

Claire Darmstadter

Hey everybody, I am so lucky to be joined today by Nicole Marinin secondary English Learner/ Bilingual Education teacher at the Luxemburg-Casco School District. Thanks for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

Nicole Marinin

Oh, you're welcome.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, so first, it'd be great if you could just give us an overview of your kind of educational and linguistic background and how you ended up teaching here.

Nicole Marinin

Sure, I've been a bilingual ESL teacher for the last 20 years. I started off my career in a different school district and I had become interested in bilingual ESL education when I was an undergraduate student at UW-Oshkosh. And when I went into the coursework down at UW-Oshkosh, as an undergrad, I didn't expect to still be teaching in it. I didn't know anything about bilingual or ESL education at the time. It was a brand new area for everybody within this part of the state. So when I started teaching, I thought, Okay, well, let's give this a try. And here I am, 20 years later. I am bilingual. I speak Spanish, I attempt to speak Spanish. And my students work with me every day. I just transferred to Luxemburg-Casco this school year, I was an elementary teacher for the last 20 years — elementary bilingual ESL teacher. So I went from not only one school district to another, but also from elementary to secondary. So it's been a lot of fun, a lot of challenges on my side, a lot of learning a big huge learning curve for me. But I'm very excited to be out here.

Claire Darmstadter

And I didn't really know much about this district or what it was prior to speaking with you. So for people who don't know, Luxemburg is a very tiny town and Casco is an even tinier town in Wisconsin. And so what I've kind of seen and learned about is in recent years, rural areas of the state have been becoming a lot more linguistically diverse from different migration trends and patterns. Is this pretty characteristic of your district where you do have a lot of linguistic diversity? Is there a large population of students you work with, is it pretty small, what does that kind of look like for you?

Nicole Marinin

From my previous district to this district, it is a very small population, very, very small population. I believe there's only 15 to 20 students in the high school that are Spanish speakers. I know that there are one or two students who are Russian speaking. And we do, even though there are the 15 to 20 students within the high school population, not all of those students are within the ESL program currently, they have exited the program. And they are still around, they still are around and they're still within the hallways. So...

Claire Darmstadter

For sure, and you mentioned how you have that Spanish background. And you said the majority of your students are Spanish speaking, but not all. So first of all, do you ever feel like it's hard to maintain English when it's kind of easier to slip into that Spanish that might be an easier kind of common denominator language for you guys? And then b) if you're working with a couple students who don't have that Spanish background is a little bit harder to support their needs? Or how do you work with students, where you may not have that common language that is easy to communicate with?

Nicole Marinin

I've been very fortunate that a majority of the students that I do work with are Spanish speakers. So I have always had that advantage of having that Spanish language to help me out with that. But yes, it is extremely difficult to maintain the language of instruction when I'm trying to ensure that I'm getting my students their academic skills in English, as well as trying to make sure that I am fostering those Spanish language skills as well, too, because the research shows that students who have that strong L1 are going to be able to perform and be able to move quicker into their second language acquisition. So it is a constant and daily reminder for myself to maintain the language of instruction and which I am attempting to teach my students at that time.

Claire Darmstadter

And you also mentioned that there's a huge learning curve, and you came into this new position in a different city and there's so many complicating factors along with COVID I would imagine. So I would imagine you have a pretty small apartment, maybe you're a department of one? Are there ways that you connect with whether it's educators or different organizations across the state to kind of get ideas? Or how do you kind of come into this position to feel a little bit more comfortable about what you're doing?

Nicole Marinin

Well, there I am a department of four, there are three other ESL bilingual teachers and my colleague who got me into this position is actually someone I share a classroom with. So if I have to ask her any questions, or if I need any help, or any advice, I just yell across the classroom and there she is. So she and I have worked together many years ago in our former district. So knowing that I already had that support from my colleague, that's why I chose to come out here to Luxemburg Casco, and then I was able to meet the other two teachers that work within the department as well too. We have a consultant for CESA that comes in every once in a while and works with us as well too. And because I've been around for so many years within the bilingual ESL programs, I've developed a lot of connections over the years. And I still reach out to my former colleagues to ask for help with anything I need as well too. Or I am always reaching out to, you know, the University, UW-Oshkosh, to talk with one of the professors down there if I need any help. But other than that, I feel pretty comfortable with how I can ask for resources or get help. And if I can't find it, I keep on going. Or I just keep going, keep talking to try to find out what I need to find out for myself.

