

Claire Darmstadter

Hi, everybody! Today I'm lucky enough to be joined by Tatiana Joseph, Assistant Professor of ESL and Bilingual Education at UW-Milwaukee. Thank you so much for taking a couple minutes to chat with me today.

Tatiana Joseph

You're welcome. Thank you.

Claire Darmstadter

Yeah! So you've done so much in the space of education. But it would be great if we could first just get a broad overview of your linguistic and educational background and just in general, how you got to your position at UW-M.

Tatiana Joseph

Sure. So first and foremost, I'm a former English language learner myself. I came here when I was 10 years old from Costa Rica. I didn't know any kind of English well, no, I knew three words of English that my dad made sure I knew before we boarded the plane on the airplane at the airport. And that was *help*, *bathroom*, and *my name is*, so I mean, it's three words, but it's a phrase. And so I came here, I went to a monolingual school where thankfully my teachers spoke Spanish and made the learning of academic content available for me. And so then I have always wanted to be a teacher since I can remember. And I went to Marquette University where I did my undergraduate in teaching in Spanish. I was, I had gone through some kind of traumatic, painful educational experiences with people pushing English to be my only language and pushing Spanish out. And so I decided to be a teacher and then specifically to teach Spanish so that I would provide students with an opportunity to, one, retain their language, but two learn the language, because it was my experience that a lot of my classmates knew English or knew Spanish, but they didn't know how to write it or read it, because they never had formal Spanish. So I was convinced that I wanted to be a Spanish teacher. And then I did my student teaching at South Division in Milwaukee, and my cooperating teacher, you know, we were having a conversation one day about educational equity. And she said, *Well, you're so passionate about this. Have you ever considered getting a master's degree in curriculum and instruction?* And I said, no way. You know, I'm a Spanish teacher, I'm a first generation college student, I don't know anybody with a master's degree or anything above that. So no. She said, well, why don't you take one class, and if you like it, you know, you can stay. So you know, you're probably right. And so I did, I signed up for a summer course. And I took a course and I just loved it. Being able to name some of the inequalities that I saw and experienced, was really important to me. And then from there, my advisor then offered me or talked to me about a PhD in urban education. And I said, no, I don't know anybody but you with a PhD. I can't, you know, ever do this. And then she started talking to me about the representation of Latinas in PhDs. You know, the change that we can make in somebody's life or to impact when your teacher sounds like you and looks like you. And so I said, okay, well, maybe, you know, I'll take a class, I'll try it and, and, you know, and it's, it's all been one series, a series of conversations and trying it and loving it. And, you know, with my PhD program, I really got an opportunity to develop courses, to network with national entities around language education, especially for Latino

students. And I was just hoping you know, that that really made a difference, that I could potentially make a difference within teacher preparation, and preparing teachers in this particular way. And so that's how I got to be where I'm at. I am a former, I always tell people first and foremost, I'm a Spanish teacher, at heart. But along the way, I've become a passionate advocate for language equity for all students.

Claire Darmstadter

And so we know Milwaukee has a really long history of fighting for not only bilingual programming, but specific types that are additive and affirm multiple abilities rather than having the goal being making them monolingual English speakers. However, as a reason bilingual edits become pretty trendy, right? So we have frequently financially advantaged monolingual families. And you know, I would argue that they do come from a great place of good intentions. But the result can sometimes be that these families begin to dominate school decisions or policies and create kind of a disconnect between families at the school. So how do we celebrate the fact that more people want to become multilingual, but at the same time, remind ourselves about the students who these programs originally created for and make sure that we're best supporting them as well?

