

Claire Darmstadter

Hi, everybody. I'm so lucky to be joined today by Sarah Smith, WIABE board member, Kenosha School District Director of Language Acquisition and former EBSOLA, which stands for Edward Bain School of Language and Art, principal. Thank you so much for taking a couple minutes to chat with me.

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

Absolutely.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah. So first, it'd be great if you could just give us an overview of your linguistic and educational background and kind of what brought you to Kenosha?

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

Absolutely. So I did my undergrad at UW-Whitewater, and I have a bachelor's degree in Spanish. And my minor was Latin American Studies. And I had lived in México for a while and actually worked with some of the kids down there when I was living there. And I just had always really loved languages. As a child, I was in a German immersion program, sign language, I started Spanish in middle school, so I just had always loved languages. So when I went to college and found out that I had passed through the first four levels of Spanish, I was like, okay, I think I'm gonna do something with this. And that's, then of course, what led me to get my bachelor's degree, and then go live in México for a while. And then when I finished my bachelor's degree, I didn't really know what I wanted to do. So I applied to grad school, and, and went to Milwaukee for grad school and I have a master's well, my first master's degree is from the Foreign Languages and Literature Department. I studied Spanish pedagogy and linguistics. And so I graduated with my master's degree in 2007. I then started teaching at a charter school, it was a dual language charter school, and I taught Spanish for Spanish speakers, Spanish, and ESL. And then I went back to school to finish my teaching certificate, which at that point, didn't really take me a whole lot. It was a couple courses. So I finished that. And then I ended up taking a job with the Archdiocese of Milwaukee as a Spanish teacher, and joined a curriculum writing team for that. And then I decided to go back to school again. My second master's is in administration and leadership. And while I was doing that, I was able to do my internship with Sue Nelson, who is the Director of Instruction for the entire archdiocese in Milwaukee. So when Common Core rolled out years ago, I was the one who was added to those trainings and meetings and helping roll some of that out. So just some really awesome experiences. Throughout those years, I also worked as an adjunct at UW-Milwaukee, the continuing School of Education, I taught Spanish, one through five, Spanish for Spanish speakers, Spanish healthcare. And I currently am an adjunct at Carthage College teaching Applied Linguistics and at Concordia University also. That's a lot, but that's what I do. And here I am. And I'm also in charge of language acquisition programs for KUSD, which is Kenosha Unified School District. And that is we have 42 schools that have English learners, and then our middle and high school programs have world languages, and one of our elementary schools, our IB school has also Spanish. And then we have one dual language program as well that I helped oversee, but I'm no longer the principal there.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure, we have like a lot of things, you've done a bunch of different angles that you've been able to see language education. And like you mentioned, you're helping direct language acquisition in one of the largest districts in Wisconsin. So you can really see the broad overview of how it operates. So you talked a little bit about different programs and schools and different offerings they have, can you just walk us through a little bit how the dual language program works, and then how students post-elementary school can continue that type of education?

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

Oh, sure. Absolutely. So we actually just got approval to start a 4k next year. So we're very excited about that. And that will be 90/10, which would be 90% Spanish instruction and 10% English. But normally, in the past, we start in kindergarten, and that's with 80% Spanish 20% English, and it goes up and gets lesser in Spanish and more equal in English. And in third grade, they're at 50/50. So the new principal came in and has really done well with the new Spanish language arts curriculum that we implemented two years ago. So she does that. They get their language arts mostly in Spanish, especially kindergarten first, second, and then in third, they do get those English or ELA pieces. Their specials are also all in English because it's extremely difficult to find elective teachers and specialists that speak Spanish or that are certified bilingual, but in general, it's hard to get bilingual certified teachers all over. So when the kids finish fifth grade, then they go to Bullen Middle School, well, it's a choice, they could go there and they could go to their boundary school also if they wanted. But Bullen Middle School has a dual language program, and that continues with the 50/50 in sixth, seventh and eighth grade. And then when they graduate in eighth grade, all of our high schools have a Spanish for Spanish speakers option or Spanish or Spanish speakers 2, or cultural and civilization or the Advanced Placement course. We have a lot of our kids that go straight into AP, and I believe our data from two years ago, I don't have that data available for last year because I was principal. But we had nine kids take AP and seven of the nine scored a five on AP exams. So the K through 8 really does prepare you and that was as freshmen they took AP, which is pretty amazing. Because that test is I don't know if you've taken the test before, but it is a little bit of a difficult test. So for freshmen in high school to be able to succeed with that is pretty awesome.

Claire Darmstadter

And that's pretty unique. You talked about having like the Spanish for heritage speakers, and some like culture and civilization courses. And that's not something that a lot of other schools offer. So was that kind of born out of having this dual language program or when did that kind of come to be a part of your district?

