

**Claire Darmstadter**

Hey everybody, I am joined by Don Hones, UW-Oshkosh professor who specializes in English language learners and bilingual education. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

**Don Hones**

You're welcome.

**Claire Darmstadter**

So it's a little bit difficult to pick a place to start, since you've done so much with so many different languages and types of education models and different students. But perhaps most helpful would be if you could just give us a background on your personal language learning and education experiences and kind of how you initially got into the field of education?

**Don Hones**

Certainly, yeah, well, I grew up in a big family, I was one of the youngest, number 9 out of 11. And my older brothers and sisters are always bringing home friends from other places. We had people coming through the house from Iran, we had people coming through from China, Japan, Mexico, that were friends that they would meet along the way. We had very good family, friends who were Iraqi. And their child was always at our house hanging out with us. So even though it was Southern Michigan in the 1960s, I had a lot of connections, I was very lucky that way, a lot of people who were around me who opened up some, I guess you could say some perspectives about culture and language and that sort of thing. When I was in high school, I took French, we didn't start any languages before high school in those days, where I was at, and had a chance to take a trip to Montreal, which was pretty cool to practice it a little bit. What I've learned early on about myself is I'm fortunate that I approached language and the practice of it, like a game. I don't know if everybody does that. I know some people are very nervous to try things out, I kind of enjoy it. And I don't need a lot to go on. In fact, some people, some people close to me, that bothers me a little bit that I'll start writing out phrases and things but don't really know what I'm talking about. But it has encouraged me to keep going and to engage in the practice. I had the opportunity when in graduate school to study some Arabic and to and to go to Tunisia, to spend some time there. While there I met somebody who was from Spain who said you ought to come and teach English over in a school that I work with in Spain. And so a few years later, I took him up on that. And I did. Before I went, I sat in on a community education class in Spanish where I learned probably about three phrases. I was there for about a month. And then I went to Spain and of course, I landed in Sabadell, where they speak Catalán. The only person who would speak Spanish to me was an immigrant from Adulucia, and everyone else was speaking in Catalán. If it wasn't Catalán, they wanted to speak in English. So that was my first connection with how language....first of all, I can't look at a place and say monolithically, this is what they do here. This is the culture. This is language here. That's not the case. The Catalans educated me about that. And I think the other thing that came from that was how powerful language was as a motivational thing for people to create their sense of identity. And I think they educated me a lot about that, too. So then I learned a little bit of Catalán while I was there, kind of had to, certainly learned how to listen to it. Came back and did a few other things. And then had another opportunity, started studying actually to be a teacher because I thought, well, this teaching part