Tatiana Joseph

Yeah, you know, I think the conversation that I always have with my students, it's about equity. Right? And that bilingual opportunities are for everybody. Regardless of who you are, what you bring to the table, if you're able, if you are, you know, have any kind of special needs, everybody can have this opportunity regardless. But it's that equity piece, and reminding ourselves that some of the children that we serve already come with one or more languages, they too have that opportunity and to serve that opportunity to maintain and strengthen that language, none of the expense of anybody else. And so, you know, in teacher education, something I do is really encourage my teachers to be vocal about inequalities. So for example, you know, in a program that may be changing population to, you know, we know that the research says 50/50, right. So 50% students who are, speak, dual languages or speak this language primarily, and then the other 50%, who are monolingual English speakers, and they support each other. But because in some schools nationwide, this particular number is changing, then it becomes an issue of equity, because why are there not children present in this classroom? It's a win win for everybody. You know, and so, we can celebrate, we can talk about it, but it's calling into question. You know, why, and when we do that now, right? I mean, if you think of some of the world language tracks, right, there are some private entities that have better curriculum, more opportunities. We don't see that in the urban school setting. And so we have to ask the question, why, right? Why are those children not afforded that same opportunity? So being a, you know, just this constant, critical lens, constant evaluative lens, and constantly speaking out to ensure equality for all of our students. You know, because even even in this discussion, right, it's what about, you know, the poor students of color? Right, they're monolingual English speakers, but may not be given that opportunity? You know, we see in our black communities that historically we've left them out of this language discussion. And so how do we bring them in, you know, to, so they too, can afford it or can have opportunities, right, in this discussion about learning languages?

Claire Darmstadter

For sure. And, you know, Milwaukee is an incredibly linguistically diverse city, and there are so many incredible options and opportunities for students to attend schools that have all this language programming, but like, you're kind of saying many multilingual students end up attending schools that don't have a specific language focus. So knowing that not every teacher who enters MPS, or that gets an education degree from UW-M will have a specific concentration and ESL or bilingual methods or speak additional languages, how can we prepare them to work with these families and students to have a positive, productive, affirming relationship? And then are there any tips for teachers of how they can best work with these families or students?

Tatiana Joseph

Yeah, so something we're doing at UW-M is that most of our teacher preparation programs have to take an ESL teaching methods course. And it's more than just the methods course, like it goes through theories and practice and policy and advocacy. So students who you know, I have students who don't think of themselves as I will ever have this particular type of student in my classroom, right. And so when we go through statistics and that initial discussion, showing them that, hey, you're gonna get somebody in your lifetime, you know, probably right away, regardless of where you go, private, public, charter, our ESL students, and our multilingual students are coming into our classrooms. And so we approach it from, you know, what I tell my students is, they are your responsibility too, just as you are responsible for teaching your monolingual students, you are responsible in teaching your bilingual students, or your multilingual students, so there has to be a way, you know, whether that forces you to work in collaboration with other teachers in the building who are more knowledgeable about teaching methods, whether it's you know, kind of questioning your own biases and your own ideas about what people should sound like and shouldn't sound like or look like, and you know, to truly love and work with the students, you need to get yourself there first, you know, you can't be a good, effective teachers, of teacher of multilingual, multicultural students, if you're not ready to step into that role. And so, you know, tips is, collaborate, collaborate, collaborate, you know. You can't only be the only person in your classroom serving these children, it takes a village. So invite the village into your classroom. You know, I always tell my teachers now who are certified, and I'm working with them, they're not — these folks are not coming in to evaluate you. They're coming in to collaborate with you. They also want to be able to provide opportunities for these students, just like you do. So now it's how do we do it? You know, let's come up with a game plan. Let's, you know, I personally feel that our ESL teachers are not used appropriately in buildings, you know? Yes, of course, they have to work with students individually, but what about the teachers too? Reach out to that ESL teacher, you know, and if that's not enough, reach out to your administrators and say, hey, we need more professional development on this, we need more, you know, what can I do? What can? How can I become a more effective teacher for the students? So I think asking help and acknowledging that you may not be able to do this work on your own comes a long way.

Claire Darmstadter

That is so important, asking for help. I know you've also been involved with efforts to recruit more Latinx/Latine students into education. Can you just talk a little bit about your work here and why you think that is really important?