Claire Darmstadter

And we've seen that COVID has been hard on all schools and all students, but it's especially difficult when you're working with a language class or some type of language instruction, because that in-person communication is really important. Everybody who's listening right now can't see, but you are in your classroom. So has that been a really hard and difficult situation? Or have you guys been able to be in your classroom most of the time, or how have you supported your students when you might not have that like face to face communication 100% of the school year.

Nicole Marinin

We have been very fortunate here in Luxemburg-Casco. We have only been on, we were only put online for two weeks due to a spike in cases. Other than that, it has been in-person instruction, our students have been allowed to choose which mode of instruction, most of my students or most of our students have chosen in person instruction. And then throughout quarantine had to go online such and such or, or things like that back and forth. The most difficult thing I have had to deal with with COVID and second language learning is wearing a mask. Because my students cannot see my mouth when I'm trying to talk with them in English. And I'm trying to pronounce these words and when I am working with them in English, I have to be very careful and very — I have to pronounce very slowly when I talk with them, or I will have to tell them, I will have to back more than six feet away from them and pull down my mask and say watch my mouth. So they can see how my mouth is forming some of these words, or they can hear some of these words. And a lot of times I've told my students watch my mouth and my mask is still up. So they're like, *No, I can't see you. I don't know what you're saying teacher.* So try that again. So COVID has been very challenging. However I've made I've made do with it, we've we're doing the best that we can. And I've told the kids I'm like you just try hearing the sounds the best that you can. I've tried to work with the students on doing or utilizing various resources online to help them out as well, too.

Claire Darmstadter

So a lot of people know about opportunities for careers, whether it's a high school Spanish class, that's a pretty common job, or you can be someone leading the class of maybe 30 students learning another language. But for you, you're in a position that might not be as well-known or as commonly understood among people. So can you give us a little advert of why people might want to consider going into your field of work if they have multilingual abilities, and why you enjoy your job.

Nicole Marinin

We very much need anybody who speaks a second language, to help out our students to help linguistically our students who are of district linguistic backgrounds. And like I said, had I not gone through my undergraduate work at UW-Oshkosh with understanding what the bilingual and ESL minor was — I didn't even know what it was to begin with. So I was starting to, I just jumped in because I had a little bit of Spanish instruction or Spanish that helped me out with that. Our students afford — our students should, our students need to have every opportunity to learn and they deserve that high quality instruction just like any other student as well, too. So having a teacher who has the background in the students' language, or even just understanding

the ESL background, how language is acquired, is such an important step as well, too, because students will be able to grow very quickly when they have that quality instruction and our students just like everyone else deserve to have that quality instruction when they are within our schools.

Claire Darmstadter

And just the last question to wrap us up. So we tell those kids and older kids too, that speaking more than one language is a superpower. So can you give me just one reason, whether you want to say it in English or Spanish or both, whatever you're most comfortable with, why we should view multilingualism as a superpower?

Nicole Marinin

Oh, that's a good question. I have found out for myself being bilingual, the opportunities have opened. I have had so many doors open for me. And I'm sure that if I chose to go into another profession or chose to look outside, I probably would be snapped up right away. And in fact, I had been approached by other people over the years who have said, hey, how about changing a career. Would you like to consider doing something else, and we really need your Spanish skills...not so much of the understanding about the career, but it's the Spanish speaking skills that helps me, so being bilingual for me, I have seen can open up so many more doors and that is the message that we are sending to our students currently is if you can speak two languages you are worth choice to anybody and everybody out there in the world and you will be able to write your own career choices any way you want.

Claire Darmstadter

That is so true. Thank you so much for talking with me. If people are interested in learning more about Oshkosh programs, I have a couple interviews with some of the amazing faculty there and I just love everything that they're doing over there in Oshkosh. So have a great day, great rest of your school year, and thanks for chatting with me.

Nicole Marinin

Thank you