was kind of interesting. I had the opportunity to go to Ecuador with a Fulbright. And, and there was the first time I've ever gotten involved with teacher preparation kinds of training because we had workshops we would do with Universidad Central and Católica in the capital. And it was really interesting getting into that and just especially at Central which was the public, free university. People were so excited, and you could definitely see that people were coming in representing the country. Like everywhere else, you start to see the difference between also how social class, culture all that plays into it. At Católica, the great cool students, lighter skinned, typically, get over to Central and much darker shades of people as well as not the designer clothes or anything like that, but very eager, as future teachers who wanted to work with the communities that they came from. So that was very educational too. But I started getting into the teacher training sort of mindset there. So that eventually I went back and got a PhD at Michigan State and focused on the teacher education part of it. Was fortunate to get a job offer in Oshkosh after that. And here at the time, 1997, they were just beginning their ESL program, licensure program, they were just starting to offer also a bilingual education, both in Spanish and in Hmong, because Hmong was, was quite present here at that time. It still is, but a little bit more recently arrived at that time. What else was I gonna say? So I was able to get here and start that up. I will say one of the things that happened here with what we got to, we can also talk about is in the mid 90s, was this tremendous beginning of the tremendous migration of a lot of Latinx people to this area of the state. After 1994, I'd say specifically, I mean, we can connect it with NAFTA, you know, the beginning of NAFTA and and someone at the time predicted 10 million people are going to have to leave the land and go elsewhere. And anyway, we had millions of people coming up here looking for work and families and such. So that transformed Green Bay. And I think not so much in Oshkosh, but Menasha, Appleton nearby, also areas where we work a lot, definitely started to transform the kind of people that were arriving there. And again, refugees of various kinds continued arriving down through the years from Kosovo in the late 90s. Lots of different places. And then, of course, most recently from Syria, and Congolese refugees who have been dispersed over different countries of first asylum that have arrived now. So for me, one thing that I really, I love about being able to be part of this work is I am always learning something new. I'm interested in culture, I'm interested in language. I am attracted to the stories of exiles too. And it may be that I have a certain ruthlessness about me, I don't know. But they compel me, there's a compelling nature of their stories that really draw me in. So that's part of it too. And then working with young people going into teaching who want to not only teach but be advocates. I am so impressed with that sense of advocacy that I see in so many of the young people becoming teachers as well as people returning to become teachers who have been in other lines of work. And, and one final thing, we've been very fortunate here at Oshkosh, for about 17 years, we had federal grants that supported not only people who wanted to get licensure, but also really helped to bring in bilingual assistance, people who were performing that really important role in the schools who, who had, who had just this. They are irreplaceable, there's work they're doing that no one else can do in terms of translating in terms of really offering a support offering that person someone can go to, but they're paid very little, or you know, and not in the summer. And one of the things I'm happiest about is that many have gone through, picked up their teaching license, some have gone on for master's degrees, some have got PhDs now. And it's a really cool thing to see that growth as well. So I feel really fortunate, and I'm really happy to have been involved thus far.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, that's incredible. And that's like a perfect segue into what I was about to ask next. Because, for me, you know, we talk about teacher shortages and these areas of high need. And we see especially people who have multilingual skills, like that's a very high need skill to have when you're working in education in Wisconsin, as well as in other places. And as you very clearly laid out like there are tons of different students with many different language backgrounds we're trying to help and best support, and you kind of talked a little bit about the grant work you're doing and different scholarship opportunities to maybe make it a little bit more financially viable. But how do you reach these multilingual individuals to kind of pull them into education or show them what career paths are available? Because I feel like a lot it's not that we don't have multilingual individuals, but it's the connection of getting them into education. That's the hard part. So how do you kind of work with that? And how does the money support that?

**Don Hones**

But that's a huge question, Claire, and I think one, one thing that I don't want to just say it's about money, because it's not just money, but money is important. And a lot of people will not be able to go to higher education without funds. And I feel that because of the things that you've suggested, because it's a high need area, because these are very talented people, multilingual people, I mean, I'm thinking of the Congolese refugees, who are typically it might be five, six languages that they have, you know, it's just astonishing the talents and the and the knowledge and knowledge about the world and culture that people have. But we're not providing the funds that they need to to go forward. And I think that's a huge thing right there. To have financial support, and have that available for people going into an especially high need career. And I would say not just teaching, but probably nursing and some other areas too. Secondarily, I think, for the ESL teachers, and bilingual teachers, when they're there, they're tremendously supportive typically, they typically are the go to people that young people and their parents, folks will go to, that they can talk to. But all teachers have to be invested, administrators have to be invested in it. And I think some places that works better than others, some are doing a better job of that than others. Some districts have a community, whatever they call them. Like, for example, Oshkosh has a refugee coordinator, and he does a real good job with that. Not every district has something like that. But I think that's a pretty key role to have someone who's looking in and, and paying attention to people. But I think getting all the teachers, especially in the academic areas, invested in seeing, you know, you see this student, and if you think they're not paying attention, it might just be they don't know what's going on. It's not that they don't care, you know, or if they're tired, it might be they worked, you know, they just get off a night shift. You know, my friend who just retired shared with me that one of the people who's helping me with a Congolese project right now, study project, when he came to Oshkosh, she was studying during the day and working in a stone quarry at night, you know, and that's the other thing is just the bring to people's attention that, yes, someone may have been accepted as a refugee or received asylum, but it doesn't necessarily mean we're treating them really well, or that we're we're aiming them toward kinds of work that they're qualified for... might be cutting stone, breathing in all that dust, and that. That's troubling. You know, it's troubling that, and I