Tatiana Joseph

Yeah, yeah. So when I was a graduate student, I was part of a national initiative, the Grow Your own Teacher Pipeline, and it was across seven different states. It was grant funded. The biggest takeaway from that is that our teacher population is still very much middle class white. And our student population, especially in urban settings, is not middle class, or white. And so you know, this shock of different cultures and languages, often scares away our good teachers, and not I mean, so mean it, but some don't. They're just overwhelmed. And they're not prepared to work with this population. And so how do we, even the playing field, for our students, but also for our communities, so that we're building on the assets that they already bring, right their community assets, their language assets, their cultural assets, and they can plug into our classrooms and work shoulder to shoulder with our, you know, majority white teachers who are also interested in doing this work, but sometimes lack the tools and the connections and, you know, with our students, so how do we bring teachers in, of color, Latina teachers, to serve as bridges between different worlds, you know, and really give students the opportunity to see themselves and hear themselves in somebody else, in an adult, that can be a role model for them. And also, you know, I mean, this is so important in schools as well, because, like I visited some schools and some sometimes there is no cultural brokerage or brokering going on in that school. For example, you know, there might be a cultural tradition in the Latino community that the administrators or teachers don't understand and may see it as bad or, you know, as less. But if we had more teachers of color, more Latina teachers to say, hey, wait a minute, you know, this is, this is normal, this is traditional, this is what it is, you know, then our students, we can create more spaces for our students to feel comfortable in, and to feel representation and feel represented. Because there's a voice, and there is somebody who looks like them.

Claire Darmstadter

That is so important. Just to wrap things up, in celebration of multilingualism. Can you tell us either in Spanish and English, or both, or one or the other why you believe that being multilingual is a superpower, as we sometimes tell our kids?

Tatiana Joseph

Let me think about that for a second. I'm like, Oh, my gosh, I have so many answers. I don't know which one to go with. So I'll do it in both, because I think it's always important to highlight that people know multiple languages. So I think it's important that we celebrate multilingualism because it gives you an opportunity to be part and be connected to multiple people and multiple spaces, that people who are monolingual don't ever have that opportunity. As such, I think that not being able to connect to those spaces and people removes this layer of empathy and understanding and appreciation. Which if you think about right, a lot of our current political craziness, I don't even know what to call it has to do with this lack of empathy and understanding and appreciation for people who don't sound like you or look like you. So I think

through multilingual, multiculturalism multilingualism we can remove some of those barriers and truly, you know, learn empathy and understanding and appreciation. So,

Pienso que es importante ser multilingüe porque nos da una oportunidad de estar en un espacio y convivir con personas que no, que hablan idiomas diferentes, que son diferentes, y así podemos aprender empatía, podemos aprender a querer por el prójimo y entender el prójimo, que es algo que nos falta en este país, ahorita especialmente por los problemas políticos que la fundación de este problema muchas veces tiene que ver por la falta de empatía, la falta de cariño por el prójimo porque la persona no habla su mismo idioma o no se ve igual que la misma raza, que la misma color. Así que al aprender otro idioma, aprender otra cultura nos da este espacio de convivir con otros y aprender de los demás.

[I think it is important to be multilingual because it gives us an opportunity to be in a space and live with people that speak different languages, that are different, and through that we can learn empathy, we can learn to care for our neighbors and understand them, which is something we are missing in this country, now especially due to politics. These problems often are due to a lack of empathy, a lack of care for one another, for the person that doesn't speak the same language as you or isn't of the same race, the same color. So learning another language, learning another culture, gives us a space to live amongst each other and learn from one another.]

Claire Darmstadter

Well, thank you so much. You have so much incredible wisdom that you shared with all of us. And I really appreciate all your time. So I just -- I'm very excited by all this information, everything that all of our listeners can learn from what you've all had to say.

Tatiana Joseph

Perfect. Thank you for having me.

Claire Darmstadter

Thank you so much.