
- Andrew: Hmm, yeah, that would make sense. I guess if you were an immigrant and you had children, you would want to teach them about that immigrant experience. Maybe it's something that the children couldn't relate to, but is very important in the parents' life.
- Paula: That's right.
- Andrew: Hmm, cool. So, the reason why I wanted to get you on the Culips podcast is because this book is specifically written for English-language learners. How can people use this to learn English?
- Paula: Well, I believe that the book was written with very basic English structure. That was the idea when I wrote it. I didn't want to overwhelm the reader with words that they did not understand, so I was very cautious with that. And there are reading comprehension questions at the end of the book that gets the readers engaged with what happened with the main character of the book—her name is Claudia Sanchez—and they also think about their own journeys as immigrants. So that's a very interesting aspect of the book. There are vocabulary questions at the end, so it kind of forces the readers to investigate words that they don't know, so they can expand their vocabulary more.
- Andrew: Very nice. Yeah, I like this way of studying with a book, right. It's not just read the book and close it and move on but when there's comprehension questions and some vocabulary activities, you can really make the most out of your reading experience.
- Paula: That is true, and in many schools, students are writing essays about their own lives or sometimes they're doing presentations about their own journeys in front of the entire class. And that's a way to get the students to read a book and also practice their writing skills and their speaking skills at the same time.
- Andrew: Right on, very cool. So you mentioned earlier some of the themes of the book, like immigration and English as a second language. Why are these themes important to you?

- Paula: Sure. I think that's a very good question. Like you said, well, the book focuses on learning English as a second language, finding a job, developing good study skills. The fact of, that the main character is away from her family and, I guess, the idea behind it is how an immigrant can achieve the **American dream**. And as an immigrant myself, I went through very similar issues that the main character went through, because I'm from Brazil. So I believe that these are universal themes that immigrants go through when they go to another country.
- Andrew: So could we call this book an autobiography?
- Paula: Not necessarily. I have people asking me this question. It is ... I wouldn't say it's an autobiography. I would say that I have many similarities with Claudia Sanchez because I also came from another country. Claudia Sanchez works at the library to improve her English, and this is something that I also did to help me improve my English. Claudia Sanchez was afraid of answering the phone and that's something that I was also afraid of, answering the phone when I first got here in the United States. So there are many similarities.
- Andrew: OK, interesting, good. So you mentioned you're from Brazil. Where do you live now?
- Paula: Well, now I live in Southern California.
- Andrew: Southern California. Oh, very nice.
- Paula: Yes, great weather.
- Andrew: Yeah, I'm jealous. Cool. And you work at a library, as well?
- Paula: I do. I work at a library. I'm a librarian. I have my Master's in Library Science and I've been doing this since 2009, but I've worked at a library since 2001.
- Andrew: Oh, it sounds like a good place to work, at a library.
- Paula: I love it.
- Andrew: Great. And what about your experience learning English? When did you first start learning English?

Paula: Well, I started learning English when I was 11 years old, right after I came and I visited California for the first time. That was my first time away from my country and visiting the United States, and when I came back my parents decided to enrol me to take English classes twice a week. It was an after school program. And I took English classes for 9 years before I came to the United States, and it was a shock when I got here. I realized that my English was not good enough.

Andrew: Ah, OK. Well, it sounds very good now.

What are some of the ways that you studied? Do you have a favourite study technique?

Paula: Well, I think, I was thinking about this and what I really tried to do, I never missed classes.

Andrew: OK.

Paula: I always had my book with me. I was sitting right, very close to the instructor. I took notes of everything the instructor said. I never put my pen down. I had my notebook and I wrote every single thing down so I would be able to go back home later and read everything again. And I made sure I spoke English as much as possible during the day, that I watched TV in English, that I listened to the radio in English, that every conversation that I had was in English. It was hard and painful and I couldn't do this the entire day, but I really tried my best.

Andrew: Very good. Yeah, I think that's the best way, right, is just to try and live the language that you're learning.

Paula: Exactly. I don't think there's another way. I feel like if you go to school and if you learn and you have your grammar book with you, it's going to give you the foundation of the language, which is extremely important, but at the same time you need **to put yourself out there** and practice as much as possible so you can internalize the language better.