don't think a lot of teachers, I don't think a lot of community members get that. And I think that, that part of what I would like to do is, is bring those stories, not just to complain, but to bring the story just real, what's happening, and also the goals and ambitions and aspirations of people in front of all educators. So they can say, *wow, man, that's what a powerful story, what can we do to help?* Because I think a lot of people would like to be more that way. And I think at the university we have been talking since I came here in 1997. About -- we've had these diversity and equity goals since 1997. We're slightly more diverse in our student population than we were back then. We are no more diverse in our professors, I can tell you that. Sadly, you know, we have a long way to go. We don't represent the community the way that we could. And I think we need to put our money where our mouth is, and I'm talking specifically about University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. But I think we could probably talk about any higher ed institution.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, for sure. And, you know, I think you bring up an important point about that deficit view of students and individuals versus that asset view. And I think with language a lot, it's like, you need to learn English and people don't focus on this incredible background you have in 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 other languages and how incredible is, so for a lot of people right now we're thinking about, okay, how can we get these people into education. It's a little bit more of a hard sell, especially right now with everything going on with COVID and just all the challenges. So what kind of advice or pitch do you have to people who maybe considered education the past and are like now I don't want to or just a little bit reluctant because there are a lot of downsides, whether it's financially or the stress and the work hours or just so many other factors that can kind of take away the incentives to go into education?

**Don Hones**

No, definitely. Good question. We did something really important, I think in the state of Wisconsin, when we removed the requirements for the EdTPA. Not the EdTPA. Well, we removed those two at our institution. But we've also removed the requirements for what's that test the?

**Claire Darmstadter**

I don't have to take it yet, so I don't know!

**Don Hones**

We had those Praxis 2 tests. So they had to take these tests in the content area, before they could get licensed. And I saw people who were outstanding students, outstanding bilingual teachers, and they never went forward because of that Praxis 2 test. Well, that's gone, which is a good thing. We still have that other one, the FORT test, which is required for elementary teachers, and that should be gone. I mean, everybody who has spoken about it, who understands what is needed, would like to get rid of it. So it is a political decision. It's a legislative thing. But those things are holdups. Money is a hold up, the attitude that I think needs to, we really need to work on with people who look like me, and people who have my background is can you step outside of trying to replace yourself with yourself and think about Wow, look at all these wonderful, talented, skilled, multilingual people. They should be the next

ones coming up. Those are the ones that — how can we represent better the school kids, the kids in the schools who are minority majority? How can we represent them better? How can we start to prepare the leaders for those young people as well as the leaders of our society as it's becoming. Some places that may be happening a little bit sooner than in Northeast Wisconsin, but still, we can do what we can here. It's an attitude shift. And I think it's an attitude shift needed in the professoriate too, again, you know, we do not have a diverse professor, not at UW Oshkosh. And I'm guessing maybe at some other institutions, as well. And we need to start if we should certainly seek to happen. In the meantime, we need to start opening our viewpoint about who should come in if their English isn't perfect, well what about their Swahili? What about their French? What about their Spanish? What about all these other things? When do we start asking ourselves, wait a minute, why couldn't they do that assignment in Spanish, especially if they're going to be a bilingual teacher? You know, that doesn't mean their English can't be in pretty good shape, too. But should we expect it? We have to kind of change what we see as a good candidate to go through. And I think that's part of the process is adapting our viewpoint on that.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

For sure. And I think, I don't know, can you read my mind? Because you're asking all these questions and saying all these things are exactly what I want to talk about. And then next thing, I was kind of wondering, I know, in the past and present, you've done a lot of work with people who speak different languages, or have different ethnic backgrounds that don't necessarily match the background that you grew up with. So as someone, for example, who didn't grow up in Hmong family or speaking Hmong, how do you have positive, respectful, additive interactions with these different groups and individuals when you're writing about them and researching them if you didn't necessarily grow up in that community?

