

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, today I am joined by Kathy Henn-Reinke, former UW Oshkosh Professor of Bilingual and ESL Education, WIABE member, author, and most presently super grandma helping out her grandkids with online school. So I really appreciate you taking a couple of minutes to speak with me today.

Kathy Henn-Reinke

My pleasure, I'm glad to be with you.

Claire Darmstadter

So you have a really impressive resume. And before we dive into some of that work, could you just give us an overview of your education and linguistic background?

Kathy Henn-Reinke

I have a bachelor's degree in Spanish, masters in reading, a PhD in urban education. And then I was a bilingual teacher, second and third grade, for a number of years and enjoyed that immensely in Milwaukee. And then from there, I went to Alverno College where I was the bilingual coordinator, and then to University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh as the co-director of the ESL bilingual program there, and we had a number of federal grants that we had, I think it was about over 350 ESL bilingual teachers were licensed through those programs. So we were very proud of that.

Claire Darmstadter

Yes, I have a great interview with Don Hones. So if anybody wants to learn a little bit more about what Oshkosh does, check out that one because there's some great things that you guys have done. And so I find it really interesting that you have that unique perspective of seeing what it's like in the classroom as a teacher, but also teaching teachers to be good teachers. And I don't want to date you. But I would imagine you've been in this field for a lot of years. And so you can kind of see, I don't know some changes that have happened or how the view of bilingual or multilingual education has evolved through the years. Are there any big takeaways you have about how the field has kind of changed as of recent?

Kathy Henn-Reinke

I think the biggest changes that I've witnessed over the years were, you know, like the addition of both the Common Core standards, and especially relating to bilingual education, their language standards, and those have been just game changers in the field, because it gave us so much more direction in terms of where we could go. And then bilingual programs evolving into dual language, I think, has been very exciting. So that the number of children in the state that are becoming bilingual, is expanding on a yearly basis.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And I know, I think if I understand correctly, you also do a little bit of work on trilingual education. And I know that we're expanding a little bit into the dual language bilingual space, but

I've never really heard of a trilingual program. Can you talk maybe a little bit about what that entails and why it's interesting to you?

Kathy Henn-Reinke

Well, I started because there was a district that came to us when I was at Oshkosh, that had students -- they had a bilingual program. And there were students that spoke Hmong, and they said, Well, does it make sense for them? You know, would it be beneficial for them to do a trilingual program? And so I had over two sabbaticals, then I decided to study trilingual education in Spain and Argentina. And it was just so amazing to me the capacity that that children have for language learning and how it was just, it was nothing special to them, it was just what they did, and how the schools design these programs to make sure that the children became trilingual, you know, that they developed proficiency in these three languages when they came to school. And the most amazing thing to me was that there were so many children that spoke languages other than these three languages, you know, that they came to school from families that you know, a lot of them were international students, so they spoke additional languages. So there was one little girl that I remember from Japan, who was five years old and spoke five languages. So you know, but that part about the capacity of children to learn languages has just really impacted what I've done since then.

Claire Darmstadter

And you've done tons of other work writing books and research papers and doing lots of great scholarship in this field. And I'll leave a couple links in our show notes. If people want to check out some of those pieces. Do you have a couple favorite projects or initiatives you're involved in? I know, like, the Literacy Club was something that you had kind of a big focus on. Are there any projects that you could highlight briefly about what you did?

Kathy Henn-Reinke

Well, I think the Literacy Club was the most extensive because I did that over a number of years. We started, actually started out before there were language standards and so on. And I worked with a couple of schools in Milwaukee and then in Menasha, and it was fun because it made such an impact on the students' lives that they were, you know, struggling with literacy. And then through the program, not only their skills improved, but also their self confidence. And that was just, you know, that was just the fun part to see.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And you've also -- just to add another thing to your resume --you also worked with the WIABE. Can you talk a little bit about what your work in that space has been like? I know they have an Action Coalition coming out here, just talk about kind of, in general, what that's trying to accomplish?

Kathy Henn-Reinke

Yeah, WIABE's the largest association that deals with bilingual education in the state, it stands for the Wisconsin Association for Bilingual Education. And actually, one of the things that we've been really trying to expand is before we were really mostly just known for having a conference

once a year. And we would bring in national, nationally known speakers, and then people from districts and so on that would do presentations. So now we've expanded and developed this action coalition that has two arms. One is advocacy. And so far, they've developed a parent institute and an administrators Institute. And then there's the professional development arm, which I'm involved in. And so we're looking at putting together these modules that we'll talk about in a bit for administrators and educators. But we also want to look at perhaps doing a speaker's bureau so that if districts want somebody to come in, and you know, that has expertise in a particular area that can go to the speaker's bureau, and arrange for somebody to come in, and then developing some district networks so that districts can work together with teachers to develop programs and so on.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, I read the, you know, rough draft version, and it has some great information. So I'm really excited for hopefully, when this is released a little bit later in the year that people will be able to check it out. And part of the work here is on demystifying language education kind of talking sometimes about things that people might have misconceptions about or might not know, is there, like maybe there's one misconception that people have about bilingual or multilingual education that you can kind of bust or talk about why it might not be true?

Kathy Henn-Reinke

Well, I think you think that districts struggle with the most is the notion that the pacing schedule, or that you can't compare students in a bilingual program to students in a monolingual program, that when you're in a monolingual program, and you're just dealing with one language, you progress at a certain rate, but often students that are in a bilingual program, because they're not only learning all the content, but they're learning in two languages need a little more time. And usually in well-developed programs by about fourth grade, fifth grade, they have developed that proficiency, and then they often exceed averages in terms of achievement. But just for districts to set something up so they recognize that they can't be holding bilingual teachers to the same, you know, to the same levels of achievement right away, that they need a little more space to develop that language.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And finally, in celebration of multilingualism, can you share with me one reason -- we say this a lot to our kids that multilingualism is a superpower -- can you give me one reason why that's the case?

Kathy Henn-Reinke

I think it just expands our world so much that we meet more people, we understand different ways of thinking, different ways of doing, and it just enriches our lives.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah. Well, thank you so much for your time. And all the different areas you've been involved in, I think is gonna be really helpful and interesting to a lot of different people that come at this type

of education from a lot of different perspectives. So I really appreciate your time today. I'll include some links to your work below. But I hope you have a great rest of your day.

Kathy Henn-Reinke

Thank you so much for this opportunity.

Claire Darmstadter

Yes, thank you!