

Penguin Chats podcast – A Clark College Foundation production

Transcript | Nov. 12, 2021 | **Creating the bilingual brain**

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: If you want to get to know different people or if you want to travel or just a different way of viewing the world, languages get you there.

RHONDA MORIN: Do you speak more than one language? If so, what benefits does it have navigating your life? And if not, do you wish you'd learned? Well, your kids and grandkids may be getting that chance as more and more schools across the nation add what's called dual language programs to their repertoire. Languages other than English are gaining the respect they deserve.

NARRATOR: Penguin Chats is brought to you in part by Ginn Group, Horenstein Law Group, Vesta Hospitality, Waste Connections of Washington, Arnerich Massena, Quail Homes, and US Bank. Our platinum and gold donors are helping make extraordinary things happen at Clark College Foundation.

RHONDA MORIN: Welcome to Penguin Chats, a Clark College Foundation production. I'm Rhonda Morin. Lucy Estrada Guzman and her family moved a lot when she was a kid. Her parents, who were migrant workers and later owners of a small business, went where the jobs were, which meant she changed schools several times during her young life. And sometimes she was made to feel inferior because of her bilingual abilities. Other times her gifts were celebrated. The bias she experienced at school, however, motivated Guzman to become a teacher and then a principal. She had a vision to change the way multiple languages and people's cultures are received in school.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: So when I became an educator and I realized that kids come to us with all these different gifts and we have to leverage them, especially the gift of language, leverage it to help kids with their achievement and their emotional growth and the power of that acknowledgment

RHONDA MORIN: Today, Guzman, a Clark College alumna and an outstanding alumni recipient from 2019, is the director of dual language for Vancouver Public Schools. But more on that in a minute. For now, you're going to hear how Guzman is passionate about language and a firm believer that knowing more than one will get you far in this world.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: Many of the benefits are financial and economical or religious and aside from just knowing the second language. So we know that across our area, more and more people are starting to realize, yeah it's important to know a second language just because of the benefits that it will give you. For example, job opportunities. When you grow up and you write on a resume, you can have the exact same resume as another person. But when you write on the resume that you're bilingual, you get that second look, usually above another person.

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Cognitive, also for example, the research shows that if you are a bilingual person, you get to delay the onset of dementia by four years. So those are physical benefits that people are not aware of. Cultural, if you want to get to know different people or if you want to travel or just a different way of viewing the world, languages get you there.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

RHONDA MORIN: What about this thing called dual language? You might have also heard it called dual language immersion. Let's have Guzman begin to explain it.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: The research shows that dual language is the best program that helps our emerging bilingual achieve academically and also feel emotionally and culturally respected.

RHONDA MORIN: It is about learning a second language and another culture, but it's also much, much more.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: When we talk about dual language as a whole, we're not only talking about Spanish or English in isolation. We're also talking about that bilingual brain and how one word can cross over into one language or another. And so we're using the power of creating multilingual learners and multilingual speakers in reading, writing, and communicating themselves. So it's not an isolated piece of work, even though the previous comments seem to make it sound like it's all work that really works towards creating a multilingual learner or that bilingual brain.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

When you learn about yourself, you learn about your culture. And then you learn about your classmates and their culture. It really solidifies who you are. It solidifies knowing that there's different ways of celebrating things at other kids' homes. It really helps just creating your own identity within your family structure and it creates a community within the school culture as well that we are a community of learners and we're a community of language learners. And that's really powerful because it creates your identity and it creates your identity within a school culture.

RHONDA MORIN: But how can schools do that, create this culture? Or more precisely, how do teachers teach this? Well, they follow three steps based on research from the Center for Applied Linguistics. And these steps are intended to immerse children into various cultures.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: Of course becoming bilingual is one. The academic successes the second one. And the third one is that social cultural competency portion of what a true strong dual language program would be. So that is really embedded in the program. An example would be just language. Language shows you how different cultures think. Like for example, I dropped

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the cup, right, you would say in English. Well, when you say it in Spanish, [Spanish sentence], it almost means like the cup fell from me, would be a direct translation.

So it just shows you how different cultures and societies view the world. And that's how you study it through language. And as a little child, you study like their celebrations and their customs and it goes more beyond than just food or dress. But you learn it through the stories and from different parts of the world. And in the end, we find out that we have so much more in common. We just go about it at different ways.

HUGO ZALVALA: What inspired me to be a bilingual educator is having the experience of learning a second language, coming to a country not knowing a single word of English. You as a teacher need to understand that they can have success.

RHONDA MORIN: That's Hugo Zalvala, a teacher at Lewis and Clark Elementary School in Wenatchee, Washington. He's one of many such teachers who is nurturing the bilingual brains of children at the local level.

[CHILDREN SINGING IN SPANISH]

The instruction changes as students advanced through the grades. The younger ones start off speaking in their native language more often until they get a little older.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: Then when we talk about 90-10 that's the program model of instruction. So in kinder, we start 90% of the day in kindergarten in Spanish. And then 10% in English. In first grade, we go to 80-20, second grade 70-30, third grade, 60-40 and then fourth grade and fifth grade, the program is 50-50. Half of the day is in English, half of the day is in Spanish.

RHONDA MORIN: This model works. Guzman says there's plenty of research supporting the step of having young learners immersed, at first, in the language other than English. Then they move into the next phase of speaking both languages throughout the day as they progress through their grade levels.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: Because we know that kids will pick up and understand and learn English from both groups. But the power of the bilingual brain and the multilingual brain is that we have optimum opportunities for both languages.