### **Don Hones**

That's a great question. What I have found is that first of all, is that people, yeah, I've been very fortunate to to meet a lot of people from a variety of different communities, a lot of different cultural backgrounds who have accepted me and have welcomed me. I'd say 99% of the time, that's been the case, whether I was a traveler, where people would be sitting on a dock and in the shores of the Mediterranean and Tunisia is somebody would bring me out a little plate of food and he's just sitting there. He didn't have to do that, you know, but that kind of welcoming that wow, that says something cultural here that is so cool, to as a traveler, but also being here, going into, I was welcomed into the Hmong community very, very early on, and in a very clear way, I've been welcomed into Congolese homes in a very clear way, into Syrian homes and just beautiful welcomes. And I think if you talk to any English language teacher, ESL teacher, and certainly any bilingual teacher, they will say the same, that the parents, the families, the people in the community are so welcoming and so supportive. That's huge. I'm sorry to say sometimes it's a big contrast to how we, the dominant group, welcomed them. But we can do better. And we can learn from that. And we can take some, I mean, that's what I would like to learn from is how can I try to at least meet people halfway, and start to extend that welcome back. But in terms of being welcomed into the community, the other thing that I remember when I was working on my dissertation with Shu Cha, and he was sharing all this stuff with me, and he says,

What about you? You know, what's your story? He said, You got to tell me yours, too. And that was a really good moment. And we want to share a lot with each other, but that is part of it, too, is you've got to be vulnerable, and share something about yourself. And along the way. And anyway, I've just felt so honored and so welcomed over the years with different students, different groups of people. And to me, it's amazing. It's an incredible experience. And I think I think that I'm at the point now, I think I've always kind of been there. But now whenever I put any research together, I always want to try to get the participants on as co-authors, and as co-presenters of whatever it is we do, because it's their stories, and it's their perspectives that are really coming forward. And that's been a really cool process too.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

And like you were talking about before, part of what needs to be done is bridging those community divides where you have people who don't know about the people that are living amongst them. They don't know about some of these refugee or immigrant communities. And I know you've done lots of other work. And there's different projects you're involved with. Is there any work, you can maybe highlight and I'll leave some links below in our footnotes for people to check out, but anything that people could read or that they could look into that you've been involved with, that might be helpful if they want to learn more about different communities in Oshkosh or the greater area?

### **Don Hones**

Sure, yeah, yeah! Well, I have had a nice relationship down through the years with the magazine Multicultural Education magazine out of San Francisco. And there's a number of things that have come through them, kind of some of the recent stuff. I finally got back to some long term friends of mine here in Oshkosh, well the Fox Valley. Mayra Pasayes who came up from El Salvador at the age of 15. She works with the Fox Valley Technical College and Txerthoj Vang, who is a bilingual assistant and assistant teacher with the Oshkosh school district who came over in 1981, something like that, from camps in Thailand. And I've known them all these years. I thought, you know what, we got to share some things. So we have something out that is basically a lot of each of their stories and called Refugees With or Without Papers, because my Mayra, I mean, she was fleeing death squads. But she came up undocumented. I mean, so it starts a question that idea who gets considered a refugee or not? Right? That one is out. I'll have to look it up for you. But that came out. I think about a year ago, a year or two ago. We have one that is in process right now that is looking at a summer program we engaged in, that just kind of happened because they needed some but they needed a summer program and I happened to be volunteering at the literacy council. They said oh, I said, I'll help out, they said oh you can do it. So we kind of put it together in a few days and it was two of the participants and two of our undergraduate students at the time who are now, one's a teacher and one's about to become, actually I think they're both teachers now. And they, those two and a young woman from Syria and a young woman from Vietnam were best friends. They are the co authors in that and talking about that summer program and how it kind of kept them inspired in terms of going on their career goals. And those two are both studying to be nurses right now. Which is pretty cool. Yeah. So there's a couple of recent things that I can point to, and I won't go on and on though I did hear from Shu Cha the other day, he's stuck in Thailand because of