Andrew: Absolutely. And that is kind of what I'm doing right now in Korea. I'm trying to live—Korean is my second language—and I'm trying to live it as much as possible. And like you said, it can be tiring. When I come home from work, I just want to relax and watch English TV, but I try to watch Korean TV. And even when I'm relaxing, I still feel tired.

Paula: Exactly. I used to get a headache from watching TV in English, and I speak Portuguese so my only two options was to either watch TV in English or in Spanish. And that way—because I did that so many times and because I also took Spanish classes—I was able to master both languages. My Spanish is not that good, but I feel like this is the only way. You need to embed yourself in the culture as much as possible, and so you will be able to know how to pronounce the words correctly as well.

Andrew: Mmhmm. I totally agree. OK. Let's get back to your book, talking about your book. I looked at the sample that's available on your website, and I was really impressed with the illustrations that are in the book. They're very colourful and very cute, and I know that you were the artist. You illustrated your book yourself. So how did you learn to illustrate so well?

Paula: Well, that's interesting because it wasn't that easy for me. This is something that I learned recently. Um, I wrote my book and I had the desire that I wanted to illustrate it myself. But in the beginning, it sounded like a dream because I didn't know how to draw and I didn't know how to paint.

So it took me 3 years to be able to do all the paintings and the drawings that you see on the book. There were many bad drawings that I had to throw away. They were not good enough, but I **put my heart into** all my illustrations. I wanted to make them very colourful. I wanted them to motivate and inspire other people, and I guess the message with my illustrations is that if you want something really badly, if you want to make it work, you will find a way to work.

So, I got books from the library. I went on the Internet and I found pictures and videos and bought all my supplies so I could do my illustrations, but it doesn't happen overnight. Just like with English, you just have to take your time and do your part and, day by day, you get a little better. And that's the same thing that happened with me, with my illustrations. And I still feel like I'm still learning how to draw and paint, but I love what I'm doing and I like the result of what I see on the book.

Andrew: Very cool. So it's almost like the illustrations are a metaphor for the story, some of the themes in the story, too. It's just another way to approach that topic of hard work and the **American dream**.

Paula: Exactly. That's the idea.

Andrew: Cool. So maybe I know the answer to this question already, but you wrote the book yourself, you are self-publishing the book. What is the biggest challenge you face in doing everything yourself, doing it a **DIY** way?

Paula: Well, you're right, I think you already know the answer to the question. Because writing the story wasn't too hard because I had talked to so many students at my library and at different libraries. They had talked to me about their own experiences of being an immigrant. Some people cried with me because they thought that learning English was very hard, that it wasn't for them, and I always had a word of encouragement for them, saying, "Just **take it easy**, day by day. Don't think about the big picture right now. You have to go slowly." So because I had all these interactions with so many people throughout so many years, I felt like I had enough things to write. So when I wrote the book, it was very easy. I think I wrote it in a day.

Andrew: Oh, OK.

Paula: So I think I wrote it in a day, but the illustrations, like you said, was the part that took me the longest. And of course learning everything about self-publishing it, how to do it, how to market it, how to ... there were so many questions that I didn't know. So this, because it's my passion, I **put my heart and my soul into** this project, and I absolutely love it.

Andrew: Very good. And so do you have any plans in the future to write and illustrate more books?

Paula: Yes. I don't want to stop.

Andrew: You don't want to stop?

Paula: No. No, because this is my true passion. I really found something that I love. So my plan is to write more ESL books in the future, and hopefully publish one next year if I can draw and paint really fast.

Andrew: Well, it should get easier for you as time goes on.

Paula: I hope so.

Andrew: Nice. So where can our listeners learn more about your book, or even buy a copy? Do you have a website?

Paula: Yes, I do. They can visit my website, which is www.paulamassadaspereira.com.

Andrew: Or you can just visit our Facebook page or our blog and we'll have the link up there for you.

Now, Paula before I let you go, I always like to ask my interviewees five random questions that will give our listeners a sense of your personality. Is that OK with you?

