

Kristen Anderson

What has been your involvement with the Hispanic population?

I began by teaching at pointer middle school, a junior high at that time, and I worked in the Learning Resource Center as a case manager. I worked with students testing their academics abilities and intellectual abilities

In English or Spanish?

In both English and Spanish, and I did that for one of the years and then I also taught reading and language arts to kids. I have a lot of students who are from Hispanic families who are learning their second or third language. Sometimes they have come from Mexico where there were five or so and indigenous language such as norwalthor mezteca or something. Then their parents were not necessarily educated well in Spanish, so Spanish had been a second language for their parents. Many of them didn't even speak Spanish so the kids had to learn Spanish and then they were learning English on top of that. It was difficult proposition for them and so they understandably had some real difficulties learning to read and write. So I worked with those kids and their families doing meetings and home visits and classroom instruction and then of course I came here and taught Spanish. I've taught Spanish for seven years here and one of my classes is Spanish for Spanish speakers. The purpose of that class is to develop higher levels of literacy in the student's native language and for many of them it's not their first language Spanish its their second language and English is their third. Most of those students are placed in a class in the recent 2 or 3 years only if their reading levels are third grade or below and actually below third grade if their reading levels in Spanish are higher than that they are not suppose to be in that class. I'm not certain why that is because; I believe they should be very literate in their own language. It really assist them in learning English much more quickly if they are able to read and write in their own language and understand vocabulary and content information very well in their first language.

Is it easier for you if their parents actually are fluent in their native language and English?

Oh yes, if the parents are fluent it generally means they have had a lot more education. Many of the parents have come to the U.S. because obviously, they want a better life for their kids. They want some opportunity and haven't been able to even make a living generally, in Mexico. Most of them come from back rounds of the social economic level where they don't get to be educated. Many of the parents gone through first and second grade and that's all. Some of them can't right their names and they don't understand basic concepts of percentages and things like that. It's not a reflection of their intelligence it's a reflection of their familial back round and their economic situations. The kids of course don't have those back rounds information either. If the parents can speak English pretty fluently they've been able to get generally much more education and many more who are educated in Spanish are much more supportive and understanding of what kids need in the U.S. to succeed in education

So the parents who are higher educated see the importance of being educated and push their kids harder?

Well I've seen that, they seem to have a better understanding of what their kids need to do to be successful in our schools. I believe they have a better understanding of what were trying to with them here and don't interpret those as racist or just coming down on Mexican kids just because they are acting differently in schools. They have a much better understanding of our system

What do you think the goal of the Hillsboro school district regarding Hispanic students is

Well I believe we are very committed to educating all kids to learn what they need to be successful citizens, even though many Hispanics students are not citizens, we believe they will be. They certainly are contributors to our whole society and I think we have a real personal commitment to each one of them. It's what I have seen at our school and pointer and other buildings, but we don't always have the resources for it. Many of the students come in with very little education and there is a real gap in their background of understanding of what they need to do to be successful. It's a big job and I think we are really committed and we just need a little more money.

You know any programs that are helping Hispanic students in the school, and the district?

I believe there are ESL programs that are very helpful. We have a lot of committed teachers who have gone through the program which the school district helped support by allowing and helping provide educators to be certified in ESL. This was in conjunction with Louis and Clark. We are trying to provide enough classes that are ESL in subject matters such as health, social studies, and Science etc. for students to be able to get kind of protected. It's easier because the teachers in those classes are well trained to be able to work with kids who have ESL backgrounds. We don't just throw them into a regular class room and say sink or swim we are trying to not do that as much as possible.

So if we had more money it would be even better?

Absolutely, I think we would be able to provide many more classes. We would probably be able to provide more literacy classes in native languages for kids so that they would more quickly be able to make progress in English. There is great research demonstrating the students who are well educated in their own language will much more quickly learn English. Kids that arrive here at high school age who don't know any English have a real struggle because, it typically takes a person seven years of very direct and intensive study in another language to get half way fluent in that language and be fairly comfortable using the language. And most kids don't have seven years they have a couple.

If we had more money in the schools do you think the achievement gap between the whites and Hispanics would greatly decrease?

Well we would still always have the difficulty of trying to educate kids who do not have educational back grounds higher than about a third grade level. That's a really difficult thing to keep those kids in schools. But I do believe we would be able to have even

smaller classes and more literacy classes and more services for the families possibly. I think we are doing a very good job and we are doing our very best and many people are committing their selves to lots of overtime and unpaid activities to help the ESL kids. But yeah I think it would make some difference we could probably have smaller reading classes and lower level reading classes to just meet them at more of their need level.

So you think the Hillsboro school district is being very successful in keeping the Hispanic population educated and giving them attention.

I think we are giving a lot of attention to them, with our funding being cut so drastically over the last few years obviously we haven't been able to do as well as we could have it continues to be a priority.

With the resources we have now do you think they're doing a good job.

Given what we have I think we are doing the best we can. There has been a lot of outreach and definitely a lot of commitment and it would be nice if society were very committed to education and put their money behind it.

One specific thing I believe we could do is to offer more levels of reading classes just devoted to reading for ESL students. I believe we have one Level and it's a pretty high level and it does push the students but I think we could and should have more if we want them to be able to pass the CIM and make more rapid progress.

Should we have ESL classes in Elementary School?

Oh defiantly, and we do have those but you know more funding allows for there to be fewer kids in a class room and many more classes offered with more services to parents so that parents better understand what they need to do to be really supportive to their kids. More classes for parents to possibly be more literate in their own language and they don't necessarily have to know English to be supportive of their kids in their English classes at school.

When you were talking about teaching them at a lower level. Is that for when they are high school students and they haven't had any English so that they could learn easier because high school might be too hard?

Yes and we do a pretty good job I believe. We have been cutting our funding over the years and so it eliminates various classes we can teach and it makes the classes a little bigger.

Well I can understand how hard it is for them I'm learning Spanish myself and it's hard but they have to use it here and it's not like I'm in another country trying to use it. I'm just learning it for academic reasons

And you're learning it after having had many years of public school education and you're at a twelfth grade level of understanding. When you first started learning Spanish you took it with a huge background of information about language. You may have not been as conscious about it but all that information but it was already there and so you didn't have to learn new vocabulary you already knew that vocabulary in English and concepts.

I also didn't have to learn how to write I already knew how to write the letters already.

Yeah and it was just kind of learning a new system. Where as for them for many of them everything is new they have to build from the ground up. So yes there should be more literacy in Spanish and if we could offer it also in other languages that kids come into our schools knowing other than English that would be helpful for the students.

So overall we are successful for the amount of the resources we have?

Yes

And if we had more resources it would be a lot better for them?

Yes I believe that it would help our community to be really knowledgeable about cultural differences. Instead of sometimes jumping to conclusions about people and their actions and their behaviors in the Hispanic community for instance. Understanding what the cultural traditions have been and recognizing you know they are just acting very appropriate for what they know. If we had a little more way of communication and community resources with in our city and our county to help people become part of the community. With many more free classes of English and just a variety of things to offer. I think that would be a tremendous support to the schools so it's a community need also.