

This interview is with Berta Lule by Danielle Kinnan and took place Friday May 28, 2004

Danielle Kinnan: looking around the room this is the school that does the bilingual education right?

Berta Lule: Yes it's the dual immersion program

DK: Does it just start in kindergarten? And you teach second grade right?

BL: Right

DK: So how far up in the school are they?

BL: This is our first year with kinders so next year that same group will go to first grade and also we'll pick up a new kinders so second we'll pick up in two years

DK: Okay, so this isn't actually a dual immersion classroom right now?

BL: It is. Our dual immersion program is a choice so we have most classrooms have three so two of these classrooms have a dual immersion program and the third one is still part of the team but it's not part of the dual immersion. Does that answer your question?

DK: Yeah. Is the reason for all the Spanish stuff the high Spanish population or is the classroom as second graders are they not part of the dual immersion program yet?

BL: What I do in here varies because it hasn't started in here I still do bilingual I still teach my program bilingually here still because of our population and that's why Spanish because more than 70% of our students here are Spanish speakers so what a better way to bring Spanish and English together not only do they learn the language but they really learn the content throughout and more about each other.

DK: What sort of reaction have you gotten from the parents about this program?

BL: I think it's been a program that a lot of our parents have been waiting for in Hillsboro we have lost a lot of our parents before starting our dual language program here to other districts like Forest Grove and Beaverton. And so there are many question like the scheduling and how you work it out with the content and so I think that it's been a really positive program and a lot of our folks have been waiting for and I think comparing it to last year when we did parent outreach presentations this year we're getting more parents waiting lists are starting so every year I think there's going to be a waiting list of a campout of parents who are trying to get into the program.

DK: And are the parents that are really interested are they both from Hispanic students and from non-Hispanic students?

BL: Yes they're from both. They're from both. And like I said that's what represents what we have at our school and like I said it'll be more of set focus program to really bring in both languages represented here and really build another community all across our school.

DK: So do you also have like an ESL program with the dual language?

BL: Yes we have our ESL department I don't know if you know the background a little bit about our school but it's huge. It's a big school and so our ESL department is also part of a key component for our whole school also being a support to our dual language program and also being a support to those other non-dual languages as well.

DK: Is the ESL program seeing an increase in just English proficiency because of the dual language program already or like have they still been as highly involved with students lives?

BL: The way our ESL department is established is what is it four, I think four ESL certified each one of them is responsible in supporting a grade level so there might be one or two teachers that are supporting the kinder program and so they help the kinder program and they...can you repeat the question?

DK: Basically how have the kinders, since they're in this dual immersion program, are they still having to rely on the ESL program as much?

BL: I think that you have to work together with our ESL department because our ESL department does the woodcock meñoz and I think our kinders get them midway through the year because you don't want to assess them at the very beginning it's a new beginning for them a new environment starting a school so to get information where they are with our RP assessment and the woodcock meñoz and also collaborating with teachers seeing what literacy and other communication they need so I think the communication and collaboration with them is strong

DK: It's the beginning of the experiment essentially so you can't really see...

BL: Exactly it's our first year of the program and then having started a new reading adoption so there's been a lot on our plates.

DK: What is your personal background? Why are you interested? And were you born here?

BL: I was born in Mexico in the central part of Mexico in michochan? Chihaucan? and at the age of five we moved up to the states into California until age of nine and then at nine we moved to Cornelius, Oregon and I started school there and then by the time I was in fourth grade we moved to Hillsboro and I've been living here ever since then. I'm the oldest of five siblings. I feel like I've been raised with both the two worlds that my

background comes from and I think my parents just instilled to be proud of who you are and where you come from and then to learn from others as well

DK: Were you involved in ESL programs or similar programs?

BL: I was, and what's incredible I went to W.L. Henry in fourth grade and in sixth grade, I was a pullout ESL student and I remember like in fourth grade getting pulled out to get ESL and I remember saying I don't want to get pulled out I want to be part of what my classrooms doing but I think as you see in our school we also have more of a push-in model where I think students, they're still part of the classroom either ESL certified or classified come in and they're still part of the program unless you're a newcomer and then you do get pulled out, and I was part of that

DK: So how has that experienced shaped you, was going through this school how you decided to become a teacher and get involved in this type of program?

BL: Which program?

DK: The dual immersion. Do you work with ESL students specifically or just teach in the a general classroom?

BL: This is a mainstream second grade classroom and ever since I can remember ever since I was little, first grade, second grade, I knew I wanted to become a teacher, and my mom always wanted to become a teacher but she didn't have the funds in Mexico to follow her dreams so in me I think it was part of her blood in me that I had that passion to become a teacher so throughout high school I knew that's what I wanted to be there was no question no doubt in my mind that's what I wanted to be a teacher and at first I thought it was going to be in high school teaching Spanish literacy or foreign language, I minored in French also, but when I started my college education I was leaning more toward elementary children that's where I found my passion more and as I got more into school volunteering I found my passion with the little ones and I said I have two languages Spanish and English I said why not do it bilingually that's where I said I can use my background with Spanish to become a bilingual teacher.