- Paula: It's OK with me. I'm ready. I hope I'm ready.
- Andrew: OK. So my first question is if you could live in a book, TV show, or movie, what would it be?
- Paula: Oh my gosh. Um, I really love *Back to the Future*. I don't know. It's a very famous movie that ...I think most people have watched that movie, but it's something that I watched when I was a kid, and I think I watched it many times after that.
- Andrew: OK, OK.
- Paula: And I think I choose it because I like the idea of being able to go back and forth in time. It seems exciting to me, so I would pick that movie.
- Andrew: That's a great answer. Yeah, time travel would be really, really fun.
- Paula: Exactly.
- Andrew: OK, good. Question 2: if you could master one skill that you don't have right now, what would it be?
- Paula: Oh boy. That would be ice skating.
- Andrew: Ice skating. Oh, interesting. Why ice skating?
- Paula: Well, I think it is so pretty. I always loved it ever since I was a kid, and this is something that I decided to do when I became an adult. So last year, I registered to learn how to ice skate but I realized that it will take me a lifetime to become as good as those professional figure skaters that you see on TV. So unfortunately it would require me a lot of time but I would love to know how to do all those beautiful spins, but I don't think I'll be able to do it.
- Andrew: You'll have to come to Canada and visit the Culips team, and we can go ice skating in the winter.
- Paula: That would be fun.
- Andrew: OK, question 3: what's your idea of a perfect day?
- Paula: Oh, perfect day. There's so many things I could do on a day. Well, I like the idea of spending a day at a wide sugar sand beach with crystal clear water, and just stay there for hours listening to the waves. That's perfection to me.
- Andrew: That sounds like a pretty perfect day, I have to admit.
- Paula: Yes. When the weather's hot and the water temperature is just perfect.

- Andrew: Awesome. OK question 4: would you rather live in the city or the country?
- Paula: OK, well, I'm a city girl. I think I love the country lifestyle too, just to visit and to enjoy nature and take a break from the crazy city life with too many cars and pollution and noise. I love the idea of getting away and escaping, but just for a few days because I feel like I need the noise back in my life too, which is very crazy to say, but I think I'm a city person.
- Andrew: OK, fair enough. And last question for you today is: what's on your bucket list? What's one thing on your bucket list?
- Paula: Just one? I have so many. I feel like I want to do so many things in my life. There's always something new that I'm coming up with. Well, one thing would be to write and illustrate more ESL books, but I definitely want to continue at my work, inspiring so many ESL students. I also teach classes to ESL students. I show them how to conduct research, and hopefully in the future I would love to open an online store featuring all my drawings and paintings and having my drawings and paintings on some products like t-shirts and mugs because people have been asking me about it, so that's something else that I have in mind. I'm sorry, I think I gave you more than one.
- Andrew: No, that's OK. Good. Well, Paula thanks so much again for coming on the Culips podcast. We really appreciate it.
- Paula: Sure, you're very welcome. And I hope that my story, that my book can inspire all the listeners all over the world, and it's very exciting to know that you're going to be listening to this podcast. And I am a very friendly person—I hope I am—so if you feel like you wanted to contact me, go to my website, send me an email, go to my Facebook. I also have a Facebook page too, which is Paula Massadas Pereira and just join it and talk to me. I want to hear from you. I want to hear what you thought about the book.
- Andrew: Awesome. Thanks a lot, Paula. Have a great day.
- Paula: You too. Take care, Andrew.
- Andrew: Well, that about wraps it up for us today. I certainly hope you enjoyed listening to my chat with Paula. It was really great to connect with her and learn about her new book, and I do hope that you go and check it out.
- Remember to visit our website, Culips.com. It's the place where you can learn all about Culips and what we do, as well as it's the place where you can sign up to become a Culips member and get all of the extra study materials that comes along with Culips membership.

We'll be back soon with another Culips episode. Talk to you then. Bye, everybody.

Detailed Explanations

The American dream

In the United States, there is the belief that every single person has the ability to become happy and financially successful if they work hard enough. **The American dream** is this state of achieving financial success, and the comfort and happiness that comes with a good job and good pay. **The American dream** is special because it applies to all people, immigrants included. This belief is a very important part of Americans' social understanding of their country and their culture.

In this episode, Paula talks about how the character in her book strives to attain **the American dream**. In other words, Paula's character comes to America with the belief that, if she is persistent and works very hard, she will be successful.