[CHILDREN CHANTING]

RHONDA MORIN: How difficult or easy is it for children who don't speak Spanish, for example, to learn it?

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: You would be amazed how they pick up language. When you walk in there, in that classroom, it is amazing what the brain is able to do at such an early age.

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Yeah, they grow up. They don't have an accent in Spanish. If they really go through the program, it happens in other parts of the world. So why do we question it here in this country?

RHONDA MORIN: Precisely. Why do we question it? And we're not just talking Spanish, of course. We're using that as an example for this story. There are many other languages that fit into this model. It all depends on the needs of the school district.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: In Portland Public just across the bridge, they have different language groups, Japanese and I think Vietnamese and Russian and so I think they were also starting an Arabic group. So yeah, it depends on your area that would dictate the program that you'd want to start.

[CHILDREN SINGING IN SPANISH]

RHONDA MORIN: Children learn in all sorts of different ways. They mimic their parents, they learn words, phrases, and eventually the meaning of those things. It's that meaning part that dual language is premised on. Guzman explains more.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: As a young child in a dual language program, you're always creating meaning and you're always creating content that is comprehensible to the student so that they will-- it becomes part of what you're remembering, not memorizing. In the past you would just learn the word and you'd memorize what it meant. But in a dual language classroom, you would learn it. You would learn it through maybe a passage that you read. And within that passage, what did that word mean? And how did you use that word? What is another word that is similar to it? Or what is an antonym? What is a synonym?

And then you can present on that word or more than a word, that concept. So that then you are really using the word or the concept in something that is meaningful to you. And that's how we build memory and that's how we build vocabulary.

[CHILDREN CHANTING]

RHONDA MORIN: So here we are in class, spending 70, 80% of the day speaking in a language other than English and experiencing a culture other than the dominant one. What are we learning here? Math? Physics? Social Studies?

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: In kinder and in elementary grades, you have ELA, which is English language arts. You'll have SLA, which is Spanish language arts. Depending on the grade level, you'll have math in English or Spanish or science and social studies in English or Spanish. Once you get to the middle school, you have two classes and usually it's like a Spanish language arts and like a world history or a social studies class.

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And then at the high school level, you have two different classes that could be maybe an advanced Spanish topic or a Spanish literature class and so forth. And right now that's what we're looking at. With more schools coming on board, we may need to expand the options at the middle and high school level in the future.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

RHONDA MORIN: Another part about dual language programs is that they incorporate the entire family, not just the child. And it uplifts the recognition and the discussions about cultural identity that's in the classroom.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: Sometimes families that come from different countries into this country they're like, well I just want my child to learn English because I want them to be successful here. Well, yes of course that is a goal, definitely. We want kids to be successful. And we know that English is the language of power in this country. But there's also a lot of power in being bilingual and being able to understand your home language and that your children can go and speak with their grandchildren and that they can have an identity that their language or they are just as important and valued.

RHONDA MORIN: This initiative involves parent education, as you can imagine. Engaging with them, listening, making them feel welcome is all part of the process.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: So teaching the parents what the process of learning a second language is is important. Keeping them involved, making sure that they're a partner. If they can only read in English, great. Then read to your child the story in English. They understand that as well. So those pieces of that parent communication and partnership as well.

RHONDA MORIN: We should be clear here that this program is not available in all classrooms or even in all states. It's voluntary and parents sign their kids up for it. But it's increasingly popular. Washington's state superintendent even has a goal to have every child get access to dual language by 2030 if they want it. And Vancouver's superintendent and the school board are also behind those efforts.

To meet that ambitious goal though, they'll need to be more skilled teachers. And that's where Clark College comes in. They're embarking on a new K through third grade program that will launch next year to help train those teachers. The first academic year, Clark is anticipating 24 full time students. And by 2027, they're projecting 62. Right now a group is working on that curriculum and Guzman has a seat at the table.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: We're lucky that Vancouver school district is collaborating with Clark College. And so we've been working on the curriculum and how the courses should be

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aligned. I've been really happy that I've been given that opportunity to just collaborate and help make the program a program that can fit the needs of Clark College and fit the needs of Vancouver school district and the local school districts around.

[CHILDREN SINGING IN SPANISH]

RHONDA MORIN: The program is paid through basic education at Vancouver Public schools, which is funded each year and is part of how the state pays for education for all children. There are also other alternatives, as Guzman explains.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: Washington state is offering grants though. And so for any districts that want to start up or want to expand their programs. So there are places where you can look for grants and so forth.

RHONDA MORIN: At the end of the day, this is about where we're headed as a society, she says.

LUCY ESTRADA GUZMAN: We do need this program here in Vancouver and in a lot of places around the nation because we are a global society if we like it or not. And so we need to ensure that our kids have the best opportunities, the most opportunities, just like other kids in different parts of the world.

RHONDA MORIN: There is an abundance of information and research about this model. A popular one is Dual Language Education of New Mexico. At the local level, you can visit Vancouver school district's website at vasd.org and search for dual language. Visit our website, ClarkCollegeFoundation.org, for more podcast and fascinating stories about Clark alumni. That does it for this edition of Penguin Chats. Thanks for listening. I'm Rhonda Morin.

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