DK: What other improvements like this school is making, first of all it has a huge Spanish population, but what are some other improvements throughout the district that you think should be implemented, or do you think they're doing okay right now?

BL: Let's see the year 2000 strategic planning started and that's when I joined the district planning committee and what was a red flag for me when I heard that this was forming was our high Hispanic dropout rate and being a Hispanic myself and not only serving Hispanic students but all students, something needed to change with our district and that's why I said I'll join that, so out of all that I was in the strategy that wanted to improve our Hispanic dropout rate and so from there, there was a big committee of parents teachers administrators volunteers, and we all focused in on different kinds of programs that we could offer students anything from parent to a student or as staff ourselves to improve it and that's where it came about that being the elementary school

that's where my position was that's where the idea of the dual language immersion program came about, from the strategic plan.

DK: Throughout the whole entire district do you think we're improving as a district?

BL: Absolutely. When I was a student here in the district I remember myself being a student in the high school, I think I took an AP class, history I think it was, I felt like I was the token of the classroom, I either had to speak up or not speak up, and so that was hard. There were teachers that did not know how to respond to you or react to you, if you're talking about Christmas, how do you celebrate Christmas in your house, you're in the spotlight. And so I think outreaching to teachers nowadays is much better there's more cultural learning on how to, it's not that people sometimes don't want to it's the fear or just the unknown of how to so absolutely we're going forward improving things for our students, our staff, I've seen it.

DK: How much more do you think the district can improve, or is there ever a point where they're going to be exactly what the Hispanic population needs, or is it going to be a continuously ongoing process of improvement?

BL: It's going to be continuous it's going to take time just like any change it's very systematic and it's a pretty big district and we're getting bigger, as you see we more elementary schools, we just built a new high school and we need another one, so I think there's a lot more room for growth and improvement, but I think we're headed in the right direction that things have started we have the Hispanic outreach program that the district has started, so things like that to ensure that whatever your representation is in our district we have it whether it's through training for teachers or administrators, or to make sure that materials, and I don't know what's happening more in the upper grades in high schools to make sure that texts have a representation, I can see from our adoption it's more multi-cultural, that kids can relate to what they're reading, you know relate to what they're learning and so effectiveness strategies like that so kids feel included that parents know that their kids can get involved in sports or the key is getting kids involved and parents can know the acts of how to get their children involved that there's more out there than they think

DK: One thing I've just noticed in the high school, especially how you said that you were a token in the AP class, we have one Hispanic and one girl who is half-Hispanic but she looks completely white, there's not a high level of Hispanic students in any of advanced classes, do you see maybe the dual immersion as being a help to get more of the Hispanic students academically at the same level with their language and skills so that by the time they reach high school there will more involvement in the high level classes?

BL: Absolutely and you know that's what's fantastic about the dual immersion program, it's not only the Spanish dominant student but also the English dominant student you will surpass your classmates who are monolingual and so that will open up more of your horizons and your doors because you have two languages in your background you've mastered both of them, mathematically, it's just incredible, because I'm a product of that,

it will, and right now I know our goal is only k-6 but it could pick up when those group of students go through jr. high and high school, it could be an international type of school where you learn all the academic and the language and even travel abroad and bring all that back with you, Eugene has a program like that

DK: I've also heard that the dual immersion program isn't going to be spreading to any other schools for at least five years even though it has a high success rate. Is that true?

BL: probably because of administration change the original plan in strategic was two schools, the other school didn't go ahead because of administration change. We're really lucky here I think our staff here we have quite a bit of bilingual teachers, we have quite a bit of good materials, and that's why we didn't start right away we wanted to make sure we started it right with staffing, materials, parent outreach you need to communicate that well and that's why we were finally able to get it started this year. So if the school can and will it's just going to take time, like I said administration comes in and makes change and it takes the staff a while to get on board.

DK: so if a student moves up from say Mexico, and once this dual immersion program goes all the way through the sixth grade, at the fifth grade level would it be okay for a student that doesn't speak very much English to come into the program or would they still have a lot of trouble adjusting or would that be an easier transition for them?

BL: We would have to take each child case by case, it would depend on the student's background, if they had all the academic background in Mexico, they're at grade level or above, they could easily fit in and if they're a newcomer we could definitely help the newcomer with the English, so we have to assess and see where they're at because if we have a student coming from Mexico yet has none of the academic background, maybe not reading at grade level, then we might have to struggle to put them in the dual language program because they're getting both the English and Spanish so they might not be ready for the dual language program especially for children once they start fourth grade I think that's where the content and the academic language gets a lot more challenging. So you have to take it case by case and the key is to see where they are background-wise what schooling they've had and other background.