Paula herself is an example of someone who has achieved **the American dream**. She came to America as an immigrant from Brazil, not knowing much English, and through hard work and determination has made a life for herself in California.

Here are a couple more examples with **the American dream**:

Jesse: Do you remember my friend Una, from Iceland?

Ann: Yeah, I met her a couple years ago at a dinner party, right?

Jesse: Yes, that's her! I just had coffee with her last week. I remember she was really worried that she wouldn't be able to get a good job here and would have to eventually go back home, but she's doing so well! She just finished doing a Bachelor's degree in Computer Science and got an awesome job as a junior software developer—and she's engaged!

Ann: Wow! Sounds like she really achieved **the American dream**!

Doug: Hey, Leila, how's it going?

Leila: Really well! I just landed my dream job.

Doug: That's amazing!

Leila: I'm so happy about it! I'm especially excited to tell my mom. I know it's been hard for her that I'm living in the US, so far from home. She's always hoped that living here would mean I could achieve so much more than I could at home—**the American dream**.

To put yourself out there

To put yourself out there is an expression that means asserting yourself in ways that might be emotionally uncomfortable but could lead to positive practical outcomes.

Native English speakers will most often use ***to put yourself out there*** when talking about jobs or romantic relationships. **Putting yourself out there** in terms of jobs means not being afraid to apply for lots of jobs, hand out resumes, and self-promote. In terms of romantic relationships, **putting yourself out there** means not being afraid to go out, meet new people, and ask them on dates!

So, ***to put yourself out there*** means not staying at home, but going out into the world and trying to achieve something!

Here are a couple more examples with ***to put yourself out there***:

Jocelyn:	Oh man, David, I'm so stressed out.
David:	What's wrong?
Jocelyn:	I'm so broke! I just can't seem to find a job.
David:	That sucks! Are your interviews not going well?
Jocelyn:	I haven't had an interview yet!
David:	Darn! Are you handing out a lot of resumes and no one's calling?
Jocelyn:	Well, no. I've only handed out a couple.
David:	That's your problem right there! You really need to put yourself out there . You're never going to get a job if you don't keep sending out resumes!

Charlotte:	Hey, Ted—I haven't seen you in forever. How've you been?
Ted:	I'm doing great, Charlotte. I just got married!
Charlotte:	Wow! I remember that you had a lot of girl trouble in the past, so what happened?
Ted:	I put myself out there , and it really worked. I had a crush on my wife for a while and I finally got up the courage to ask her out. Turns out she had a crush on me too!

To put your heart (and soul) into something

When you **put your heart into something**, you give all the time, energy, and dedication you can to that thing. **Putting your heart into something** means working as hard as you can to achieve your goals. You will most often hear about someone who **puts their heart into** their work or creative pursuits.

In this episode, Paula talks about **putting her heart into** her illustrations, despite the fact that she started out not knowing how to draw or paint. So, Paula means that she put a lot of her energy and free time into practising and getting better at illustrating.

This expression is interesting because it can be said three ways, all with the same meaning. You can say “**to put your heart into something**,” “**to put your heart and soul into something**,” or “**to put your soul into something**,” and they all mean the same thing!

Here are a couple more examples with **to put your heart and soul into something**:

Adrian:	Hey, Olivia, how's the new job going?
Olivia:	It's going pretty well! I didn't think I would like working as an executive assistant, but I love it.
Adrian:	Oh yeah? What's so good about it?
Olivia:	Well, my boss is a really cool woman. She really puts her heart and soul into her work. It's gratifying to work for someone who is so dedicated and passionate. She's also appreciative of all the hard work I put in.
Adrian:	I totally understand. It's so nice to have your work recognised and valued.

Liam:	Hey, Kelly! How's it going?
Kelly:	Pretty good! I just came from my dance class.
Liam:	I didn't know you danced!
Kelly:	I just started a little while ago. I wanted to learn so I could feel more strong and confident in my body. I've ended up really enjoying it and spend almost all my free time at the studio.
Liam:	It sounds like you're putting your heart and soul into your new hobby. That's great!

DIY

DIY is an abbreviation of *do it yourself*. Broadly, **DIY** is a building, repairing, creating, or modifying things yourself, instead of paying a professional to do those things for you.

