

Claire Darmstadter

Everybody, I am joined today by Josh Forehand, principal of Nuestro Mundo in Madison. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me!

Josh Forehand

It's my pleasure. Thank you.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, so first would be great if you could just give us a really general overview of your educational and linguistic background and how you arrived at your current position.

Josh Forehand

Okay, well, I didn't study education as an undergrad. I studied English and history. And I kind of fell into teaching. Teaching kind of found me as I was traveling in Central America. In Honduras I actually ran out of money and had to find a job. And there was a bilingual school there, and they needed a teacher last minute, this was in August. And so they spoke English. So they gave me a job. And I taught third grade, had no idea what I was doing. But every bit of energy that the kids threw at me, I threw right back at them. And we kind of figured it out together and kind of felt like I had a knack for teaching. I enjoyed it. And so I went back to the United States, found a job teaching in a bilingual program outside of Dallas, Texas, and did an alternative certification program as I was working, and went back to Honduras a couple years and then found my way up to Madison, Wisconsin, and started working at Nuestro Mundo Community School in 2005. As a teacher, eight years ago, I became the principal of the school. And linguistically, I didn't start taking Spanish courses until high school. I enjoyed them. And then in college, I had a very influential professor who encouraged me to go study abroad one summer, summer after my freshman year of college, and I did so then I went back to Mexico every summer, and continue to take Spanish courses that way.

Claire Darmstadter

And so DLI programs have a lot of different structures and models? So can you kind of walk us through what the particular structure is at your school and any particular theories or guiding principles you ascribe to?

Josh Forehand

Sure, so, Nuestro Mundo Community School, we run a 90/10 two way immersion program. So 90/10, meaning at the kindergarten level 90% of the instructional time in the classroom is in Spanish, the target language and 10% is in English the dominant language around us. Every year we add in about 10% more English instructional time. So first grade will be at 80/20, 2nd grade to be 70/30. In fourth and fifth grade, it's about 50/50. Two-way immersion is under the umbrella of dual language immersion. It's a program in which you have speakers of the target language, which in our bars are cases Spanish speakers of the dominant language, English, and speakers who are along the continuum of bilingualism, all in the same classroom, learning together, serving as language models for each other. So they're teachers in the room, they're

experts in the room, and they're also learning from each other within the room. So that kind of sums up our program.

Claire Darmstadter

And so when looking at bilingual ed and dual language programs, specifically, there's a great opportunity to advance equity, but also the opposite, especially as these programs have become more popular among monolingual financially advantaged families. So how do we celebrate the growing popularity of these programs, while at the same time making sure that we're meeting the needs of all learners and keeping all parties involved in the decision making process?

Josh Forehand

Well, I think that's a very good question. And it's something that we have always held as a priority and are still working toward. We haven't quite found it yet. But I think it starts with your admissions policy, and ensuring that your admissions policy is one that provides equitable access to any and all families. And that's what we do. We typically will have more applications and then we have room available, so we do a lottery system in those situations. And so there you know, it becomes an issue of diversifying the pool, the candidate pool, so that you have more students of color, or students from lower socio economic situations, getting selected through the lottery system. We also have a commitment to keeping siblings together and families together. So we don't have situations where one, one sibling will have access to our program and bilingual education and another sibling won't, which is absolutely what we should do. But if you don't work really hard at diversifying your recruitment and your candidate pool, that can create a situation where more and more advantaged kids are getting in because their siblings are in. And so it kind of creates different tiers within a lottery that was created to do something good, but can have, you know, unintended consequences. So we work very hard to, to reach out to communities of color. So it's very important to our program to have Spanish language models. So we do a lot of targeted recruitment with families who speak Spanish in the home, it's also very important to us that we make our program accessible for our Black community in Madison. So we do targeted recruitment there also where we identify all students who are enrolled in a 4k program in Madison, who are pointed to our attendance area, we look at them by race and ethnicity. And we reach out, we have more intensive methods of getting information to families so they can make the best decision for their family. So that might be making phone calls, it might be, you know, getting current families involved in reaching out, particularly black families within our school who can help us reach out to black families in the community who may have access to the to the program and may not know about the program, or may be somewhat leery of bilingual education. And so those are some of the things that we've done in the past.