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

So when I started here, seven years ago, they actually did not have a Spanish or Spanish speakers class. They had a Culture and Civ class that they hadn't offered any years. So when I came in, we worked on curriculum, and did some curriculum writing, and I pulled some of the team leaders. And I have to say I have some very, very wonderful teachers in the world language, dual language and ESL program, some very strong leaders. And they came in and

we did some summer work. And we had our Spanish for Spanish Speakers 1 ready to go for that following year. So we've had them now for seven years, the Spanish or Spanish speakers, Spanish for Spanish speakers 2 followed the next year. So that's been six years and then culture and civilization. We did that curriculum writing also, I believe it was like summer of 2014. And that's being offered at all of our high schools too. So...

Claire Darmstadter

And I believe you kind of talked about your connection with Carthage, if I understand correctly, there's like a partnership with one of the charter schools maybe with like a kind of elementary language program, even though it's not like immersion can you just kind of maybe - is that a thing that's in place, or...

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

Well, Carthage has a lot of TLEs they bring in and they speak a variety of different languages. I actually teach a lot of them in my English linguistics course, which is, you know, oddly enough, but then they come in to our schools, and they teach to get some of their hours. Yeah, we have a lot of Carthage students that a lot of our buildings, specifically last year at dual language I think we had and Creative Arts, because dual language and Creative Arts share a building. They're two different elementary schools, but it's a huge building. And we probably had about 20 different student teachers from Carthage come in and do some of their hours. So yes, we do have a program with them, and work very closely with them and Parkside too.

Claire Darmstadter

and you talk about kind of it's a little bit difficult to recruit bilingual teachers. So is there a pretty clear connection between them and then coming to work in your district? Or is that pretty hard to maintain through graduation?

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

So sometimes they do come and work for us. But the problem is, a lot of the TLE's are here on that two year like, J-Visa I believe it's called that they get for being students, they can work for Carthage, but they can only work for Carthage, and they can't work for us. So even if they are -- maybe it's a three year visa. So if they end up moving here, and you know, getting themselves established, and of course, that would be someone we would consider for a hire, but it just has to do with all of the paperwork. And...

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

It is extremely hard to get bilingual teachers.

Claire Darmstadter

Yep. Yeah, no matter if it's, you know, you talked about like those specialist courses, but also just in general, it's super difficult, especially in Wisconsin. So if I understand correctly, I believe there's also some work you did with Rosetta Stone with both like middle school students, as well as educators. Can you kind of talk through like the rationale behind that, why was it offered for the different groups, how it kind of works?

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

Sure. So we use Rosetta Stone at our middle school. For students who if Spanish doesn't fit into their schedule, they can take it and but then we also offer our Italian, German, French and Chinese because those are our world languages that we offer at our schools. So the students are allowed to take them in middle school early and kind of decide if that's what they want to do. And then when they go to high school, they can continue on with that with that world language choice. But I did something a little different a couple of years ago, and I actually spoke, I was one of the keynotes at the Rosetta Stone conference back in 2018. I think it was. I decided that I wanted to work more with my teachers in their understanding, not my teachers, not my ESL teachers, but just our gen ed teachers about the understanding of what it's like to truly be a language learner. So I said what, you know, better experience and to use some of these Rosetta Stone licenses. And I was able to work with Carthage and for 12 hours of study of Rosetta Stone, they received a credit. So it was a continuing education credit for the teachers. But it not only helps them learn another language, but it just put them back in the seat of a language learner for them to truly understand that this kiddo is you know, in fourth grade, he's a newcomer, he only speaks Chinese and you're sitting in when you talk to him and like he's not trying to be disrespectful, he just doesn't understand you and like the capabilities and the things that he's able to produce and do that we have to make those accommodations for our kids that are here with another language as their first language. They're trying to learn English but you know, of course, it just takes time first of all and practice so I thought it was a good idea, and I actually had about I think 25 or 28 teachers fully complete the course that summer and they got to pick a language of their choice and I've been asked to do it again. But last summer was just so crazy with you know, trying to figure out virtual, hybrid learning and me just getting back from the principal job so maybe it's something we'll do this summer.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah, well that sounds incredible, right? It has the benefit of them being able to learn some language but also just like experience what that's like because it's really hard to put yourself in the students shoes so I think that's super cool. Just to close this out, in celebration of multilingualism Can you give me one reason why we should celebrate it why it's a superpower and if you want to answer in Spanish you can but no pressure.

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

Okay. *En mi opinión, los idiomas extranjeros son muy importantes porque creo que los idiomas son el futuro para todos nosotros. Vivimos en un mundo que tiene muchas culturas diferentes y tenemos que enfocar más en las diferencias y se unen un poco más con la gente en los EEUU y en todos los lugares del mundo.* Like it just is so important that we all come together. Now more than ever, as a global community and languages are, you know, something that can help bridge that gap if we start being more culturally understanding, more culturally accepting and embrace others. I think that that could definitely be a bridge to us having a better future.

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. Well, thank you so much for sharing your perspective. I think there's so many cool ideas and programs you're doing that some other people whether it's teachers or administrators or even like parents might want to kind of look into or do themselves so I really appreciate your perspective and your time.

Sarah Shanebrook-Smith

Absolutely anytime and good luck to you.