the pandemic he was visiting there with his wife to do some missionary work and out of the blue I hadn't heard from him in 20 years. So it's nice to hear back from people that you worked with down through the years too and see how they're doing.

### **Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah, for sure. Oh, thank you so much. And yes, we will include all the different things you can send me some more and we'll leave them for people to read. And just one last question. So a big focus here is celebrating multilingualism; I know you speak Spanish you're learning a little bit Swahili right now and if you can share a little bit why multilingualism is important, if you want to say it in a couple of different languages that will be awesome, but just kind of anything that we haven't mentioned that you want to mention in whatever languages you want to employ.

### **Don Hones**

Okay, bueno, voy a empezar en español porque tengo un poco más vocabulario. Yo nunca estudié español en las clases, solo en esta clase de la comunidad. Y entonces, aprendí en España, leyendo El País, el periódico, y hablando con mi amigo de Andalucía porque los castellanos no quisiera hablar en castellano. También estoy casado con, mi esposa es de Guatemala, entonces puedo escuchar bastante español en la casa. Pero yo creo que los idiomas son muy importantes porque somos un país de muchos idiomas. Somos un país multilingüe. Y es una lástima cuando las personas pierden sus propios idiomas. Mis antepasados fueron de Irlanda y los irlandeses, muchos perdieron su idioma durante la hambría porque los británicos y bueno los de las iglesias solo apropiaban la comida para los que pudieron, como se dice, renunciar su catolicismo y cosas así su idioma y todo en inglés. Entonces, es un derecho humano, los idiomas. Voy a parar porque he hablado bastante. Solo voy a decir algunas cosas en Swahili porque es buena práctica para mí.

*[I'm going to start in Spanish because I have a little bit more vocabulary. I never studied Spanish through classes, only through community. So I learned in Spain, reading the newspaper El País, and conversing with my friend from Andalucía because the Castellanos didn't want to speak in Castellano. Also my wife is from Guatemala, so I get a lot of exposure to Spanish being spoken at home. But I think languages are important because we are a country of many languages. We are a multilingual country. And it is a shame when someone loses their own languages. My ancestors were from Ireland and many Irish lost their own languages during the Famine because the British and well, those from the church, only gave food to people that could renounce their Catholicism and things like that -- your language and everything in English. So, languages are a human right. I am going to stop here because I have spoken enough. I am only going to say a few things in Swahili because it is good practice for me.]*

*Jina lako nani* which is what's your name. And I'm learning it on Duolingo. And I by the way, I will give a send up to Duolingo. Because even though it seems real simple, if I do it for about 15 minutes a day, I've got a very, I've got a big vocabulary in my head right now. If I was dropped down in Tanzania, I believe that I could probably function somewhat given a few days. I'm gonna give a send up to Duolingo and things like that that are out there. People can pick up languages, but definitely the best way to get a friend, get somebody in the community and

practice with them. Do a two way exchange. And if you're a teacher, learn a few phrases even if it's just hello in every language spoken in your classroom. Right. I think that's a really, really important thing. And for parents when they come in, that's going to make them smile.

**Claire Darmstadter**

Yeah. Well, thank you so much. I know this is way longer than I was initially planning for but I so appreciate all your perspectives. And wow, I wish I could take all your classes because they sound so interesting. So thank you so much.

**Don Hones**

Well, Claire, great talking with you. And the problem is when you talk to professors, they're going to talk too much. You're welcome. Have a good day.