Claire Darmstadter

And so you just talked about the side with the students, but also it can be extremely difficult to get enough staff to work in these schools. So if there's an individual who doesn't have a traditional educational background or they don't have a bilingual license, but they may speak

Spanish, are there opportunities for them to work at your school? Or is there a process to kind of incorporate them into the school culture and program?

Josh Forehand

Yes. However, I think that the ability to speak Spanish would not be my absolute number one priority for a candidate. And obviously, we need Spanish speaking teachers, however. So I can't, I can't hire you know, classroom teachers who don't speak Spanish. But I would place you know, the ability to make connections with kids and build trusting relationships with kids and families, The ability to work in a team with other people, other teachers, the ability to provide culturally responsive and relevant instruction, I hold those things extremely high my priorities in terms of who I select to work in the school, and as a principal, one of the number one most important things I do is making sure I'm bringing the right people in to the school. So you know, we have some other opportunities such as like right now we have special education assistants who are sort of paraprofessionals and we're working with them to get into teacher preparation programs. We also have a position known as a bilingual resource teacher, which is not a classroom teacher. It's kind of a teacher who provides additional support for students, mostly for students who speak other languages, Spanish in the home. So that's kind of a nice entry point for a teacher who may not have experience or education to become a teacher. So that's kind of an intro point where they can learn on the job and learn from classroom teachers who have been doing this for a long time. I also work really hard to develop relationships with the institutes of higher education in this area to bring in practicum students and student teachers who are bilingual so that they can kind of learn — I feel like we have extremely skilled and experienced staff here at Nuestro Mundo. So they come in, and they can learn from us, they can learn how our school works. And typically, they, you know, end up wanting to work for us. And so it's kind of a, it's a mutually beneficial relationship where we're able to find qualified bilingual staff, and they're able to enter a work environment that is, that's just, you know, really fantastic.

Claire Darmstadter

And so like you were talking about a little bit qualifications includes a lot of different factors and can mean a bunch of different things. So personally, as somebody who is not a native Spanish speaker, and does not identify as Latine, I often feel a little bit uncomfortable saying, I'm going into bilingual education, because I know, I might not necessarily have as intimate of a connection to the language or culture of the speakers, and almost is kind of like *Who am I to say that I should be going to this kind of teaching?* So what are some ways that people with similar backgrounds to my own can be an advocate for all students and families and have a really positive impact knowing that despite all the classes you take, or the books you read, or the experiences you have that you're never going to know what it means to have a particular background that a lot of your students might have. But you still deeply care for your students, you just might not be able to relate on that particular level?

Josh Forehand

Oh, well, it would be a good idea to live for a significant amount of time in a Spanish speaking country. And I think that that provides insight into the culture and into the language that you can then bring back to make better and deeper connections with students and families. I think if

that's an interest of yours, if that's a passion of yours, then then that's definitely the route that you should pursue. And there is a benefit of, and a real concerted effort right now, to recruit and hire teachers of color, and native Spanish speakers. But that doesn't mean that there's not a place for people like you and me who learned Spanish later in life, who are white, but have a passion for Spanish language, have a passion for bilingual education, and who have kind of, you know, sorted through a lot of the implicit bias a lot of the less conspicuous manifestations of white supremacy. And who, you know, who can provide a quality bilingual education. I mean, ultimately, what we're doing is we're trying to set up the next generation to be self actualized and successful. So if that's if that's your passion, then then I say, go for it.

Claire Darmstadter

So the last question I asked everybody is we tell little kids and older ones, too, all the time that it's a superpower to seek more than one language. So can you give me one reason, you can answer in English, Spanish, a mix of both, whatever you want, why it's a superpower to speak more than one language?

Josh Forehand

The only reason anyone's ever hired me for a job is because I speak Spanish. That's a joke I tell. It's true. I think for me, the superpower is being able to understand your own language, your own culture and your own way of thinking and ways of being ways of interpreting the world. I don't believe that you can truly deeply understand that about yourself until you are able to speak another language, until you're able to experience another culture in a deep way. And for me, you know, I think that that's a superpower, the ability to truly understand yourself.

Claire Darmstadter

Well, thank you so much. I appreciate all your time. There are so many, so many, so many great things going on at your school and so I'm really excited for people to learn more about it, and I hope you have a great rest of your school year.

Josh Forehand

Well thank you so much. I appreciate it and you as well.