DK: So is there any particular methods you have your students just in the ESL used to transition them from the ESL to the mainstream classes, or are they still kind of involved in the ESL while they're transitioning?

BL: What happens in pretty much all our schooling unless they're a newcomer they're the only ones that get pulled up, because there's so many things, they need to listen how the school system works here it's brand new to them it's getting less and less of that every year, so the rest of the students I would say are all ESL and what I mean by that is that our population here at Henry is that a lot of our kids need a lot of oral language development a lot of vocabulary that they don't have that they don't come with from home to school so we've all been GLAD trained so these are techniques that you're teaching to the whole classroom. We gear our lessons to make sure that everyone, they're

all great techniques. So our ESL students are not separated from the non-ESL, you see what I'm saying? We're all together we work cooperatively, because, and I see that in my sons, they will learn more working together cooperatively than they do by themselves and they learn more from peers, so you do collaboration like that cooperatively, and in the future what do business want or what do firms want or what do jobs want. People that can work together and so we do that and like I said GLAD training techniques and a lot of literacy throughout the day.

DK: What exactly is GLAD?

BL: guided language acquisition design, we have a whole weeks worth of training, a lot of children at this age learn through chants, poems, a lot of visuals one example is we were studying rocks, rocks and minerals, not too long ago, it's part of our curriculum for second grade, it's not an easy concept, it's kind of way out there for a lot of our kids, but using visuals, I drew a map okay this is the rock cycle there's three kinds of rocks formed and so for them to see not only hearing me talk, but you want them to participate you want them to talk, they need to participate and check with their peers to see if they're understanding, the visuals, vocabulary, the writing that goes with the visuals and the books you have, or films that you can provide with them, that's just one example and it's for all of them, it's for all of them. And then there's Jim Cummins, training, gurus of ESL that come to Portland that if we are lucky we have money to go and we get new ideas on how to better help our kids because if you think Spanish, even French, they're romance languages, Latin, and so if you teach kids that background, roots of words they will transfer that to English and other examples.

DK: You've probably seen Jonathan Fernow's dropout report? Have you seen that?

BL: I haven't seen that recently.

DK: I just read through it for part of my report and it had a list of most of the dropout reasons, and one of them was basically parents culturally didn't know how to get involved. You said parents' involvement has improved, what has your school used to try to pull parents in and to keep them involved or has it just been natural?

BL: I think parents they are getting more they're starting to be a little more visible at our school, but what happens at our school many of our parents work two jobs, and a lot of it's not knowing who to go to for what, and that fear of you know, we have bilingual office secretaries now, one, so the key I think is us as teachers making contact with them whether it's by phone, note, newsletters and that really is a key thing because it's changing that mode of thinking in Mexico or Latin America that parents are used to sending students to school and the teachers are the ones, they trust, not that they don't trust us here, but the school take care of their education so it's changing the format of the way of thinking that they need to get involved. Making more parent nights with our families. We have had for the last couple of years, [something sin frontera] that we picked up from our author Alma Florado, she's from san Francisco and she came to our district and had a better outreach for parents and these are great nights both the students



come and the parents come, they read a book on a certain theme then they discuss that book and they relate experiences to them and they write a book together, the parents usually writes an experience or a story that goes with the story and the student draws a picture, and it gets put together in a binder. That's just one example of what we're doing with parents here. It's great, it really is great. And then just making parents aware of how to help their child, especially if their background wasn't a lot of schooling or knowing that you can sit with your child, checking with them every 15 minutes, how's your homework doing, or here's some juice, or here's a snack or really incentives and I think that a lot of our parents want their children to do their best.

DK: You teach with somebody right now?

BL: I do.

DK: Does she speak Spanish also?

BL: Yes she understands and communicates with our students, and she has been at our school for several years too.

DK: Are all the teachers here bilingual or are there some that only have one language?

BL: Some, not everybody's bilingual. I don't know what percentage.

DK: Do you think those teachers are adequately prepared to teach and communicate with their Hispanic-cultured students in their classes, or is there a lot of communication between somebody that hasn't been around it and somebody like you who was raised in it?

BL: I think it depends teacher by teacher but I think I can say for each grade level there's at least one bilingual, at least on the primary side where I'm at there's at least one bilingual person per grade level. And the teachers here I'd say the majority know about our students and their backgrounds, unless you're really new and you've never worked with the population that's when if you don't have background on the Hispanic population that they can either go to one of us and in the past we had done training our ESL program has been doing great in giving them information on how to better communicate with them especially if they need to contact parents in writing or by phone and they can't speak Spanish that's where our ESL department comes in.

DK: I think that's all the questions I have. Thank you very much.

BL: Thank you.