While **DIY** started out referring primarily to home improvement and home repairs, the range of things you can now **DIY** is endless! There are many, many tutorials on the Internet for how to do almost anything **DIY**: from making projector screens or doing plumbing repair to creating zines or recording music.

As Andrew mentions in this episode, Paula self-published her book. So, Paula's book is an example of a completely **DIY** project; she wrote, illustrated, and published the book herself!

Here are a couple more examples with **DIY**:

Irving:	Hey, Veronica, that's a really nice dress you have on.
Veronica:	Thanks, Irving! I made it myself.
Irving:	Wow, I'm really impressed! I could never imagine trying to make my own clothing.
Veronica:	It's not that hard! I started out making really simple stuff. If you can get your hands on a sewing machine, you could learn too!
Irving:	I don't have the patience. I can't even put together IKEA furniture—I definitely couldn't DIY my own clothes.

Brock:	How was your weekend, Helena?
Helena:	Pretty good overall, but part of it was just brutal.
Brock:	Oh yeah? What happened?
Helena:	Well, I just moved into a new place, and I got the idea that I was going get into the DIY spirit and put up some floating shelves. That was a bad idea.
Brock:	How so? They're just shelves, right?
Helena:	I put the first one up three times! The first time it was super crooked, the second time it fell off the wall and into my foot, and then the third time I just gave up. It's not strong enough to hold anything but a couple of pictures, but I'm done with it!

To take it easy

To take it easy means to generally stay calm, relax, and not get upset. You can use **take it easy** as a piece of advice to avoid either physical or mental strain.

When Paula talks about giving advice to people who were anxious and stressed out about learning English, she says to, “Just **take it easy**, day by day.” This is an example of **take it easy** referring to mental strain. In this example, **take it easy** means to not get stressed out or worry too much. Instead, Paula suggests that you take the task of learning English slowly.

As mentioned above, **take it easy** can also refer to avoiding physical strain. If you sprain your ankle, a doctor might tell you to **take it easy** on the ankle. In this case, **take it easy** means to avoid doing too much with the ankle, like going on a long walk or a hike.

Here are a couple more examples with **to take it easy**:

Mercia:	How’s it going, George? You look a little stressed.
George:	I guess I am pretty stressed. I have this exam coming up that I just can’t fail! I’ve worked out a schedule for the 2 weeks leading up to the exam.
Mercia:	Being prepared is a great way to avoid being too stressed out.
George:	The schedule is perfect. If I study for just 5 hours every day, I can cover all the material on the exam twice over. Then I’ll have time to do two practice tests a day.
Mercia:	Woah, George, that’s an insane schedule! You really shouldn’t be working that hard. You have to give yourself some time to take it easy and give your brain a break.

Carmen:	Hey, Richard, how’s the broken leg?
Richard:	A lot better, thanks! I’m getting the cast off next week.
Carmen:	That must be exciting! Are you going to get out and start running again soon?
Richard:	No—unfortunately, I still need to take it easy for a few more months.

Quiz

1. What does DIY stand for?

- a) don't irritate yaks
- b) dancing in Yellowknife
- c) do it yourself
- d) decorate items yellow

2. True or false: The American dream is the belief that anyone can be successful if they are lucky enough.

- a) true
- b) false

3. Putting yourself out there involves:

- a) being assertive and trying new things
- b) being scared and staying home
- c) being frustrated and writing angry letters
- d) being happy and getting anything you want

4. When you put your heart into something, you:

- a) dream about doing something, but never try
- b) try once and give up
- c) try hard to succeed
- d) are not interested in it

5. When you take it easy, you:

- a) get excited and are super productive
- b) relax and avoid stress and strain
- c) worry and stress about your life
- d) complain and annoy your friends

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.b 3.a 4.c 5.b

Episode credits

Today's guest: Paula Massadas Pereira

Host: Andrew Bates

Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates

Audio editor: Andrew Bates

Transcription: Transcript Heroes Transcription Services

Learning materials writer: Morag St. Clair

English editor: Stephanie MacLean

Webmaster: Hussain Mohammed

Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima

Project manager: Jessica Cox